

Connecting To God Through His Church

For three years now, dating back to January 2014, we have been going through the Bible chronologically. We began “Connecting the Dots” which covered the Old Testament in seventy-eight weeks. We prepared devotional guides for our adults and students, and for the families with children we used a devotional book written for children by Marty Machowski. Then we journeyed through the New Testament, “The Dots Connected,” similarly for seventy-eight weeks. Once again, we wrote devotions for adults and students, while using a Devotional book for children on the New Testament, written by Marty Machowski. This was a blessing to all who took part. We felt it to be such a positive experience we now embark upon a journey for another fifty two weeks dealing with God’s church. The first section will deal with “Connecting to God through His Church.” The second section will be “Connecting to God through Spiritual Maturity.” The third section will be “Connecting with God through Ministry.” The fourth and final section will be “Connecting to God through the Mission.”

Once again, Chris Watson and Dennis Watson will team up to write the student and adult devotions while Judi Knowles and Jennifer Dooley write the devotions for children. This will put us on the same page week to week. Pastor Chris and Pastor Dennis will be preaching each Sunday on the things that were in the previous week’s devotions.

So, once again, we embark upon a journey together to become more effective as individual believers and more effective as the body of Christ at Harp’s Crossing.

WEEK 1 GOD HAS REVEALED HIMSELF-----Dennis Watson

God has made Himself known. He has sought to establish for Himself a people who would make Him known to the world. The start of this was the call of Abraham through whom God would bless the whole world. It continued with Abraham's offspring who were enslaved in Egypt. They became a nation - Israel - when God used Moses to deliver the people from Egyptian bondage. In the event called the Exodus the nation of Israel was born. Through the promise given to Abraham, God raised up from Abraham's family Jesus through whom He brought salvation into the world and then sent His Holy Spirit to empower His children and His church. Like Israel, the church is to be a light to the world. The nation of Israel and the church were established by God to give Him praise and glory. Both were His idea and both have a place in God's eternal plan.

DAY 1 GOD HAS ESTABLISHED HIS CHURCH

READ 1 Corinthians 12:12-27

Key Idea: God has established for Himself a people to reflect His glory and to be the shining light in a dark world.

God established for Himself a special people through whom He has blessed the whole world. It is amazing to read the account of God's call to Abraham (see Genesis 12:1-3). God called Abraham and told Him that He would make him a great nation. God also told him that He would bless him, that He would make his name great, that he would be a blessing, and that through him all of the families of the world would be blessed. Now we know that the blessing was the ancestry line from Abraham that would lead to Jesus and that through Jesus all people would be blessed with the salvation that He brought.

The nation of Israel is the blessed people of God. Through Israel God gave special promises, many of which have come to all people through Jesus Christ. Also through Jesus, God has established His church. The church does not replace Israel, but it is still only through Jesus that any person, including Jews, can be saved. Those who come to salvation through Jesus Christ are made to be a part of His church.

In today's passage we read about the wonderful nature of the church, the body of Christ. We will look at this passage again in a few weeks. Our purpose in reading this passage today is to see that all saved people, of any and all nationalities, are made to be members of God's church. All of those people have a role to play as individual members of the church. The church was only a hidden mystery in the Old Testament but like many parts of God's plan they become mysteries revealed in the New Testament.

We are connected to the nation of Israel through God sending His Son Jesus through the ancestry line of Abraham. As believers we are wonderfully connected to God's plan. I don't know about you but I find that really special. Pray that Jews and all people of all nationalities will come to Jesus and be brought into His church.

God has been at work since the very beginning of time. In fact He is the One who began time, space and matter. He has been orchestrating history. God had all of these, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, and many others, in mind before the foundation of the world. In fact He also had you and me in mind. The church was not an afterthought that came along after the Jews rejected Jesus. The church was part of His plan. The nation of Israel is still part of His plan. Just think, here we are thousands of years after the Lord called Abraham and promised to bless him and to make him a blessing, and Abraham is now our father by faith! Now, like Abraham, we are to be a blessing to the whole world.

If you want to dig deeper about the church in the Old Testament check out this article: <http://www.khouse.org/articles/2003/469/>

DAY 2 ARE YOU LISTENING?

READ Hebrews 1:1-4; Deuteronomy 28:1-2

Key Idea: God has been speaking and continues to speak today. He wants us to know Him, to love Him and to worship Him. As members of His body we need to listen to Him so that we may do His will.

In order to have a relationship with someone you need to know them. A very important part of knowing someone is communicating with them, and a big part of communicating is listening. We listen to God by reading His word and seeking to hear what He is saying as His Holy Spirit speaks through His Word.

Where does faith come from? Faith come from hearing the Word of God (Romans 10:17). Teachers and parents alike spend time encouraging children to listen and pay attention. The reason: so that they can follow the instructions that are being given. A person cannot follow instructions they have not heard. The problem is not that instructions have not been given, because they have been. The problem is in the hearing of the instructions. In Deuteronomy 28, Moses, under God's instruction, tells the people to hear and obey God's covenant provisions. Their obedience would express their reverence for the Lord in a concrete manner.

In the passage in Hebrews, we read that God spoke through the prophets in the Old Testament. We can read their biblical, historical accounts. We have the record in the pages of the Old Testament. God spoke through prophets and others and those words are preserved for us. We can read it, study it and see how God has been at work unfolding His plan of redemption. The writer of Hebrews says that now in these last days God has spoken through His Son. The last days began with the ministry of Jesus and will continue until He returns for His church. God always speaks with a purpose. He speaks to accomplish the purpose of His people coming to Him and following Him in faith. I ask again, “are you listening?”

There is the “I heard you” that is the nonchalant hearing that just means my ears took in what you said. Then there is the “I heard you” that is a mental assent to understanding what was said. Finally there is the “I heard you” which implies hearing and action based on what was heard. Jesus makes it clear in John 17:3 that our love is expressed to Him by our obedience to what He says. He has been speaking so that people can hear Him, come to know Him and make Him known. Jesus told us that eternal life is “To know God and Jesus Christ whom He has sent.” Are you listening? Are you really listening, the listening that includes surrender and obedience?

Listening involves paying attention. Henry Blackaby says that God speaks by the Holy Spirit through the Bible, prayer, circumstances, and the church to reveal Himself, His purposes and His ways. Believers should always be alert, paying attention and prepared to hear from God.

Here is a big jump. Are you listening? Paul says that Jesus loved the church and gave Himself up for her (Ephesians 5:25). Now if Jesus loved His church that much, shouldn't we?

DAY 3 MOSES WANTED MORE

READ Exodus 33:12-23

Key Idea: Intimacy always wants more. It is satisfied but longs for even more. The intimacy we are speaking of is a close loving relationship with God that involves deep interaction.

I came to know the Lord Jesus as my Savior when I was ten years old. In the 54 years since that time I have grown and been in the process of learning more about what is involved in knowing and walking with Him. A big part of that journey has been living among people who, like me, know and love Jesus and love His church. There is no way for me to begin to express how

much I have learned by being in relationships with other members who make up the body of Christ. This does not mean we have always gotten along or that things have always gone smoothly. It means that God has been faithful to work on all of us through other believers as iron sharpens iron.

God had called Moses to lead the people out of bondage in Egypt and into the land of promise. God was working and Moses joined Him in leading the people. In the first eleven verses of Exodus 33, God told Moses to move on and lead the people to the land and He would send His angel ahead of them to prepare the way.

Moses then cried out to the Lord, wanting to do what God had for him to do. Moses was a desperate man. He wanted God to go with him. Moses knew that he was not able to do this thing God had called him to do. Moses told the Lord that he did not want to go any farther unless the Lord went with Him. He then asked to see God's glory. Moses wanted to do God's will but he was desperate for the presence and power of God! He knew that this was a God-sized task and there was no way for him to do it apart from God! His plea was for God. He was overwhelmed with the task. He wanted more—more of God's presence, power and glory. He did not want it for some special experience. He had to have it because apart from God he knew he was powerless. Moses was a desperate man!

Moses wanted to know God in a greater way. This should be the desire of every believer. Moses was asking for the same thing that Paul asked for in **Philippians 3:10**, "*That I may know him....*" It is the same thing that Philip meant when in **John 14:8** he said, "*...show us the Father.*" I believe every sincere child of God has a desire to know God through the things He has called us to do and that only He can enable us to do.

I use the word "wanted" but it is more a case that Moses had to have more. He could not do this task without God. He was desperate. Have you discovered yet that you too, are desperate for Him? What has He given you to do that you cannot do without His power, presence and provision?

DAY 4 GOD IS

READ Genesis 1:1; Hebrews 11:1, 6; Romans 1:18-21; and Psalm 19:1-3

Key Idea: The Bible does not seek to prove the existence of God. The Bible begins with the God assumption. God is. He has created and made Himself known.

Keep in mind what it is that we are talking about. We are looking at the church. God has sought to establish for Himself a people who would make Him known to the world. This first began when God established for Himself a special people—the nation of Israel. Through Israel God established a line—the line of Judah. It was through Judah’s family that God brought the Messiah into the world. God had a plan.

Today I want us to get to ground zero in who we are as a people, the body of Christ. Ground zero, the foundation is that God is! The Bible presumes that God is. It does not prove nor does it attempt to prove God. The Biblical writers present this and it becomes a matter of faith. What is Faith? For some it is believing something that is not real. Of course, that is not what biblical saving faith is. Biblical saving faith is defined in **Hebrews 11:1**:

“Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.”

The word translated “substance” means literally “to stand under, to support.” Faith is to a Christian what a foundation is to a house: it gives confidence and assurance that He will stand. So you might say, “Faith is the confidence of things hoped for.” When a believer has faith, it is God’s way of giving him confidence and assurance that what is promised will be experienced. The word evidence simply means “conviction.” This is the inward conviction from God that what He has promised, He will perform. The presence of God-given faith in one’s heart is conviction enough that He will keep His Word.¹

All around us, we have creation shouting that God is. The Bible then helps us to clearly identify this God and come to know Him. For our thinking regarding the church, if there is no God then He did not create the universe; if there is no God there is no Messiah; if there is no Messiah there is no church. However, there is a God who has given evidence to His power and existence in what He created. He has revealed Himself through His prophets and through His people. He has revealed Himself through His Son and affirmed Him as His Son through His resurrection from the dead. I am a part of His church because He does exist and has revealed Himself. This is a big deal! The church you and I are a part of is part of the incredible plan of an incredible God! Once again be reminded, “How Beautiful is the Body of Christ.”

¹Bible Exposition Commentary (BE Series) - New Testament - The Bible Exposition Commentary – New Testament, Volume 2.

If you want to dig deeper on this subject I recommend reading Norman Geisler and Frank Turek's book I Don't Have Enough Faith to be an Atheist. Here is a quote from the book regarding belief:

“God has provided enough evidence in this life to convince anyone willing to believe, yet He has also left some ambiguity so as not to compel the unwilling. In this way, God gives us the opportunity either to love Him or to reject Him without violating our freedom. In fact, the purpose of this life is to make that choice freely and without coercion. For love, by definition, must be freely given. It cannot be coerced. That’s why C. S. Lewis wrote, “the Irresistible and the Indisputable are the two weapons which the very nature of [God’s] scheme forbids Him to use. Merely to over-ride a human will (as His felt presence in any but the faintest and most mitigated degree would certainly do) would be for Him useless. He cannot ravish. He can only woo.”

As believers we are part of His body because He has chosen to reveal Himself and make Himself known to us. I have enough evidence to place my trust in Him. Do you? I do not have proof but I do have evidence. He has done a work in me. He has revealed Himself to me. He has made me to be a part of His family—the church.

DAY 5 GOD IS SOVEREIGN

READ 1 Samuel 2:6-8; Acts 17:24-26

Key Idea: God is sovereign; He is in control of all things.

In the Bible the theme of king and kingdom is very important. In the Old Testament the king of a nation, or territory, was sovereign. He was completely in control. He was responsible to protect and provide for the people in his kingdom. However, there were, of course, good kings and bad kings. But God has revealed Himself as the King of the Universe, the One who is in control. He will ultimately reign with justice and righteousness. He is the good King. He protects and provides for His own. All of His enemies will ultimately be judged and cast out of His presence forever. We see the ultimate experience of this when Jesus comes as King of Kings and Lord of Lords as we read in Revelation 19:6.

So I ask this question: “Is your world guided and directed by the whim of man, fate, coincidence or divine providence?” Personally, I am going to rule out fate from my answer. I just do not believe that the world in which we live is random. I have lived long enough and read the Bible long enough to rule out coincidence also. The choices and decisions of people really do make a difference and shape our world, but I believe they are under

the plan and direction of God. The writer of Proverbs puts it this way, “*A man’s heart plans his way, But the LORD directs his steps*” (**Proverbs 16:9 NKJV**).

As the King, God is sovereign. He is the ruler of the entire universe. It is not a coincidence that the whole makeup of our solar system and the movement of the stars and planets keep everything perfect for people to live on this planet. The atmosphere is perfect for man to live and thrive. God is in control, so the greater question is what do we do?

After the birth of her long-awaited son Samuel, Hannah sings a song of praise to the sovereign Lord who blessed her. She says that He is the One who is sovereign over history and specifically over her history. So she lived her life in surrender to the One who was her Lord and King. She wanted to live in agreement with His plan and purposes.

Paul was speaking to a group of philosophers in a place known as the Areopagus about 1300 years after Hannah sang her song. He said that God has in His power decreed the times and exact places of all people. God is in control! He has a plan that He will accomplish on His terms, in His time, and in His way. People can disagree, fight against it, or live in surrender to Him and live praying, “Your Kingdom, come Your will be done.”

I enjoy living and watching for the hand of God and then seeking to see how I am to join Him in what He is doing. I want to live a surrendered life to the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. He has this. He is in control. That brings me peace and confidence and a desire to go with Him.

Check out this powerful song: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PAmh3yvmzXs>

WEEK 2 God Is... -----Chris Watson

God is creator, God is love, God is our hope, and God is full of grace, just to name a few. Our view of God is important, as it will determine the rest of our doctrine, or what we believe. To have a right view of God, we must allow Scripture to be our guide and instruct us as to what is true and what is not. It's not just enough to say, "to me God is..." but we must say as well based on Scripture, "God is."

Day 1 GOD IS CREATOR

READ Genesis 1:1, Job 38:4-39:30

Key Idea: God said it and it came to be.

Either God is creator or He is not, it can't be both ways. As believers we know the Bible to be true. As we have said over these past several years it is more than a "story" book, but it is God's historical, Biblical account of truth. (To read more on how we know the Bible is true, check out: <https://answeringgenesis.org/is-the-bible-true/how-do-we-know-that-the-bible-is-true/>). If you look at Genesis 1:3,6,9,11,14,20,24 and 26 they all have one thing in common and that is the words, "God said." With God's words every thing was created. He is that big and all-powerful.

One can't be a theist and also believe in the big bang. The cosmological argument says that : 1) The universe began to exist. 2) If something began to exist, something else must have caused its existence. 3) Therefore the universe was caused by something else. **Psalm 90:2** says, "*Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever You had formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God.*" God is eternal, He has always been. Now that's hard for us to wrap our mind around because all we know is a beginning and an end, a start and a finish. But God is not inside of time. God is uncreated so He has always been. Space, matter and time had a beginning but God did not. So either the creation account of Genesis is true or it is not, and if it is not, then we have a problem with the rest of the Bible; however, we know it to be true.

Both creation (from God) and the big bang require faith. In his book I Don't Have Enough Faith to be an Atheist, Frank Turek makes the argument that it actually requires more faith to be an atheist (many of whom subscribe to the big bang theory) than it does to believe in the one true God and creation.

Take a look outside. If it's dark, look up into the sky. Can you see the stars and the moon? If it's daytime, look at the beautiful sky, the trees, the birds and look at the light the sun provides. Jesus' creation shows just how awesome He is.

When we think we have something to offer God, or feel the need to question God, or think maybe that God has gotten it wrong, we need to be reminded of Job's account, part of our reading today. Job found out that even in his pain and struggles God was still God and He was still good. God told the ocean how far it could go, He put the birds in the air. He placed the sun and moon in just the right place so that we would not burn up or freeze. In fact, "Life must also have the right type of star. Stars act as energy sources for life. Most stars are too large, too bright or too unstable to support life. The size and age of the sun enhances the earth's hospitality. If the earth were moved 1% closer to the sun, bodies of water would vaporize, and life would not be possible. If the earth were as much as 2% farther from the sun, its waters would freeze. Earth has a nearly circular orbit, which ensures a nearly constant distance from the sun — ensuring that seasonal changes are not too severe."² This is just incredible. If you want to read more about this and go deeper go to: <http://crossexamined.org/the-argument-from-cosmic-fine-tuning/>.

Thank God for His creation and the fact that not only is He creator but He sustains His creation.

Day 2 GOD IS HOLY

READ Isaiah 63:1-5

Key Idea: There is no one like the Lord--NONE LIKE HIM

(1) To be holy is to be distinct, separate, in a class by oneself. As Sproul puts it:

The primary meaning of holy is 'separate.' It comes from an ancient word that meant, 'to cut,' or 'to separate.' Perhaps even more accurate would be the phrase 'a cut above something.' When we find a garment or another piece of merchandise that is outstanding, that has a superior excellence, we use the expression that it is 'a cut above the rest.'³

(2) To be holy is to be morally pure.

When things are made holy, when they are consecrated, they are set apart unto purity. They are to be used in a pure way. They are to reflect purity as well as simple apartness. Purity is not excluded from the idea of the holy; it is contained within it. But the point we must remember is that the idea of the holy is never exhausted by the idea of purity. It includes purity but is much more than that. It is purity and transcendence. It is a transcendent purity.⁴

²Frank Turek, Crossexamined.org

³RE.C.Sproul

⁴ibid

(3) For God to be holy is for Him to be holy in relation to every aspect of His nature and character.

When we use the word holy to describe God, we face another problem. We often describe God by compiling a list of qualities or characteristics that we call attributes. We say that God is a spirit, that He knows everything, that He is loving, just, merciful, gracious, and so on. The tendency is to add the idea of the holy to this long list of attributes as one attribute among many. But when the word holy is applied to God, it does not signify one single attribute. On the contrary, God is called holy in a general sense. The word is used as a synonym for His deity. That is, the word holy calls attention to all that God is. It reminds us that His love is holy love, His justice is holy justice, His mercy is holy mercy, His knowledge is holy knowledge, His spirit is holy spirit.”⁵

To be holy means to be set apart and righteous, without blemish or defect. Jesus was and is holy, He always has been and He always will be. We can't be holy on our own; in fact Scripture tells us that our holiness is like filthy rags. There is truly no one like our God. He is creator as we read yesterday, and just as important, He is holy. Scripture says that Christ became holiness for us. He died on the cross for our sins when we could not, we never could. There truly is no one like our God, praise Him today that He is holy and righteous.

Day 3 GOD IS LOVE

READ 1 John 4:7-21, Jeremiah 31:2 and 1 John 3:16

Key Idea: You can know for sure that God loves you always.

God is love, literally. God is love. Our society has such a jaded view of love. In fact if you were to ask ten people what love is, you would most likely get ten different answers. Some say it's doing what you want, others say it's whatever makes you happy, and there are some that say they have never felt love.

Our verses today remind us that God is love, God Himself. We do not have to seek love any further than God Himself. God showed His true love to us in sending His Son to die for our sins; that is true love. *He demonstrated His love for us in the fact that while we were still sinners Christ died for us* (Romans 5:8). Apart from trust and hope in Jesus, Scripture tells me I am an enemy of God. Romans 5:10 and Colossians confirm that before we put our faith in Jesus, we were enemies of God. However, since we have put our faith in Christ, we are not only friends but sons and daughters of the One True King. This is what love is. Love is knowing God, not knowing about God, but knowing God through Jesus. Salvation is being reconciled (made

⁵lbed

right) with God so that we can walk, talk and know Him daily.

Because a believer knows God, he then knows true love. True love always desires to please, love, and know more intimately the object of that love. We love because He first loved us; our love back to Him and our love for others is only because He first loved us. Love is giving one's self without reservation to the object of our love. We give ourselves to Jesus without reservation and do what He tells us.

Many have asked, "Do I have to go to church to be a Christian?" or "Do I have to read my Bible?" or "Do I have to obey God?" If these are our questions, we may be on the wrong side of God's kingdom. For if we know God and truly have a relationship with Him, we will walk with Him because of His love for us.

How much does God love you and me? So much so that He sent His Son to die for you and me, to be laughed at, ridiculed, mocked, beaten, and demeaned just to name a few. Jesus loves you and me, praise the Lord. Spend some time today thanking God for His love for you!

Day 4 GOD IS RIGHTEOUS

READ Isaiah 56:1-5; Romans 1:16-17

Key Idea: God can only do what is right because God is always right. Therefore, He wants His children to be righteous.

God is the only righteous one. Scripture reminds us that there is no one who is righteous (Romans 3). Let's back up for a minute. How do we know that there is a right or a wrong? How do we determine the difference? Even our "world" acknowledges that some things are wrong. In order for something to be wrong, there has to be something that is right. God Himself, therefore, is the only right or righteous one. All right or wrong is measured against Him. Our world often determines right or wrong by feelings, ideas or on a whim. Just look at our world now. Watch the news for five minutes and you can see that determining right and wrong that way is one of the reasons we are in the mess we are in.

"For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." (2 Corinthians 5:21). This verse is loaded. God could not just look over sin, because He Himself is holy and righteous. He could not excuse sin because that would totally go against who He is and His nature. Therefore, He sent His Son on our behalf. God demanded perfection, holiness and complete righteousness, and we could not offer that. However, God offered it to us in Jesus. God did for us what we could not do for ourselves. God met His demands of perfection in His Son and

then offered that perfection (righteousness) to us. WOW! Talk about a great God!

God not only became our righteousness, but He wants to live that righteousness out in us. We cannot live righteous in and of ourselves, but He can live it in us. Praise the Lord! Righteousness comes to us through faith in Jesus. We have no righteousness to give God on our own so we give back to Him what He has given to us, and that is His Son and the blood He poured out for our sin.

I know this, I have been taught this my entire life, and I have also come to take it as my own. However, as I write this I am still amazed at the righteousness and goodness of God. He did for me what I could not do for myself and only because He was and is GOOD, HOLY, RIGHTEOUS, and WORTHY TO BE PRAISED. Take some time to thank God for who He is and what He has done.

Day 5 GOD IS JUST

READ Romans 3:21-31

Key Idea: God is the just One and He is the One who is the justifier or the One who makes it possible for our judgment to be taken by another—the righteous One—Jesus

“Don’t judge me.” Those words are not only used across our world but particularly among Christians. There has been something traveling around on social media with one person saying, “only God can judge me” to which the person responds, “and that should concern you.” Verse 23 of today’s passage reminds us that ALL have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. In other words, we all fall short of God’s expectation and of perfection and holiness. We can’t do either on our own, we are sinners. Verse 24 goes on to say that we are justified by grace that is provided through Jesus. We cannot be justified on our own. Let’s look at that word. Justified means to “make right” in this sense. By Scripture we know we have no relationship with God; that relationship was severed when Adam and Eve sinned. Remember “they died,” and they did not die physically but spiritually. They were cut off from God.

Since God is righteous, holy, and perfect, He does not need justification (to be made right) but we do. Our only hope is through Jesus. Since God is righteous, then sin must be judged. God cannot and will not overlook sin or brush it off for it is the very thing that separates us from Him in the first place. We come to a big word in verse 25 and that is the word propitiation. “In Romans 3:25 and Hebrews 9:5 (A.V., “mercy-seat”) the Greek word *stereion* is used. It is the word employed by the LXX. translators in Exodus 25:17

and elsewhere as the equivalent for the Hebrew kapporeth, which means "covering," and is used on the lid of the Ark of the Covenant (Exodus 25:21 ; 30:6). This Greek word (hilasterion) came to denote not only the mercy-seat or lid of the ark, but also propitiation or reconciliation by blood. On the great day of atonement the high priest carried the blood of the sacrifice he offered for all the people within the veil and sprinkled with it the "mercy-seat," and so made propitiation."⁶

God did for us through Jesus what we could not do for ourselves. 2 Corinthians 5:21 tells us that He (Jesus) became sin for us so that we might become the righteousness of God. Jesus not only died for us, but He imputed (gave) to us the righteousness of God. When we realize this, then the last few verses of our passage today (27-31) make perfect sense. There is no way that you and I can boast that we have done anything. God through Jesus did for us what we could not. We simply receive it through faith and spend the rest of our lives walking, learning and growing in it.

⁶<http://www.biblestudytools.com/dictionary/propitiation/>

WEEK 3 MAN'S PREDICAMENT-----Dennis Watson

God created man in His image so that man can live forever in a love relationship with Him. However, Adam, the first man sinned. He chose a way other than God's. He listened to the serpent and rebelled against God. With that one sinful act sin and death came to all people. This sinful act passed the sin problem to all people except of course Jesus who was born of a virgin having been conceived by the Holy Spirit. Because of our "in Adam birth" we were all born sinners. That is why we sin. This predicament caused all people to be separated from God forever unless they are born again in Christ.

DAY 1 MAN IS MADE IN GOD'S IMAGE

READ Genesis1:26-31

Key Idea: Man was made in the image of God to live in an eternal relationship with God. Man, like God, is capable of loving and being loved and knowing and being known.

Most of us have played with play-dough or modeling clay. With play-dough you could take a cookie cutter or some other shape and press it on the play-dough and the play-dough would take on that shape or image. God made man in His image, but not like a play-dough image. In the beginning of creation God made all the things that exist in the entire universe and then He made man in His image.

As a parent, all of my children are like their mother or me in some way. That includes physical makeup and appearance as well as personality. Of course they are each different but the main thing I enjoy is that we enjoy each other. From the beginning, when they first came into our lives as infants, we loved them and they came to love us. Any time that the relationship became strained, it grieved us.

God is the supreme parent of all the living. He made man, the crown of His creation, in His image. J. Vernon McGee says regarding this image, "I think that it refers to the fact that man is a personality, and as a personality he is self-conscious, and he is one who makes his own decisions. He is a free moral agent. Apparently that is the thing which is unique about mankind. I believe this is what is meant by God creating man in His own image."⁷

There is much more that could be said about God making man in His image and plenty has been written. Henry Morris in The Genesis Record has a great explanation if you would like to go deeper. The bottom line for us

⁷Through The Bible with J. Vernon McGee

today is that God has made man to be in a special relationship with Him that is characterized by love—His for us and ours for Him. This is evident in the Biblical fact that after the fall of man He made for Himself a special people, Israel, to be in a relationship with Him. Then He established for Himself a special people known as the church, the church being the people He brought into a relationship with Him. This relationship is characterized in the New Testament in at least two ways. First is that of becoming His child through adoption. The second is that of marriage with the church being His bride.

God didn't make you into a particular shape just to be like Him. He did it so you can be one with Him in that special relationship, with you as His child and Him as your Father. God knows what we need and the greatest need we have is His love!

DAY 2 MAN IS FALLEN

READ Genesis 3

Key Idea: The image of God in man has been impacted by sin—man is not in a relationship with the God who made him in His image; instead, he is alienated from Him. Instead of being connected to the true source of life he has become disconnected; not going God's way but his own.

We saw yesterday that God created man in His image to live in a love relationship with Him. Today's biblical, historical account is a very sad one. Adam and Eve rejected God their creator and chose their own path. God had given them very clear instruction regarding the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Instead of following God's instruction, they followed another voice—the voice of the serpent. The serpent convinced them that God's words were not true and that He was just trying to keep them from being like God. What a lie! They were already like God. Adam and Eve believed a lie, ignored the truth, and made a choice that has affected every person born since. God told them that the day they ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil they would die. They did not immediately die, but they began to die. This death was twofold. First, it was separation from the life of God. This was the great divorce or separation that has plagued man ever since. Second, they eventually did experience physical death. All of creation was subjected to this frustration (see Romans 8:20). Death, decay and destruction entered God's perfect world because of rebellion and sin. When they disobeyed God, they became like Him in being able to discriminate between good and evil; but they became unlike Him in that they lost their sinlessness and eventually died.

It has been said that Genesis 3:15 is the “first gospel.” It is the first prophecy of the Messiah, the beginning of salvation’s history that finds fulfillment in Jesus. Here is what J. Vernon McGee says of this verse:

The most prominent thought is not the ultimate victory that would come, but the long-continued struggle. This verse reveals the fact that now there is to be a long struggle between good and evil. This is exactly what you will find in the rest of the Scriptures.⁸

We are now in that battle. It has been going on since the fall of Adam and Eve. It will continue until Jesus returns and establishes His eternal kingship. When He came 2000 years ago, He came to give victory over the authority of sin and Satan. Now we have in Him the power and the deliverance from the influence of the fall. If you have not received Jesus do so and live with Him as your power and authority.

DAY 3 THE FAR REACH OF THE FALL OF MAN

READ Romans 5:12-14; 1 CORINTHIANS 15:22

Key Idea: Because of the sin of Adam all have been born in sin except for Jesus.

How far can one sin reach? People have made the statement, “My sin hurts only me.” That is just not true. No sin is merely private. Eventually it will come to light and many people will be impacted by it. The problem of mankind is found in that little three letter word SIN. Adam was the first man. He was the prototype. He was the beginning. Was it fair for God to allow the sin of Adam to pass to all of his descendants? It was necessary. If God had tested each human being the result would have been the same. Sin entered the world through one man but all are guilty. We sin because we are sinners. Adam was the first. If it had been possible for no sin to enter from Adam until my birth, I probably would have been the one through whom sin entered the world. So lighten up on Adam. Paul was not laying blame he was acknowledging a truth. We have a problem—SIN.

“We know that all men die. But death is the result of disobeying the Law. There was no Law from Adam to Moses, but men still died. A general result demands a general cause. What is that cause? It can be only one thing: the disobedience of Adam. When Adam sinned, he ultimately died. All of his descendants died (Gen. 5), yet the Law had not yet been given. Conclusion: they died because of Adam’s sin. “For that all have sinned” (Rom. 5:12) means “all have sinned in Adam’s sin.” Men do not die because of their

⁸Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee

own acts of sin; otherwise, babies would not die (Rom. 9:11). Men die because they are united racially to Adam, and “in Adam all men die” (1 Cor. 15:22).⁹

Paul made the connection of our sinfulness to Adam. In this all have become guilty not by sinning but by birth. When the capability to sin comes to us at a very early age we sin. Sin is rebellion against God’s Word, the same as Adam and Eve. We choose our own way contrary to God’s way. In Psalm 51:5 David says that he was a sinner from birth. That is true of us all. That is why Jesus told Nicodemus, “You must be born again.” We are either connected to God through Jesus or connected to the enemy through Adam. “And so it is written, “The first man Adam became a living being.” The last Adam became a life-giving spirit” 1 Corinthians 15:45 (NKJV).

I pray you too have been born again.

DAY 4 A LONGING IN MAN’S HEART

READ Ecclesiastes 3:1-11

Key Idea: There is a longing within man for more, for better, for the newest. There is a dissatisfaction that cannot be satisfied and will not be satisfied apart from the connection to our creator.

It seems as though Solomon is describing monotony. There is a time for all things. Each day has its work and challenges. Life is not just a transitory. It is not just impersonal trudging through life and then it is over. Life is personal and has meaning.

As we have already seen, man was created in the image of God. He was given dominion over creation. In this he is different from the rest of creation. No one can be satisfied with this life apart from God. Apart from God life is vanity; it is meaningless and becomes monotonous. Solomon was king. He was wealthy and powerful and could try things but with all he could pursue, he still concluded it was vanity and chasing after the wind.

In verse 11, however, he expresses a key that opens the door to man’s greatest need. God has “put eternity in man’s heart.” Man is divinely linked to heaven by divine design. This is why nobody can be satisfied with accomplishments, achievements, wealth or fame. God alone can bring all things together and make all of those things, all of creation, and all of the events of history beautiful in His time. For us now it seems contrary to what we believe to be God’s will. It will not be until we enter His eternal reign that we will begin to grasp His total plan.

⁹Bible Exposition Commentary (BE Series) - New Testament - The Bible Exposition Commentary – New Testament, Volume 1.

Much of our longing and dissatisfaction is found in the fact that God has placed eternity in our hearts. For this reason this world will never satisfy that longing. So we fix our eyes on God and His eternal plan and live daily knowing that He will finish what He started and it will be beautiful indeed.

DAY 5 OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS IS LIKE FILTHY RAGS

READ Isaiah 64:6-9

Key Idea: There is nothing good in us—our flesh, personality, emotions... Even when we do right our motives are not. All of our attempts to be righteous are as filthy rags.

There is a longing in our heart for something more. Sin is a plague that has come to man traced back to the sin of Adam and Eve. So there is within us a longing for eternity but also the ravages of sin. What can we do? How can we find meaning and at the same time deal with the sin problem? We want to try to establish our own goodness. Some religions propose that if we just have more good acts than evil acts we will be okay. How will one know when enough good has been done to offset the evil? Isaiah tells us that this does not work. He says that all of our righteous acts are like filthy rags. In our thinking, our goodness is good enough. Have you ever seen what you believe to be a white garment and then a really white garment is placed next to it. That is the way it is with our goodness. Compared to God and to His righteous demands, our righteous acts are filthy rags. Even when we get it right our motives are less than pure.

So what can we do? Do we just not seek to do good? Of course not, we are to seek to be good but the motive is just as significant. If you are trying to get to God by good works, forget it. That is not the way it is done. Pleasing God by your behavior in order to be accepted by Him is backwards. God has taken steps to deal with our sin. In fact Isaiah gives us a prophecy concerning this:

All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way; And the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all. Isaiah 53:6 (NKJV)

This verse is found in the servant songs. It is talking about Jesus. Now we know that is exactly what God did. He placed all of our sin on Jesus. Jesus became sin for us so that we can become God's righteousness. We are not living for righteousness but from it. We are motivated by God's love for us expressed in His work for and in us. As a child of God you are not trying to be something you are not but what you are in Jesus.

Rest in His finished work. Our righteousness is like filthy rags but His righteousness is white as snow!

WEEK 4 THE SAVING WORK OF GOD-----Chris Watson

Salvation is miraculous. It is nothing we deserve and nothing we can do for ourselves. No matter what, we cannot do it. We need someone to step in and do for us what we can not do for ourselves. Are you saved, have you put your faith in Jesus? Truly thank Him for what He has done for you. There is no way for man, for any of us, to make ourselves right to the point that we are acceptable to God. He made us in His image. That image was marred by sin; originally by Adam's sin and compounded by our own. We are separated from God who is righteous, just, and holy. For this reason all of mankind has been and is in a predicament we can do nothing about. That is the bad news—we are hopelessly lost. The good news, however, begins with two wonderful words, "But God."

"But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us..." **Ephesians 2:4 (NKJV)**

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

"For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." **Romans 6:23 (NKJV)**

So we carry over from last week that man cannot do anything about his sin or the fact that he is separated from God. God has taken action by sending His sinless Son, Jesus, to come and die for us in order to get us out of Adam's family tree and into Jesus'.

DAY 1 IT IS THE WILL OF GOD TO SAVE

READ Peter 3:1-9

Key Idea: God wills for all to be saved. He reaches out to us through His love, but He will not force us to accept His gift of salvation.

2 Peter 3:9 tells us that *God is patient and not wanting for any to perish but for all to come to repentance*. Jesus died on the cross for all who would trust and put their faith in Him. God desires for all to be saved, but based on all of Scripture, we know some will not be saved. For some will choose the wide road leading to destruction while few will choose the narrow road leading to a relationship with God. There is a response that has to be made for each of us. Allow me to illustrate:

What if I handed you the keys to a brand new red Corvette, fully loaded, paid for including tax, title and tag and say, "It's yours, all yours!"

If you do not take the key and sign the title, it is not yours. Everything has been done to make it yours, but there is a part that you must do. You must sign, take the keys, and drive away. The same is true for the Gospel. Everything has been done for us. God lays it before us, He has done all the work, but we must accept, we must place our trust in Him resulting in following Him.

J Vernon McGee says, “The prophecy in the Old Testament of Christ's coming was to establish His Kingdom upon the earth; the prophecy in the New Testament of His coming was first to take His church out of the world and then to come to establish His Kingdom upon the earth.”¹⁰

According to verse 1-2 Jesus IS coming again to establish His Kingdom. Some, like in verse 3-7, think that it will not happen, He is too slow, or maybe that it was all a lie. However, it is coming. Verse 8 reminds us that our time and God's time are not the same. In fact, God is not on a timetable.

Do you know Jesus? If you do, with whom are you sharing? To whom are you teaching Jesus? We do not know who will receive Christ, but we know God has called us to proclaim the Gospel to the rich and to the poor, to anyone who would hear! God wants to use us to connect others. Who are you connecting? Who are you praying for to be saved? Who are you believing that God will do a great work in?

DAY 2 GOD MADE IT POSSIBLE FOR US TO BECOME HIS CHILDREN

READ John 1:6-18

Key Idea: Jesus came so that people could be connected to God as His children.

If you study other “religions” you always find one of two things to be true. Either the god they pray to or serve is dead, literally dead, and his tomb is somewhere, or the god is not dead but he cannot be known because he is so high and mighty that he could never be known by humans. Consider this in light of today's passage. Our God not only can be fully known but He came to earth to His creation, lived among them, walked and shared with them, and died for their sins and for yours and mine. What a vast difference in gods versus The One True God.

The Word (Jesus) became flesh and dwelt on earth among His creation. Prior to this John the Baptist was sent to prepare the way. Many thought

¹⁰Walk Thru the Bible, J Vernon McGee

John the Baptist was the “One” but he shared that he was not and that the One was soon to come. He came preaching repentance and preparing the way for Jesus. He was preparing the way for God through Jesus to come to the earth. When you think about how this unfolded, you see even the details and precise focus of God’s plan.

Jesus came to His own (John 1:11) who were the Chosen people of Israel. However, it says that His own did not receive Him. We know from other Scripture that this was not the Messiah they were expecting. He was born in a manger, came as a lowly king with little fanfare, and then died a criminal’s death. To God’s chosen this could not possibly be the Messiah. In fact, many helped put Him on the cross. Now Jesus willingly died for our sins. No human or nails held him. Some of these people not only did not receive Jesus, but they helped with His death.

Some did receive though; we know this from other verses in the Gospels. Some placed their faith in Jesus, but many did not. Here is what Jesus promises. Reread John 1:12-13. It reminds us that those who did believe and put their trust in Jesus that He gave the right for them to become children of God. This means two things. 1) Some will place their faith and trust in Jesus and some will not; we know this again from Scripture. 2) The fact that Jesus came to die for us and we can have a relationship with the almighty God is incredible. Think about this for a minute. You and I can have a relationship with the One who not only made the millions of stars but knows them by name. We can walk and enjoy a relationship with the One who spoke and brought this world into existence. We can walk and know the One who walked on water and the One who made the waters obey Him. I get so excited just writing about this fact. This is a miracle. Today be thankful for your salvation, be thankful that you know God, pray about those who need to know Him, pray for them and share with them the truth that you now have.

DAY 3 GOD SENT JESUS TO BE YOUR SUBSTITUTE

READ Isaiah 53:4-10 AND 2 Corinthians 5:21

Key Idea: Jesus came to be our substitute. He became our sin offering, He took our place

1 John 2:2 says *“And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.”* “God through the covenant obligated His people to keep the law which they could not do and then He obligated Himself to meet the demands of the covenant Himself. He appeased Himself. He did for us what we could never do for ourselves—

make ourselves acceptable to Him Through the “propitiation” sacrifice of Christ, he who believes upon Him is by God’s own act delivered from justly deserved wrath, and comes under the covenant of grace.”¹¹

Think for a moment what Jesus became for us. He became our sin. The sin that we were meant to pay for, He did. He became our suffering. The suffering that our sin could ultimately bring (eternity apart from Him), He took on the cross. He became our forgiveness. He did not need to be forgiven, but He gave us forgiveness. In essence He took our place. What we deserved and should have received, Jesus took for us. He literally bore our sin and the wrath of God. Sin could not be overlooked but must be paid, and Jesus did that for you and for me and anyone who would call on His name.

He took the initiative to heal the rift which He did not cause. He did all that was in His power to make the relationship whole; the rest is up to us. We will look more at this tomorrow but we must receive it through faith and by faith. God has given us Jesus through His love, but I must decide to put my trust in what He has done for me. My parent, spouse, child or friend can’t decide that for me. I must put my faith in Jesus, not just to go to heaven one day, but to be reconciled into a relationship with God through His son. In Christ we have been made acceptable and holy in God’s sight. That free gift though is only credited to us if we take it, if we receive it.

Have you received it? Is it yours? Are you enjoying it or is just a distant memory? Are you enjoying God’s love as a believer? Are you walking in it? The gift is offered through Jesus but we must take it. Unbeliever, take it. Believer, walk in it and enjoy the fellowship with God.

DAY 4 HOW SALVATION HAPPENS

READ Ephesians 2:1-9

Key Idea: Salvation is a gift From God. It is the outcome of His grace being expressed in Jesus Christ and His atoning death and victorious resurrection. It is God’s gift to us and it must be received by faith.

Go back and read verses 1, 4, and 8 again. There is a common theme. Verse 1 begins with, “And you, He made alive.” Verse 4 starts out, “But God,” and verse 8 “For by grace...it is the gift of God.” In other words, it is all about God. Salvation happens because God did it, He made it happen, and only by His grace has and can it happen. We were in a problem we

¹¹Vines Expository Dictionary of Old Testament and New Testament Words.

could not fix apart from God revealing Himself to us (*No one comes to me unless the Father who sent Me draws Him, John 6:44*). God made available to us what we could not make available, and He made it available even before we found out we had a need. God's plan is great.

It has been said that mercy is not giving one what they deserve. We deserved hell, we deserved to be set apart from Christ, and we deserved to live and wallow in our sin. Grace though is getting what is undeserved. We did nothing, ABSOLUTELY NOTHING to deserve God's love but He made it available to us. We did absolutely nothing to be deserving but God gave Jesus to us anyway, as a free gift. We could not purchase it, barter it or manipulate what Jesus did. In fact be reminded that Jesus' life was not taken, it was given.

It was given because of love that I can now know God. Scripture tells us that God is love and He demonstrated His love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us. Love is the motive. God loves you and me.

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, ⁹ not of works, lest anyone should boast. Ephesians 2:8-9. God's grace is what has been offered to us through Jesus. God shows me my need for Him (my sin) and draws me to Himself. I respond by putting my faith in what has been done for me. When I call on the name of the Lord, He saves me, period. There are not "magical words," a specific spot, or someone else that can do this for me. Each of us responds to God's love by walking away from it or by calling on God to save us from our sin. We are saved when we place our faith in Jesus' death on the cross and what He has accomplished for us.

We are saved from hell and saved to heaven. Unfortunately, this is often all that believers hear, seek to hear, or are taught. Salvation is so much more. What I have been saved from is great, but what I have been saved to is even better. I have been saved into a relationship with the Almighty God, the Everlasting Father, and the Prince of Peace. When I place my faith in Jesus that relationship begins. Placing my faith in Jesus is the beginning of my journey with Christ. It is like getting married. We don't say, "Okay, well I got that done," but rather getting married is the beginning of our life together with another person. Have you been saved? Not just from hell to heaven but to a relationship with God through Jesus? If so, walk in it. There is nothing like a relationship with God. He brings peace in the midst of chaos, hope in the middle of despair, and most of all Himself, Who supplies the relationship with the Creator of the world.

Have you put your hope and trust in Jesus? If so thank Him. If not, right now call on Jesus to save you from your sins and place your life in His.

DAY 5 THIS IS ETERNAL LIFE

READ John 17:1-5

Key Idea: In this section Jesus is praying that He and His Father would receive the glory that is due them. He tells that part of that glory is the eternal life He came to bring. Eternal life is knowing God personally.

What is eternal life? Ask that question to 10 different people, and you could get 10 different answers. However, most would include “going to heaven.” As we saw yesterday salvation is so much more than “going to heaven.” Today we read what salvation is in John 17:3, “and this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.” So eternal life is to know God and Jesus personally. Notice what it didn’t say. It didn’t say eternal life is to know about God, to have lots of knowledge, to do this or that, but it is to know God personally.

What is "eternal life"? It is knowing God personally. Not just knowing about Him, but having a personal relationship with Him through faith in Jesus Christ. “We cannot know the Father apart from the Son (John 14:6-11). It is not enough simply to "believe in God"; this will never save a lost soul from eternal hell. "The devils [demons] also believe, and tremble" (James 2:19). Our Lord's debate with the Jewish leaders (John 8:12) makes it clear that people may be devoutly religious and still not know God. Eternal life is not something we earn by character or conduct; it is a gift we receive by admitting we are sinners, repenting, and believing on Jesus Christ and Jesus Christ alone.¹²

Eternal life is a journey. We are saved the moment we place our faith in Jesus, period. This is called justification which means we will be justified before God because of what Jesus has done for us. We then grow in this salvation by learning to walk and knowing God more each day. This is called sanctification, where in our day-to-day lives, we grow and know Him more as we walk with Him. Lastly comes glorification. This happens when we pass from this life or Jesus comes back, whatever comes first. We spend eternity with Him. Eternity with Him is exciting and good, but we only look forward to it if we are walking with God now.

All of Jesus’ life was to bring glory to God. His birth, life and death was to bring glory to the Father and we see this in today’s scripture. The word glory is used five times in these verses. Our salvation in Jesus brought God glory, as Jesus obeyed the Father. So when you and I are saved, God is glorified. Thank God for saving you and ask God who He would have you tell the truth of Him.

¹²Bible Exposition Commentary (BE Series) - New Testament - The Bible Exposition Commentary – New Testament, Volume 1.

THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING BAPTIZED

READ Acts 8:26-39

Harp's Crossing Baptist Church is a body of baptized believers. We are people who have confessed Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord and have followed Him in the obedience of baptism. Baptism is an act of obedience. It does not save but it is an act of obedient surrender to Jesus Christ.

Why be baptized? There are several reasons. First of all to follow the example set by Jesus. Jesus submitted Himself to John the Baptist to be baptized by him in the Jordan River. We read in **Mark 1:9**, *"At that time Jesus came from Nazareth and was baptized by John in the river."* We also are baptized because Jesus commands it. In the great commission Jesus tells His followers to make disciples and baptize them. It would seem odd for Him to tell us to baptize if He had not been baptized. The last reason is that it illustrates that a person is really a believer. In **Acts 18:8** it is recorded that, *"many of the people who heard Him believed and were baptized."* Also we read in **1 John 2:3**, *"Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments."* Baptism is one of the very first acts of obedience after publicly confessing Jesus as Lord and Savior.

Baptism is an act of obedience and it is also a symbol. It symbolizes Christ's burial and resurrection. We see this in **Romans 6:4**, *"Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life."* It also symbolizes the washing away of sin. It symbolizes the new life of the believer as expressed in **2 Corinthians 5:17**, *"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new."*

The method of baptism is immersion. That is the way Jesus was baptized, why else would He have gone down into the water and come up out of the water? Immersion best symbolizes burial and resurrection and the ancient word for baptism means to "dip under."

Baptism doesn't make you a believer - it shows that you already believe. Baptism does not "save" you, only your faith in Christ does that. Baptism is like a wedding ring - it's the outward symbol of the commitment you made in your heart. Bottom line—every believer should be baptized after coming to saving faith in Jesus Christ.

THE MEANING OF THE LORD'S SUPPER

READ 1 Corinthians 11:23-26

Jesus never asked His disciples to remember His birth. But, He did instruct them to remember His death and resurrection. He gave the church two visible symbols (Called "ordinances") as reminders of His death. These two ordinances are: Baptism and the Lord's Supper. The Lord's Supper is an object lesson that represents a great spiritual truth for believers. We see in these verses that Paul is teaching the Corinthian believers and us several lessons about the Lord's Supper.

1. It is a simple act not an elaborate ceremony.
2. It is a reminder.
3. It is a symbol.
4. It is a statement of faith.

The Lord's Supper is a time of remembrance and celebration of Jesus' sacrificial, substitutionary death. It is a time for believers to reflect on God's redemptive act of judgment on sin. Jesus was the lamb that was slain to accomplish judgment for our sin. Jesus took our judgment even though He was sinless.

If you have young children in your life use this to teach them about a very special time which is for Jesus followers only. They may want to participate, then this becomes a great tool to share the gospel with them and seek to lead them to become Jesus followers themselves.

The next time you hear that your church will be observing the Lord's Supper prepare yourself in advance by meditating on what this special time is all about.

WEEK 5 WHAT HAPPENED TO ME (MY TRUE IDENTITY)-----

Dennis Watson

Jesus said, "And you shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free." Some of those listening responded, "We are Abraham's descendants, and have never been in bondage to anyone. How can you say, 'You will be made free'?" (See John 8:32-33) It is absolutely imperative that believers understand the truth about what God, through Jesus Christ, has accomplished in and for them. We need to know the truth so that we will not live in bondage of any kind.

DAY 1 I AM NOT CONDEMNED

READ Romans 7:13-8:1

Key Idea: No matter how much we fail as God's children there is no condemnation for us. We are not condemned. No guilt, only conviction, and when it comes we are to repent rejoicing.

There is a commercial about credit monitoring that makes the point about the law. There is a guard in a bank at the time of a bank robbery. He is just casually walking around when someone says to him, "Why don't you do something." His response, "I am only a monitor. I let people know when there is a problem." That is the law. It lets us know there is a problem. It is powerless to do anything about the problem. The law makes us aware we need a Savior but it is not and cannot be the Savior.

The law makes us aware of sin. Paul said that without the law he would not have known about sin or that he was a sinner. The law pointed it out. Then he says that he felt guilt, but as hard as he tried, the things he did not want to do, that he did, and the things he wanted to do he did not seem to be able to do them. He was talking about law in two different ways. There was the law of the Old Testament that includes the Ten Commandments and there was the law that was at work in his body that was the sin-nature law to sin and violate God's Word. The law of God points to our problem—we are sinners, but it is powerless to do anything about the problem.

Paul closes chapter 7 with a plea and a thanksgiving:

²⁴*O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?*

²⁵*I thank God--through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin.*

Romans 7:24-25 (NKJV)

He sees the problem thanks to the law, and he also see the solution—

Jesus. We as believers are no longer slaves to sin and the law but Jesus.

Chapter 8 opens with a wonderful truth. Remember verse and chapter divisions were added later for our convenience. There is no real break between chapters seven and eight. He says therefore, for those in Christ there is no condemnation. I am not condemned. The law condemned me but I turned to Jesus who took my condemnation; therefore, I am no longer condemned! Convicted, yes, condemned, no! Rejoice! We are in need of a Savior and God provided. Jesus paid it all!

DAY 2 DEAD TO SIN ALIVE TO GOD

READ Romans 6

Key Idea: Jesus died on the cross. Sin no longer had power over Him in His resurrection. As believers we died with Him. We live resurrection lives. As believers, we died with Him. We, too, can live with power over sin by way of the resurrection. As a believer you are dead to the effects of sin and its power.

Is grace the license to sin more? Not hardly and Paul addresses this to the new believers and to us. Grace liberates us or sets us free from the power of sin in our lives. In this passage today there are many wonderful truths about the believer. Today we will look briefly at three words in these passages that really enable the believer to get a grip on their identity in Christ regarding being dead to sin but alive to God.

First word—know or knowing. In these passages, it is used four times. In **verse 6** it is used *“Knowing this (active participle that means we should always be knowing this) that our the old self was crucified with Him that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin.”* This is a truth that the believer is to always be knowing. Believers have been crucified with Jesus and have been resurrected with Him. So dead people do not sin and resurrected people live for God! Jesus said in **John 8:32**, *“You shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free.”* Know and live from the truth.

The second word is “reckon.” The word is an accounting word that means to put it on the ledger that you are dead to sin and alive to God. Do the math or do the accounting; you are dead to sin and alive to God. No longer living for sin but living for God and His righteousness. The account has been gloriously and miraculously changed. Live from this truth. Count yourself dead to sin but alive to God. Warren Wiersbe says, “Paul didn’t tell his readers to feel as if they were dead to sin, or even to understand it fully,

but to act on God’s Word and claim it for themselves. Reckoning is a matter of faith that issues in action.”¹³

The last word is “present.” The word “present” here means to place at one’s disposal, to offer as a sacrifice. Since you have died with Christ and have been resurrected with Him, offer your body, life, all of who you are to God to be used as an instrument of righteousness. You are dead to all others. Always be offering your very existence and parts of your body to God for His righteous purposes.

Know you have died with Jesus and are now resurrected with Him forever and always. Reckon always that you are dead to sin and its purposes. Present your very life to God for His righteousness.

Be reminded, you are dead to sin and alive to God!

DAY 3 I AM A POSSESSION OF THE LORD

READ 1 Corinthians 6:12-20

Key Idea: The believer is connected to Jesus; how then can we be connected to sin?

From dead to sin and alive to God as we saw yesterday, we move to the issue of stewardship today. Our bodies are not our own. We have a stewardship regarding our bodies. We have been bought with a price so we become stewards of our body. A steward is someone who cares for the possessions of another. Everything we have was entrusted to us by God. This includes our body.

The immediate context has to do with believers not being involved in sexual immorality. The believer’s body is not for sexual immorality. The believer’s body is for the Lord and the Lord for the believer’s body. He is not just talking about the physical but also the whole of the believer. In no way is the believer to be united with perversion. In this case Paul uses the word “porneia” from which we get our word porn—which has to do with sexual perversion. Any kind of sexual activity outside of the marital relationship is perversion. Sexual intimacy is reserved only for marriage between a man and a woman.

Our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit. We used to sing a song that says, “Lord prepare me to be a sanctuary, pure and holy.” As believers, we

¹³Bible Exposition Commentary (BE Series) - New Testament - The Bible Exposition Commentary – New Testament, Volume 1

are living, breathing and walking temples of God. Since this is true our very being is Gods. We are not to join our body, physical, spiritual, emotional to anything that is contrary to God. Think about Joseph in the Old Testament. Potiphar's wife made a sexual advance at Joseph and Joseph showed us what Paul was talking about in **1 Corinthians 6:18** where he said, "*Flee sexual perversion.*" Joseph ran from Potiphar's wife leaving his coat in her grasp.

Since we belong to God, this is to be how we deal with all perversion. We are to run from it. What fellowship does light have with darkness? We belong to God. We are His possession. We are not our own. God had graciously bought us with the lifeblood of Jesus. Live your life as God's possession. Be what you are—His Possession!

DAY 4 | AM ACCEPTED

READ Ephesians 1:1-6

Key Idea: One of the hardest things to deal with for most people is the sense of rejection. As children and teens, we all felt rejected or maybe not accepted. There is a very high cost in seeking to be accepted. Some people will use drugs or alcohol to fit in. Some people will spend money excessively to fit in. God has accepted us in Christ Jesus.

It is very important to keep in mind this week that we are looking at passages that tell about who we are as believers. We are dealing with "what happened to me?" The passages for today give three very significant truths about our identity. These three truths connect with what is in verse three, that God has "*blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.*" These blessings are in keeping with God's will. They are the result or outcome of His activity on our behalf. These blessings are spiritual, not physical.

The first truth is that God has chosen us. That is right; you can say it right now. "I have been chosen by God." That seems to be very difficult to understand, but perhaps this little story will help. A little boy was ready to join the church. The pastor asked him, "How did you get saved?" The little boy answered, "I did my part, and God did His part." The pastor was somewhat uncertain about the little boy's response so he asked him what his part was and what God's part was. He said, "My part was the sinning. I ran from God as fast as these rebellious legs would take me and my sinful heart would lead me. I ran from Him. But you know, He, God took out after me until He ran me down." I am not sure there could be a better explanation. God chose me and made it clear that I was lost in sin and He found me with His love, given in His grace and mercy in Jesus. When did He do this? In eternity past. When did it become real to me? When He caught me.

The second truth is that God has adopted us. Okay, let's do it; say, "I have been adopted as a child of God." Predestination primarily refers to what God does for saved people. The Bible does not teach that God predestines people to hell. So we are celebrating that He has predetermined to make us His adopted children (see also John 1:12-13). In adoption, a son is brought into a family and is given the same rights as a child who is born into that family. All believers have been brought into God's family and have full rights as a child. I am a child of God! It does not matter how I feel at times or what I think or what others say. God has declared that I am His child by adoption!

The third and final truth in these passages about believers is that we are accepted. One more time just say it "I am accepted by God." Everything God does, He has done and will do is for the "praise of His glory." This is true also of us. We are to be for the praise of His glory. Just as God receives His son, He receives us. Believers are in Christ and we are accepted in "the beloved" which is Jesus. None of us can be accepted on our own merits.

Close it this way. Say it and say it regularly, "I am chosen, I am adopted, and I am accepted by God in Jesus."

He has miraculously done this and made us all to be His church!

DAY 5 I AM GOD'S POETRY

READ Ephesians 2:8-10 and 2 Corinthians 5:17

Key Idea: Not only are we accepted in the beloved, but we are also a special new creation—God's workmanship which He has made new so that we can do good works which He has already determined. We need to connect to His will and purposes so we will not miss His best for His glory.

Amazing! I am God's child, I am accepted by God in Jesus, and I am chosen by Him. As wonderful as that is there is always more—much more. God has great plans, blessings and benefits for all of His children. Personally speaking, I do not want to miss anything God has in store for me.

Every day we are new. In Christ we are being made new. Yesterday is gone. The flubs, sin, regrets of the past are gone and we can do nothing about them now. However, we can live today as what we are—new creatures in Christ. In 2 Corinthians 5:17 we read that any person who is in Christ is a new creation. That is a constant truth. We are new all of the time. In heaven there is never old. Jesus makes all things new. Lamentations 3:23 says that God's mercies are new every morning. God makes things and people

new. His mercies are new every morning. For any person in Christ is a new creature.

Now let's make a jump to our passage. Ephesians 2:8-9 tells how we have been saved—by grace, through faith. Then in verse ten he says that we are God's workmanship created in Christ Jesus to do good works which He prepared in advance for us to do. Can you imagine that God has plans for us to display His greatness and glory? The word for "workmanship" in Ephesians 2:10 is our word for poem or poetry—that which is made—His masterpiece. I have been made new in Christ for the good works that He has destined for me. I want to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus has taken hold of me.

All of us as His children are His poetry. He wants us daily to be for His glory. We all have a song to sing, a poem to share, a work to do to express His workmanship.

Say it. "I am God's poetry." Don't miss what He has for you!

WEEK 6 WHAT ARE WE ABOUT (OUR MISSION)-----Chris Watson

The mission of Harp's Crossing Baptist Church is to Love Jesus and to lead others to love Him too. This defines what we are all about. We believe that God has saved us and connected us to Himself and to the body of Christ so as we grow in our love relationship with Him that we will be compelled and be responsible to seek to lead others into a love relationship with Him also. This is not only the mission of our Church but the mission for all believers, to love God with all we have and to love our neighbors as ourselves.

DAY 1 PERSONALIZED GREAT COMMISSION IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

READ Genesis 12:1-3

Key Idea: God's plan to establish for Himself a chosen people was determined from before the foundation of the world. The playing out of that has been going on now for about 10,000 years. The first real call of God was to Noah for building an ark to save Noah, his family, and two of every kind of animal. The next was the call of God on Abraham's life. It was through Abraham that God would bless all of the people of the earth. It was through Abraham and his sons and the nation of Israel that the Messiah would come.

I guess we will forever be connecting the dots. Even in talking about the mission of our church we need to see how the dots connect. God gave Abraham a commission to move to a land He would show him because God was going to bless him, make him a blessing and through him all the people of the world would be blessed. Through Abraham, God began to put together the process of completing the promise made in Genesis 3:15 that through the seed of the woman the serpent's head would be crushed. It would be through Abraham to Isaac, to Jacob and Joseph and ultimately through Judah that the Savior would be born and the promise to make Abraham a blessing to the people of the earth would become a reality.

God specifically told Abraham that He would bless him and make him a great nation. This was not because of Abraham, but because of God's plan. God used Abraham, and through his line down to David and then down to Jesus, the Savior would come. Notice the end of verse 3, "*and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.*" God chose Abraham because of His plan, and Abraham, as part of God's plan, was an obedient participant. We can either be used as a part of God's plan through our obedience or our disobedience. We can obey and enjoy God and the benefits in the process, or we can disobey and rest assured God can and will use that, too. Clearly, He wants us to obey but even when we turn from Him, He can still use us, just ask Pharaoh.

God wanted to bless Abraham, not for him to keep it to himself or to hoard it for him and his family, but to pass it on to others. The same is true for us. God has given us Himself plus many great blessings of knowing and walking with Him. We are not to keep it but to bless others. Scripture tells us to whom much is given much is required. With what we have been given we have so much to give. God wants you and me to be a blessing to others. It does not matter if we are rich, poor, young, or old; if we know Jesus He has blessed us. How can we share Jesus with others and bless others?

DAY 2 I MUST BE ABOUT MY FATHER'S BUSINESS

READ Luke 2:41-52

Key Idea: Jesus knew He was in the world to carry out His Father's business. He was intimately connected to His Father's plan, mission, and will.

Jesus never got off track, never. I wish the same could be said of me. Jesus knew why He had come to earth and it was all about His Father's will. Jesus was aware, focused, and lived with a compulsion for the things of God.

First, He was aware. Jesus was always aware of His surroundings, people and situations. He took advantage of every opportunity to show love, grace, kindness, and also to speak truth even when it was hard for some to hear. His awareness led to Him being focused.

Jesus was focused on the Father's business. He was not here to do His own thing or His way, but His Father's. That is why being close to death He could pray, *"not My will but Your will be done."* Jesus' focus was not on pleasing others around Him, it was not in His plan, nor was it directed by those around Him, rather it was straight on His Father.

His awareness and focus were directed by His love for the Father. He was compelled to love His Father. Scripture tells us that Christ's love compels us, and the Father's love compelled Jesus. Everything He did was to please and glorify the Father. When Joseph and Mary were looking for Jesus, He was being about His Father's business. That's what Jesus did, it was all about His Father. When Jesus was born, it was all about the Father. When Jesus healed others, it was all about the Father. When Jesus taught tough words, it was all about the Father. When Jesus walked on water, it was all about the Father. When Jesus was crucified, it was all about the Father, and when Jesus rose again and ascended into heaven, it was all about the Father.

We know Jesus was all about the Father's business. What about you and me? Unfortunately, at times I am all about my business and what I want.

I am often aware and focused on what I want to do or what I see but not so focused and aware on what God's plan is. However, I want to be more so. What about you? What compels you? Is it Christ' love or something else? Why do you do the things you do?

As you begin or end your day, ask God to make you aware moment by moment of His "business." Ask Him to direct your mind and heart to the things of Him, instead of it being only on what you want. When we come to a yield sign at an intersection, we wait to see if anyone is coming and if they are, they come and we fall in behind them. Today let God guide you, take the lead in your heart and mind, and yield to Him.

DAY 3 THE NEW TESTAMENT GREAT COMMISSION GIVEN TO ALL BELIEVERS AND THE CHURCH

READ Matthew 28:16-20

Key Idea: The last instructions Jesus gave His disciples before He ascended to the right hand of His Father were the words of the great commission. I believe for every age since He gave these instructions, there has been and continues to be urgency.

Most believers and church members are very familiar with this passage, but it is put here to make the connection to the urgency of Jesus to carry out the mission and the urgency of Abraham to carry out the mission. For us the mission is more clearly defined. We are to go into the world and connect people to Jesus Christ and His gospel. Then we are to connect them to growing as a disciple. As a disciple then we are to connect them to His church and to His mission, and it goes on until He comes.

As we recall yesterday's devotion, we are reminded that we are to be about our Father's business. Jesus tells us very clearly what that is in today's passage. The last thing Jesus told His disciples then was to be about God's mission. That is to go and make disciples. Sounds easy right? However, it requires prayer, time, focus, and awareness.

"Go" in verse 19 can be seen as a command, but it is best translated "as you are going." In other words as we go to school, work, home, and abroad, we are to make disciples. Acts 1:8 reminds us we are to do this in all places including Jerusalem (local), Judea (community and state), Samaria (country), and the uttermost parts of the world.

The command given in today's passage is to "make disciples." Obviously God, through His Holy Spirit, makes disciples but He uses us in the

process. I have shared with people and our church quite often that the American church has done a poor job at making disciples. We have seen folks saved and then have often allowed them to “figure it out themselves.” However, what if we took the “make disciples” seriously? A disciple simply means a “learner of” so in this case it would be “learner or follower” of Jesus. Warren Wiersbe says, “Apprentice might be an equivalent term. A disciple attached himself to a teacher, identified with him, learned from him, and lived with him. He learned, not simply by listening, but also by doing. Our Lord called twelve disciples and taught them so that they might be able to teach others (Mark 3:13).”¹⁴

Are you a disciple of Jesus Christ? That is, have you put your faith in Him and are following Him? Salvation is more than just putting our faith in Jesus and checking it off our list. Rather, salvation is putting our faith in Jesus, not only to spend eternity in heaven with Him (escaping hell) but most importantly, it is a relationship with Him. The greatest thing that trusting in Jesus gives us is a relationship with the Almighty God. This part often is not shared or is focused on very little in the American church today. Often believers don’t live the victorious Christian life because they are not walking with Jesus in that relationship.

Are you a disciple of Jesus? Are you walking with Him? If not, begin today. If you are, who can you disciple? What person can you teach and help walk the faith? Sometimes new believers and even those who have been believers for years need someone to pour into them. In actuality, everybody needs somebody. Pray and ask the Lord who you can mentor/disciple. When He shows you, approach that person about beginning to meet together in order to grow together, pray for each other, and jump in the Word together. There are many great resources out there. In fact there are literally hundreds of studies at <https://www.rightnow.org/account/login>. I am finishing up one now with a group of men. Pray and ask God, “Who would you have me disciple?”

DAY 4 THE GREATEST COMMANDMENT

READ Matthew 22:23-40

Key Idea: When Jesus was asked what was the greatest commandment He answered by saying the greatest was to love God and the second to love your neighbor.

¹⁴Bible Exposition Commentary (BE Series) - New Testament - The Bible Exposition Commentary – New Testament, Volume 1

The Pharisees and Sadducees were enemies of Jesus and wanted to make Him look bad. They often did this by trying to put Him on the spot by asking questions to entrap Him. The Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection so they asked Him a question about marriage in the resurrection. The question was if a woman had been married to seven brothers in succession, after their deaths, what would happen? They wanted Jesus to tell to whom she would be married in the resurrection. Jesus' answer was short but direct, "There would be no marriage in the resurrection because marriage was a temporal relationship."

The Pharisees were enjoying Jesus' answer that left the Sadducees embarrassed. The Pharisees had their own question asked by a lawyer. He wanted to know what the greatest commandment was. This was not a new question, for the scribes had been debating it for centuries. They had documented 613 commandments in the Law, 248 positive and 365 negative. No person could ever hope to know and fully obey all of these commandments. So, to make it easier, the experts divided the commandments into categories, "heavy" (important) and "light" (unimportant). A person could major on the "heavy commandments" and not worry about the trivial ones. The fallacy behind this approach is obvious: You need only break one law, heavy or light, to be guilty before God. *"For whosoever shall keep the whole Law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all"* (James 2:10).

"Jesus quoted the 'Shema' (Deut. 6:4), a statement of faith that was recited daily by every orthodox Jew. (The word Shema comes from the Hebrew word which means 'to hear.')

The confession of faith begins with, 'Hear, O Israel!' The greatest commandment is to love God with all that we are and have—heart, soul, mind, strength, possessions, and service. To love God is not to 'have good feelings about Him,' for true love involves the will as well as the heart. Where there is love, there will be service and obedience.¹⁵

Sometimes we just want a checklist, right? Do this or that, and you are good. That's what some of the religious leaders wanted, but this was not the gospel. We love because He first loved us. The greatest thing we can do in this world is to love God with all that we have, 100%, and the second is to love our neighbor. This is not a checklist to be checked off, but a life to live. One is legalistic and ritualistic and the other is all about relationship and love. We love others by showing them Jesus and loving them.

Who do you love? We often show our love by how we spend our time and money. So if we want to know what we truly love, look at your time and wallet. Today may we love Jesus with all we have and love our neighbors as well.

¹⁵ Bible Exposition Commentary (BE Series) - New Testament - The Bible Exposition Commentary - New Testament, Volume 1.

DAY 5 WE ARE CHRIST'S AMBASSADORS RECONCILING THE WORLD TO GOD

READ 2 Corinthians 5:18-21

Key Idea: We are Christ's ambassadors seeking to show others the love and grace of Jesus.

God offered reconciliation (made right) for us to Himself through the work of Jesus. We are reconciled to Jesus when we place our faith in Him for what He has done for us. "God does not have to be reconciled to man, because that was accomplished by Christ on the cross. It is sinful man who must be reconciled to God. 'Religion' is man's feeble effort to be reconciled to God, efforts that are bound to fail. The Person who reconciles us to God is Jesus Christ, and the place where He reconciles us is His cross."¹⁶ If we truly have placed our faith in Him we then follow Him.

The end of verse 18 and verse 19 are amazing, "*and has committed to us the ministry of reconciliation. Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God.*" As a part of His plan, God desires to use you and me as reconcilers. Now God is the One who does the reconciliation, of course, but He uses us to share the need, predicament, and the True gospel to others. It is a picture of taking a lost person's hand and the hand of God and joining them. Again the Holy Spirit does the drawing and the work but He allows us to be a part of that connecting. When you stop and think that God has given us the ministry of reconciliation, wow. All believers are or should be, reconcilers. Do we take this seriously? Do we consider that we are how God has planned to get the gospel out to a lost and dying world? Are we urgent about it or nonchalant?

How are we to be a minister of reconciliation? By our lives, do our lives exemplify Christ or us? Also by our words, and not just by the words that we use but also in sharing the gospel. Do we "hope" that people see Jesus in us (which is good) and not say anything, or do we live the life God has called us to and share the Word? We do not have to pray to ask if we are to share the gospel or not. We do not have to wonder if it's God's plan for us to witness or not. Here and in other passages, He has told us that it is. We may need to pray to be sensitive to the Holy Spirit and for Him to give us the right words, but we have been commissioned to share the gospel "as we go."

As you go about your day, look and be aware as to who you can share the

¹⁶Bible Exposition Commentary (BE Series) - New Testament - The Bible Exposition Commentary – New Testament, Volume 1.

gospel with. Pray for God not to so much give you opportunities (I believe He does), but that we would be aware and look for the opportunities that He has already given us. Look at where God is at work and join Him.

WEEK 7 THE FIVE PURPOSES OF OUR CHURCH-----Dennis Watson

Why are we here? Why do we exist as a body of believers? Are we here for our pleasure and happiness? In reality, we are here for God's pleasure and glory. We are here "To love Jesus and lead others to love Him too." We accomplish this through five biblical activities we call purposes. This week we will look at our five purposes as found in our purpose statement:

Our purpose is to Magnify the Lord and invite others to do the same, by bringing people to Jesus and Membership in His family, developing them to Maturity in Christlikeness, equipping them for Ministry in His church, and leading them to be on Mission with God in His world.

DAY 1 WE EXIST TO CELEBRATE GOD'S PRESENCE: WORSHIP

READ Romans 12:1

Worship: Love the Lord With All Your Heart

Key Idea: God deserves our worship and we need to worship Him

What is worship? Perhaps this quote from an article by Bob Coy will help:

"Then let me paint a picture of what this word is trying to convey. We're all familiar with it. We've seen it in many of our movies. It's the scene where a man stands outside his girlfriend's window, singing a serenade for the whole world to hear. He doesn't have the slightest care what others think. He only knows that all the affection bubbling up in his heart can no longer be contained. And as he unashamedly looks for the best expression of what he is feeling, he suddenly begins kissing his hands and throwing them toward the one he loves. It doesn't matter what anyone else thinks of him, because the one he loves is well worth the display of emotion."
<https://billygraham.org/decision-magazine/march-2007/is-your-worship-worthship/>

Worship is not about a place but a person. It is not about the here and now but the then and there. It is the supernatural connection between heaven and earth.

Paul is telling us that in light of the mercy and compassion of God that we are to worship Him all of the time with all of who we are and that this is our ongoing spiritual service. We are also to call others to live and worship Him. This is to be a way of life. Not a time on your calendar.

Who? We worship God and God alone.

You shall have no other gods before Me. Exodus 20:3 (NKJV)

What? Worship—ascribing greatness and applause and ongoing service to God that includes boasting about Him, singing, dancing, praise, prayer, speaking His Word, proclaiming His Word, confession of truth, sin and out of need.

When? All of the time

Where? Everywhere. Worship is not something you go to do; it is something you do.

Why? Because God is worthy to be worshipped and we need to worship. We were made to praise!

How? With our whole being—body, soul, spirit, feet, hands, voice....our very being.

¹I will bless the LORD at all times; His praise shall continually be in my mouth. ²My soul shall make its boast in the LORD; The humble shall hear of it and be glad. ³Oh, magnify the LORD with me, And let us exalt His name together. Psalm 34:1-3 (NKJV)

Worship Him and invite others to join you. He is worthy and we need to worship Him.

DAY 2 WE EXIST TO ENCOURAGE GOD’S FAMILY: FELLOWSHIP

The purpose of the church is fellowship

READ HEBREWS 10:19-25

Key Idea: God has provided the church for His people to live in fellowship with one another. Believers need one another.

The writer of Hebrews was stressing the need for fidelity to the faith. He was aware of the blessing of confident and secure access to God brought by Jesus our Great High Priest. He then makes an urgent appeal for mutual concern and encouragement for the members of the body of Christ. He tells them to consider how to spur one another on to love and good deeds and tells them to not forsake the gathering together. I am thankful for salvation, Jesus, the Word, the Holy Spirit. However, many downplay the church. Jesus loved the church and gave Himself for her. I cannot imagine living without the impact of other believers on my life and influence. I need the body of Christ as do all believers.

Let's take a look at several characteristics of fellowship.

IDENTIFICATION

We are a body of baptized believers who have identified with Jesus in His death and resurrection and thereby we have identified with one another in our common need for Him and for His body, the church.

ACCOUNTABILITY

We are answerable to hold each other accountable for responsible living. Accountability is a big part of a family and the family of God. I want people to hold me accountable. I need people in my life asking me pertinent questions about my life, faith, family and walk with the Lord.

ENCOURAGEMENT

We all need encouragement to carry on. How many times are you discouraged and feel alone in the struggles of life? I know Jesus has promised to be with us always. It is also encouraging to know that I have brothers and sisters who will be there when I am struggling. And that is mutual; we are there for others when they are struggling. Every member needs to be part of a small group or Sunday School class. We all need encouragement.

SHARING OF RESOURCES

In the book of Acts, the members of the church would take care of one another when there was a physical need. They shared their resources. People go through difficult times due to sickness or loss of job, and the body helps get the bills paid.

INTERDEPENDENCE

Another major aspect of the body of Christ is interdependence. Members of the body have different gifts, personalities, life experiences, and passions. We are not all the same. We need what each one brings to the table. Celebrate our differences! We are one in Christ.

ONENESS

That is the last of the characteristics of the body—oneness. Jesus prayed in John 17:21 that we would be one as He and His Father were one. The goal here is true unity even in the midst of our different gifts, personalities, life experiences, and passions.

God has placed His people, His children into His family—the church. We are members of one another and we need each other. Pray for oneness as Jesus did.

DAY 3 WE EXIST TO EDUCATE GOD'S PEOPLE

The purpose of the church is Discipleship; the object is maturity

Key Idea: God wills that His children be maturing as disciples and be involved in maturing other disciples.

Recently I heard someone present the idea of the spiritual growth/discipleship continuum. It looks like this:

SPIRITUAL GROWTH/DISCIPLSHIP CONTINUUM

Spiritually Dead	Spiritual Infant	Spiritual Child	Spiritual Adult	Spiritual Parent
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On the left side you see the lost person who is spiritually dead. As you move to the right, you see the growth and spiritual maturing. The goal is for all believers to be disciples and disciple makers. To be a spiritual parent is to be making and nurturing new disciples.

Where are you on this continuum? I remember when Sheila, my wife, was pregnant with our first child. I knew I would love this child and that I would be a good father but during those nine months, I must admit I had a struggle. I did not feel like a father and I did not have love for this child. However, when Denise was born something suddenly happened. The love was there and I was a father. Forty years have passed and two more children. Never was there a shortage of love and the parenting came naturally, as I accepted the responsibility of a parent.

You may be thinking, "Am I a spiritual parent, or can I be?" Not until you take on the responsibility of leading others in their growth as a child of God. Then the goal is for them to grow and become spiritual parents. It has been a joy and blessing to watch our children become parents. The key is taking up the responsibility.

Look at Ephesians 4:11-15. This is God's Plan for Maturing His Children. There is a process involved. I hope you will be a disciple and a disciple maker.

Verse 11 God gifted His children

Verse 12 To equip the saints

Verse 12 For the doing of the ministry

Verse 12 In order to build up the body of Christ

Verse 13 So that believers will be united in faith and knowledge

Verses 14-15 That believers may have the fullness of Christ

We exist to disciple believers until they too become spiritual parents. Pray that we will all be spiritual parents.

DAY 4 WE EXIST TO DEMONSTRATE GOD’S LOVE: MINISTRY

Purpose of the church is service

READ Mark 10:35-45

Key Idea: We have been saved to serve.

The brothers James and John were disciples of Jesus. They had heard Him teach. He had taught about the disciples in the future kingdom sitting on twelve thrones with the Lord. It appears that they were claiming what He promised. However, their request was selfish. Jesus told them that this journey would not be easy and would bring suffering. The other disciples became angry.

Jesus then turned it around to a greater truth in order to teach them. What they needed to concern themselves with now was being servants and doing the work of serving. The disciples were making the mistake of looking at the world where being boss, in charge and power-filled is the way. People love position and authority. There is nothing wrong with being ambitious and seeking greatness. However, what is most important is how greatness is defined. Jesus said the greatest will be servants and those who wish to be first must be slave to all. Boy, is that foreign to their thinking and ours.

The way of God in Scripture is first to be a servant. God then in His time exalts His servants to greater opportunity. Jesus served and humbled Himself and then God exalted Him and gave Him the name above every name (see Philippians 2:5-11).

In the body, God has called His children to be servants. He came to serve and to seek and to save that which was lost. He said, *“as the Father has sent me, I also send you”* (John 20:21). Jesus came to serve and sent us to do likewise.

From these passages we find these truths:

All believers have been gifted and commanded to serve.

The greatest in God’s Kingdom are those who are servants.

Ministry is a normal function of every believer.

We have been gifted and commanded to serve. How are you doing?

DAY 5 WE EXIST TO COMMUNICATE GOD'S WORD: OUTREACH

Purpose of the church is evangelism

READ Romans 10:1-17

Key Idea: All believers are to be on mission with God to reach and connect people to Him through His Word.

Paul was troubled that for the most part his people, the Jews, had rejected the Messiah. He prayed, agonized, and was even willing to give up his own salvation if it meant that Israel would come to faith in Jesus. Of course, some had come to Jesus because they were expecting the Messiah's coming. Simeon and Anna were waiting for His arrival.

Paul writes about Israel's rejection and that they had the law and the prophets but they were missing out. They had received special blessings and benefits from God. They were God's chosen people. They had the glory of God in the tabernacle and the temple. They had been given the law and the covenants. God's promises had come through Israel. Finally it was through the line of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Judah that the Messiah came. However, they still rejected Jesus.

Paul then tells that Christ is the end of the law and that all people must confess that Jesus is God's Son and that He died and was raised again. Through the proclaimed Word of God, people agree with God and came to salvation. Paul summed up how all people can be saved including the Jews. Saving faith comes from hearing the proclaimed Word of God.

Faith comes by hearing and that by the Word of God. Believers in Jesus Christ are compelled to get the Word out.

Compelled by His love 2 Cor. 5:14

Motivated by His will 2 Peter 3:9

Moved by His words Acts 1:8

Since this is true, we are to in every way possible get the Word of God to people. We are to be reaching out to the lost and the unchurched. We are to announce the gospel message to people everywhere.

These are our five purposes: worship, fellowship, discipleship, ministry and mission. All five need to be going on in our church body. All five need to be a part of our daily lives.

WEEK 8 OUR ESSENTIAL BELIEFS-----Chris Watson

We, as a body of believers, must agree doctrinally on some things. Paul wrote to young Timothy telling him that God gave the Word so that we would know doctrine (See 2 Timothy 3:16). Doctrine is what is right and true according to God. We need to know what is right and true, and it is essential that we be in agreement about those things.

DAY 1 GOD THE FATHER, GOD THE SON, GOD THE HOLY SPIRIT

READ Ephesians 4:4-6

Key Idea: God has made Himself known and is worthy of our worship, and we need to worship Him. He has made Himself known as Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

The Trinity is a “theological term used to define God as an undivided unity expressed in the threefold nature of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. As a distinctive Christian doctrine, the Trinity is considered as a divine mystery beyond human comprehension to be reflected upon only through scriptural revelation. The Trinity is a biblical concept that expresses the dynamic character of God, not a Greek idea pressed into Scripture from philosophical or religious speculation. While the term trinity does not appear in Scripture, the Trinitarian structure appears throughout the New Testament to affirm that God Himself is manifested through Jesus Christ by means of the Spirit.”¹⁷

There is only one God. Our world teaches there are many gods and all gods lead to heaven. Scripture tells us that Jesus is The Way, The Truth, and The Life, and that no one comes to the Father except through Him. God is the creator of all things who has eternally existed. That means no one created God, He has always been. God the Father is all-powerful, all-knowing, and all-loving. He reigns over the universe and His plan will prevail.

Jesus is the Son of God. He is co-equal with the Father. Jesus has eternally existed and became man at His incarnation. He lived a sinless and holy life and offered Himself as the sacrifice for the sins of all people by dying on the cross. He rose three days later to show His power over sin and death, and He ascended to heaven and will return to earth to reign as King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

The Holy Spirit is the third person of the Trinity. He guides us to the truth while convicting us of sin, working in our life, giving peace to the believer, disciplining us, and empowering us to love and serve Him as we serve others through the gifts He has given us.

¹⁷ Holman Bible Dictionary

In order for all of God's church to be one, we must know what we believe. This doctrine of the Trinity is crucial, and God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit is what our faith is all about. The Trinity is a mystery. If we could know everything about God and all the mystery He would not be much of a God, but we learn more and more about Him each day. Each day provides new hope, grace, and growth in the believer's life. Praise the Lord for the Trinity. Praise God that He has created you and loves you. Praise Him that He loves you so much that He sent Jesus, and not only sending Jesus, but leaving us with the Holy Spirit so that we could walk and talk with God daily. Praise the Lord.

DAY 2 THE BIBLE IS GOD'S WORD

READ 2 Timothy 3:13-17

Key Idea: The Bible is God's Word to us that we may know Him and experience His blessings and benefits.

It is usually not a problem for me to express my opinion. Opinions though, are like noses—"everybody has one and they are all different." Sometimes our opinion may align with God's Word but often it does not. Often our opinion is how we see things and what we think should be done. It is not our opinion or thoughts that really matter, but it is God's Word. Are you more inclined to live on your thoughts and opinions or on the thoughts and opinions of others, or on the Word of God?

"The word inspiration means 'God-breathed.' The writers of Scripture were not just pens that the Lord picked up and wrote with. The marvel is that God used these men's personalities, expressed things in their own thought patterns, yet got through exactly what He wanted to say. Through these men God has given us His Word. He has nothing more to say to us today. If He spoke out of heaven today, He wouldn't add anything to what He has already said."¹⁸ Of course God may speak to us about a situation or a decision we are trying to make, but there is no new revelation that has not already been conveyed in God's Word.

It is amazing that God used people to convey His words. One author, God, writes the Bible and yet it was penned through some 40 different people. We have 66 inspired books that were true many years ago and still true today. God's Word is perfect and infallible. It leads, guides, and directs us.

Notice the things the verses today say about the Word of God. First it shows us the way to salvation in verse 15. God's Word shows us our predicament (problem) with sin, that we have no hope alone, that the hope of

¹⁸Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee

Jesus and a relationship to God is available when we put our trust in Jesus. Our Bible has the very words of life. To think that most Americans have 5 or so copies in their homes, and yet there are some languages that still do not have the full Bible in their language. In fact, check out the video link below of some receiving their very own Bible.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HNCKBornukk>

The Scripture says that God's Word is given by inspiration from God as we have already talked about. Next, it is profitable for doctrine and reproof. Scripture helps us to know the truth about salvation, the Holy Spirit, gifts, and heaven and hell to name a few. Doctrine is not based on our opinions or "feelings" but on truth. God's Word instructs us on truth. In fact if you hear something that sounds off base on the radio, from a Christian author, pastor, speaker, or friend, take what you hear and see how it matches up with Scripture. God's Word is always right.

Next, it says Scripture is instruction for righteousness. This is how to walk with God daily. A believer who spends time in prayer and the Word and applies what he or she learns will avoid many wrong directions and guidance in his/her life. God's Word through the Holy Spirit is our guide. He shows us the way. This is why we read **Psalm 119:11** that says, "*I have hidden God's Word in my heart that I might not sin against Him.*" We must read the Word, know the Word, and memorize the Word so that we can walk hand in hand with the Lord.

Paul wraps up this passage by saying if a person is a student of God's Word then they will be complete, "thoroughly equipped for every good work." Just think about that for a minute. Daily time with God and His Word will grow us to the point where we walk with God more and more each day. Are you in the Word? Obviously you are or you would not be doing these devotions. Keep at it, dig deeper, and keep going. As you read the Word, I want to encourage you to check out the book Praying the Bible by Donald Whitney. It is a great way to read and pray God's Word.

DAY 3 HUMAN BEINGS AND SALVATION

READ Romans 6:12-23

Key Idea: Human beings were originally created in the image and likeness of God. We were created to live in an ongoing relationship with God characterized by God's blessings and benefits. The fall corrupted that nature and salvation through Jesus Christ is the only solution.

Sin, the sin of Adam, was passed to all human beings through birth. Of course, this is not true of Jesus who was born of the woman having been conceived by the Holy Spirit. Jesus was born righteous; we were born

unrighteous. I often say we are doubly sinners: we were born into sin and then we sinned ourselves. Genesis tells us we were made in the image of God. No other creature can say the same. No animals, plants, or anything else can say that they were made in God's image. However, we disobeyed God and went our own way. Adam and Eve were tempted and the enemy put that seed of doubt in their mind when he said, "Did God really say?" He got Adam and Eve off track, and instead of trusting and following God, they trusted the enemy. This is where our culture is today. They trust themselves, their feelings, and their desires, instead of trusting God. Unfortunately you and I can do this too; Scripture reminds us of this today.

Before being slaves to God (bondservant, a willing servant) we were slaves to sin. God, through Jesus, offered the way of salvation. Salvation is God's free gift to us. Salvation was made available to us by what God did on the cross when He died for our sins. It is free but we must accept it. A friend or parent can buy you something and want to give it to you, but if you don't take it, it is not yours. The same is true for salvation. God must show us our need for it and we must receive it. We can never make up for sin by self-improvement or good works. When we turn from our self-ruled life and turn to Jesus in faith, we are saved. Salvation begins the moment we place our faith in Jesus. We are not only saved for the future (heaven), but just as importantly, we are saved now. The greatest thing that we are saved to is God Himself; the relationship that we had no hope of is now given to us through Jesus.

Our verses tells us today that we used to be slaves to sin but now we are slaves to God. We often think of the word slaves as bad things from history, and that definitely is the case. However, when it talks about being a slave to God, here it is talking about being a bondservant. A bondservant is one who does the will of their master because they desire to do so, not because that is their only choice.

To whom or what are you a slave? Are you controlled by the enemy and sin or by the Lord? Are you guided by your desires or by His? Are you walking with God or walking away from Him? Thank God for salvation that is only through Him. Be in awe today of God and the salvation that He has provided. Thank the Lord for what He has done.

DAY 4 ETERNAL SECURITY

READ Romans 8:32-39; John 10:27-29

Key Idea: Salvation is the work of God through His grace and is received through faith. He saves us and He will finish what He started. It is not possible to be separated from His love.

Praise the Lord that nothing can separate us from the Love of God, nothing. If I have put my faith in Jesus then my eternity is secure. If one has truly put their faith in Jesus then one cannot lose their salvation. Our salvation is maintained by the grace and power of God, not by our own self-effort. If a person has put their faith in Jesus then they will walk and grow with Him. **John 10:27** from our passage today says, *“My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow me.”* Salvation is putting our trust in Jesus, and once we have been saved, we then follow Jesus. Salvation is more than lip service. It is placing our eternity, faith, heart, mind, and soul in Christ.

Either Jesus alone is sufficient to save or He is not. Either He saves completely or He does not save at all. There are some people and churches that believe faith can be lost. The question would then be at what point do you lose it? How much is too much? When does God finally say, “That’s it?” How would you know if you lost it? If you have lost it, do you need to be saved again only to possibly lose it again? What a stressful way to live! Remember Scripture doesn’t support losing salvation.

Our Romans passage today tells us that death, life, angels, principalities, powers, things present, things to come, height, depth, nor anything created can separate us from the love of God. Praise the Lord, nothing can separate us from the love of God if we have placed our faith in Jesus.

Take some time today to thank God for salvation. Take some time to tell Him how grateful you are, not that just you are saved for eternity (future), but that you are saved for now. Remember it is not a prayer (the right words) that saves, nor our desires or hopes, but it is our placing our faith in Jesus and what He has done for us. It is calling on Him to do what only He can do. Have you placed your faith in Jesus? If not place your faith in Him now, asking Him to take your sins away. If you have been saved, spend the day thanking Him for salvation.

DAY 5 WHAT WE PRACTICE OR OUR PRACTICE

READ Ephesians 5:15-21

Key Idea: Believers should give great consideration to how they live.

In the 101 class, we talk about giving attention to yielding to Jesus and His desires and plans and not to ours. Here is an acrostic that we go through that I want to share today. The acrostic in the end spells BAPTIST but more importantly, it is based in Scripture. As you go through these, ask yourself if these are true of you. Are you giving consideration and attention to obeying and following God? Beliefs are not worth much unless they are translated into actions. Based on what the Bible teaches, we feel very strongly about the following seven practices:

Bible as our sole authority.

The whole Bible was given to us by inspiration from God and is useful to teach us what is true and make us realize what is wrong in our lives; it straightens us out and helps us to do what is right.

2 Tim. 3:16 (TLB)

Since God's Word is the only completely reliable and truthful authority, we accept the Bible as our manual for living. Our first question when faced with a decision is "What does the Bible say?" We practice daily Bible reading, Bible study, and Bible memorization. The Bible is the basis for all we believe.

Autonomy of each local church.

Christ is the head of his Body, the church. He is the source of the Body's life. . .

Col. 1:18 (GNT)

Christ is the recognized head of the church, not any person, group, or religious organization. While recognizing the value of associating and cooperating with other groups of Christians, we believe every local church should be self-governing and independent from any denominational control. In relating to any church that we may sponsor, we encourage each congregation to determine its own strategy, structure, and style.

Priesthood of every believer

Christ loves us, and by his death he has freed us from our sins and made us a kingdom of priests to serve God. . .

Rev. 1:5 (GNT)

You are . . . the king's priests. . . God's own people, chosen to proclaim the wonderful acts of God.

I Peter 2:9 (GNT)

The Bible teaches that every Christian is called to "full-time" Christian service, regardless of his or her vocation. We practice the truth that every believer is a minister by encouraging every member to find a place of service and ministry. Every believer has direct access to God through prayer and Bible reading.

Tithing

A tithe of everything you produce belongs to the Lord; it is holy to the Lord.

Lev. 27:30

At Harp's Crossing we practice tithing for the support of Christ's Body, the church, as God commands. We recognize that giving 10% of our income is the Biblical standard of giving.

Immersion

For when you were baptized, you were buried with Christ, and in baptism you were raised with Christ. . . **Col. 2:12 (GNT)**

We practice baptism by immersion under water - the way Jesus was baptized, and the way the Bible commands. The Greek word for the word baptism is baptize which literally means, "to immerse."

Spirit-led living

(Jesus said) I am the Vine, you are the branches. If you abide in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; but apart from me you can do nothing.

John 15:5

We believe the only way possible to live the Christian life is God's power within us. So, we seek to practice a daily dependence on God's Spirit to enable us to do what is right. If a believer is truly in tune with the Spirit then he/she will know and follow God. (Phil 2:13, Eph. 5:18)

Telling others about Christ

Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. **1 Peter 3:15**

It is the responsibility of every Christian to share the Good News with those God brings us into contact with. We practice personal sharing about Christ and inviting friends to church.

Do these things ring true for you? Are you yielding to the Spirit? Maybe you were saved but haven't been baptized; seek to talk to a pastor and get that taken care of. Maybe you have been a believer for a while but have never tithed (10%). If not, tell God you do not want to continue to disobey and you want to begin obeying by tithing. Maybe it is something else that was in the devotions today or something God showed you. Spend some time seeking God on where He is leading you!

WEEK 9 WE ARE ABOUT CONNECTING-----Dennis Watson

Is it really possible to overstate the significance of connections? We use simple carabiners to represent the significance of being connected. Our carabiners are symbols of being connected and connecting. Carabiners have many uses but for our illustrative purpose, they are used to symbolize connection for safety purposes. I have an indelible picture in my mind of a utility pole that has been damaged by a vehicle hitting it and clipping it off. The pole does not fall but it is completely broken off. What keeps it standing are its many connections. Guy wires and other lines hold the pole in place and it cannot fall! That is what we are talking about when we speak of connected and being connected. The more connected you are the less likely you will fall.

DAY 1 A LITTLE HISTORY

READ Job 8:8-10

Key Idea: HCBC was an intentional start of FBC Fayetteville.

History and heritage are more important than most people perhaps are aware. Each of us has a history and we all have a heritage. We have very much been shaped by our heritage and history. Our mother church, Fayetteville First Baptist, was always involved in missions. They were instrumental in starting several churches in Fayette County. Harp's Crossing Baptist was an intentional new start as a mission of First Baptist Church of Fayetteville—our mother church. Around or just before 1980 the people of the Fayetteville First Baptist sensed God leading them to establish a church on the south side of Fayette County.

What became the mission and ultimately HCBC, first started meeting in the home of Wayne and Brenda Evans on Shamrock Drive in Fayetteville. The very first meeting was the first Sunday of May 1981. On that day 12 people made commitments to be a part of the new work. Soon after the beginnings in that basement, a small frame building with a tin roof known as Water's Chapel was leased at the corner of Antioch and McBride Road. The little group grew and a mobile chapel was built for Sunday School and for preschoolers and children on the site. Sunday School began October, 1981 with 43 people. The staff of First Baptist both preached and lead worship. Less than a year later the first pastor was called March 1, 1982. I was blessed to come and be part of the new work.

The new work was supported financially by the SBC Home Mission Board (North American Mission Board), the Georgia Baptist Convention (Georgia Baptist Mission Board) and South Metro Association.

The mission continued to grow and moved to the current site on Highway 92 in April 1984. In January, 1984 Harp's Crossing Baptist Church was constituted as a church with around 300 members.

The growth continued; new buildings and staff were added. Mission work was going on with a church started in West Virginia. The church also joined with a new work in Canada. An unreached people group in SE Asia was adopted in 1995, and that work continues to the present with no end in sight.

In the spring of 2011, the congregation of the Hollonville Baptist Church in Williamson, GA joined with Harp's Crossing becoming Harp's Crossing Baptist Church Hollonville. Hollonville Baptist Church came into existence in the mid 1870's. The current property of what is now Harp's Crossing Hollonville was a brothel. One lady prayed that God would intercede and the men would see their need for God. God intervened, the brothel was shut down, and later a church would take its place. In 1876 the first building of the Hollonville Baptist Church was built after the church met in homes for several years. Today, Harp's Crossing Baptist Church Hollonville has a thriving and effective ministry in Pike County.

There are many blessings from our history and heritage. Perhaps the greatest blessing I see from our heritage is to keep reaching out beyond where we are. I am thankful for our rich history and heritage. Now may all who come behind us find us faithful!

DAY 2 MEET PEOPLE WHERE THEY ARE

READ 1 Corinthians 9:19-23 (NKJV)

Key Idea: Like Paul we are to meet people where they are without trying to make them like us.

Paul was passionate about the gospel and about reaching people with the gospel. His life was all about the gospel. In this passage, he relates a very significant truth to us that for Harp's Crossing (at least a part of our strategy) is meeting people where they are. If your main concern is to share the gospel with someone and see them come into a relationship with Jesus, you probably will not begin the conversation about their political party. The gospel is for all people regardless of their political leanings. The gospel does not begin with morality or with opinions about the lottery or abortion. The gospel is God's solution to our number one problem—sin.

Paul wanted to meet people where they were and seek to win them to Christ. Too often we want to fix people and make them like us. Paul was not offended by what people wore, or ate. He did not concern himself with

their appearance. His number one goal was to share Jesus and see them come to Him.

Here is an attitude that believers often have. It sounds something like this. "Before I engage you in a conversation about that which will change your life for now and eternity, would you please remove your body piercings? Would you remove or at least cover your tattoos?" Uh oh, may that not be our approach!

Paul wanted to remove obstacles so that he could get to what really matters. He did not want differences to get in the way of that which was of supreme importance to him—winning people to Jesus.

It is our task to share the truth of the gospel with people. It is God's task through His Word, Holy Spirit and discipleship to transform people. We can transform and/or fix no one.

What do you say or think when you see someone who has an appearance that seems odd to you? Join me in this prayer, when meeting people--Lord, let me see what really matters and look past everything else.

DAY 3 THE FELLOWSHIP OF CONNECTING

READ Acts 2:42, 1 Corinthians 1:9 and 1 John 1:1-10

Key Idea: God's plan for the body is that believers would live in a coordinated fashion supporting, encouraging, helping, and spurring one another to love and good deeds.

The word 'fellowship' in the New Testament translates the Greek word 'koinonia' that is a word that means "to share" or "partnership." It also carries the idea of being in communication. I just tried something. I went and found those places where 'koinonia' was used in the New Testament and inserted the word 'connect.' It works perfectly even if it was used in a negative way like "*what connection does light have with darkness*" (**2 Corinthians 6:14**). As believers we are in the connecting or fellowship business. We have been connected to God through salvation through Jesus' death and resurrection. God did the work of reconciling us to Himself. Now, we as believers have fellowship with God. We have been connected to Him. This means that we are also connected to other believers.

In the introduction to this week's devotions I mentioned a picture that has really been an illustration of the importance of connections. The picture is of a utility pole that has been hit by a vehicle and broken off. The top part is still in place because of all of its connections. The obvious reason was all of

the connections of wires that held the pole up even though cut off. Cut off but not cut down. The connections kept it from coming down. Now I have to be very careful with this statement. I am aware that if it is taken out of this context, it appears that I am saying there are other ways to be saved. We are only saved by the work of Jesus in His death on the cross and His glorious resurrection. But I believe that the more connected a person is the safer he is. There it is. I said it, but if you quote me, keep it in context. A believer needs fellowship with God, His Word, and His church. A believer needs the fellowship-connection with other believers in serving and being on mission. The more fellowship-connection-with God's Word, church, and the work of the ministry, the less likely we are to get into connections with the world.

Make sure you are benefiting from the fellowship-connections of your church.

DAY 4 CONNECTED AND CONNECTING

READ Luke 14:23 (NKJV)

Key Idea: It is important that we be connected to God and His church, mission, ministry, and discipleship, but we are also to be connecting others.

Jesus, in concluding the parable about those who refused to come to a banquet, told His disciples to go out into the *"highways and hedges and compel them to come in that my house may be filled."* The word here for compel means to urge and cause it to be necessary that they come. The religious leaders had said they would come, but when the time for the banquet came, they had excuses and did not come. So the party host sent his servant to invite others to come. Those invited were the poor, the neglected, those who were down and out. They were invited to the banquet because the others refused to come.

Go! Invite! Urge!

We use symbolic carabiners to remind us that we have been connected to God through salvation. They also remind us that we are connected to His church, other believers, ministry, and mission. However, it goes further because not only are we connected, but we are also seeking to connect others in the same way. There is no other way to put it: We are in the connecting business. By God's grace we are connected to Him through salvation and connecting others.

Take some time in the still quietness of your daily devotion to ask some self-examining questions:

- Am I connected to God through salvation through Jesus Christ?
- Am I connected to a body of believers through effective church membership?
- Am I connected to God's Word so that I am a growing and maturing disciple?
- Am I connected to a meaningful place of ministry in and through my church?
- Am I actively involved in connecting others?
- We are to connect people to God through worship and salvation.
- We are to connect people to the body of Christ for the purpose of fellowship
- We are to connect people to growing in faith through discipleship.
- We are to connect people to serving through ministry.
- We are to connect people to outreach through evangelizing.
- The more connected people are to God, His Word, His church, His work, the safer they are.

What about others. Are they connected in these ways?

DAY 5 CONNECTING: MAKE IT PERSONAL

READ 2 Corinthians 1:3-11

Key Idea: Troubled times often drive us to God. When a person comes to the Lord and experiences His sufficiency, then they in turn reach out to others in their troubled times to tell them how God provided for them.

There are certain things that cause us trouble. Feelings overwhelm us and cause very serious problems in our lives. An evangelist by the name of David Ring who was here quite a few years ago often spoke of Dr. Jesus. You see David Ring has cerebral palsy. Orphaned at age 14, he was cast about from family to family, with nowhere to call home. He endured constant physical pain, humiliating public ridicule and constant discouragement. Yet in the face of these seemingly insurmountable obstacles, David emerged not victimized...but victorious! Life was worse than hopeless for him until

his relationship began with Jesus Christ who taught him respect and an acceptance of his physical challenges. To most, physical challenges of this magnitude would prove to be a tombstone. For David, his coming of age was and remains a milestone. Today he has a wife and four beautiful children and a very active ministry. He would speak of Jesus as Dr. Jesus. David says, “I have cerebral palsy, what’s your excuse?”

David Ring has used his story to make connecting personal. Listen to others in their struggles and comfort them with the comfort you have received.

It seems that people who do not attend church have opinions about people in church. They think of them as “do-gooders.” Believers often come across as people who have it all together. I don’t have it all together, but I am in hot pursuit of the One who does—Jesus. Be vulnerable and transparent. Don’t try to make people think you have it all together. Share your struggles and failures as well as victories. In this way you will make connecting personal. People will be drawn to your honesty and transparency and ultimately to Jesus.

WEEK 10 THE BODY ORGANIZED FOR THE TASK-----Chris Watson

One of the marks of an individual's maturity is a growing understanding of, and appreciation for, his own body. There is a parallel in the spiritual life: as we mature in Christ, we gain a better understanding of the church, which is Christ's body. The emphasis in recent years on "body life" has been a good one. It has helped to counteract the wrong emphasis on "individual Christianity" that can lead to isolation from the local church. The church is not about any one person except for Jesus Christ. After all it is called "the Body of Christ." It is about Him, His mission, and His purpose. Our part as individual members of His body is to find our place in His body. Your physical body has organization. Organization is necessary for proper function. The same is true of the body of Christ. There must be organization, cooperation, and coordination.

DAY 1 ALL THINGS DONE DECENTLY AND IN ORDER

READ 1 Corinthians 14:1-5; 26-40

Key Idea: The church must be organized for proper function.

In much of Paul's letters to the Corinthians he is dealing with some problem in the church. He devotes a large segment of 1 Corinthians 14 to the divisive issue of speaking in tongues in the church. In all of this Paul is seeking that the members of the body do that which will edify (build up) the body, rather than tear it down. He does not say, "Don't speak in tongues," but he is warning that if it is done, it is to be done in a way that it does not divide or disrupt the body. Then he addresses another issue of women speaking in the assembly.

Second, the women in the meeting were not to speak (1 Cor. 14:34-35). Paul had already permitted the women to pray and prophesy (1 Cor. 11:5), so this instruction must apply to the immediate context of evaluating the prophetic messages. It would appear that the major responsibility for doctrinal purity in the early church rested on the shoulders of the men, the elders in particular (1 Tim. 2:11-12). The context of this prohibition would indicate that some of the women in the assembly were creating problems by asking questions and perhaps even generating arguments. Paul reminded the married women to be submitted to their husbands and to get their questions answered at home. (We assume that the unmarried women could counsel with the elders or with other men in their own families.) Sad to say, in too many Christian homes today, it is the wife who has to answer the questions for the husband because she is better taught in the Word.¹⁹

¹⁹ Bible Exposition Commentary (BE Series) - New Testament - The Bible Exposition Commentary - New Testament, Volume 1.

To follow this quote, I want to be clear that both men and women can cause dissention, partly because we as men have not stepped up and led our wives and families. More than anything, I think this quote should challenge us as men to lead our families and to be the spiritual leader. Wives, tell your husband your needs, your desire to be spiritually led, give input, and then pray for him to lead. If you are single or a single parent, ask God to help you lead your family.

The goal in all of the instructions in our passage today is too often lost in debates about women in ministry and speaking in tongues. The focus is that whatever is done “be done decently and in order” (14:40).

Paul summarized the main teachings of 1 Corinthians 14 in verses 39-40. Things must be done in an orderly manner. In other words, in all of the issues that are addressed in this passage, the focus is to be on God so that confusion, individual focus, and selfish desires do not win out. The church is a living organism. It is made up of many parts (people). Because it is living and made up of many parts, organization is necessary for proper function. Cooperation, according to Scripture, is necessary for the Church to be what God wills. We cannot make it about me, a certain issue, or what we deem as important, but it must be about what Scripture says. If a church gets caught up in petty issues like the color of carpet or someone’s opinion, then nothing is accomplished.

Cooperation is known as an act or instance of working together for a common purpose or benefit. When Paul was writing many of his letters, he was writing to tell the church to work out a problem or issues that they were facing because the overall gospel was at stake. The church could not afford to get caught up in problems or issues unnecessarily and put the gospel to the side. This is why organization and teamwork are so important. If we go back to “essential beliefs,” we are reminded there are things that we must agree on like God, salvation, etc. These are non-debatatable. As we agree on these things, then we can organize ourselves to take the gospel to the world.

Sometimes we don’t like “organization,” and we want to go it alone, or we want to be the rebel. However, organization is the key as long as the gospel is at the front. We can do more together than apart. For example 10% of our offering goes to the Cooperative Program. Another example is the Lottie Moon Christmas offering where, for instance, \$40,000 is given to one goal, supporting missionaries on the field, so that the gospel can be spread. Cooperation is key.

How are you cooperating and working as a part of God’s plan in a local Church? God’s Church works beautifully when we work with others, even those who are sometimes difficult to work with. Serve God, each other, and the world. Men, are you leading your families? If so, continue, and if not, ask and yield to God so that you may do so.

DAY 2 THE BODY IS MANY MEMBERS

READ Romans 12:4-8

Key Idea: The body is one whole but it is made up of many members. All believers are members of the body of Christ. If there is member paralysis, something has gone wrong.

“This is the first time that Paul has introduced the great theme of the church as the body of Christ. This is the primary subject in Paul's letter to the Corinthians, Ephesians, and Colossians. The church as the body of Christ is to function as a body. This means that the many members do not have the same gifts. You may have a gift that I could never exercise. There are many members in the body, hundreds of members, and therefore hundreds of gifts. I do not think Paul ever gave a complete list of all the gifts because every time he dealt with gifts of the Spirit he always brought up new gifts which he had not mentioned in previous lists. I am sure the Spirit of God led him to do that.”²⁰

God has called me to be a pastor. That includes preaching, counseling, administration, teaching, and discipling, to name a few of my responsibilities. For some the idea of getting up in front of people and teaching or preaching scares them to death. However, some of those same people would gladly serve by rocking a baby, changing diapers and singing songs to the little ones. Both are important. The babies are getting loved on and cared for in one place while the Word is being preached in another. I can't watch the babies on Sunday morning as I am preaching, but others cannot preach because they are watching babies or helping with security. The point is each part is important.

The Church is One Body with many members. Those members have been gifted differently. Some to teach, some to serve, some to watch babies, some will teach Sunday school, or go on a youth trip, just to name a few. God's people have different gifts and when each person is serving, using their gifts, then God's Church is functioning as it is meant to. Are you serving? Do you have a place that you are using your talents in God's church? If not, seek to do so. We will be looking at this more later this year, but here is a link to a spiritual gifts test. <https://gifts.churchgrowth.org/cgi-cg/gifts.cgi?id=501470> . You can also go to www.harpscrosing.com and click “resources” and you will find it there. Even if you have taken it before, if you haven't done it in a while, I encourage you to do it again. As you find and begin using your gifts you will find much more fulfillment as you serve the Lord. You will have so much more invested. I have seen people go on mission trips who never have, and they come back energized and excited about having been used by the Lord. We are on a mission trip every day. Ask the Lord how you can use your gifts in His Church, your home, school, workplace, or wherever you may be.

²⁰Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee

DAY 3 THE HEAD AND THE HEART OF THE CHURCH

READ Colossians 1:18; Matthew 22:37-40 and MATTHEW 28:19-20

Key Idea: Jesus is the Head of the church, while the great commission and the great commandment are the heart.

Throughout the book of Colossians the supremacy of Christ is set forth. "He is the Head of the body, the church." I believe this is the key to the Epistle to the Colossians, which is really a companion epistle to the Epistles to the Ephesians and the Philippians. In Ephesians we had the emphasis on the fact that the church is the body of Christ down here in the world. The emphasis was upon the body. In Colossians the emphasis is upon the head of the body, the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. In Ephesians we read, 'And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church' (Eph. 1:22). And finally, in Philippians we see the church with feet, walking through the world -- we see the experience of the church, the experience of the believer. These are companion epistles."²¹

"Each Christian is a member of this spiritual body, and Jesus Christ is the Head. In Greek usage, the word head meant "source" and "origin" as well as "leader, ruler." Jesus Christ is the Source of the church, His body, and the Leader. Paul called Him "the Beginning" which tells us that Jesus Christ has priority in time as far as His church is concerned. The term beginning can be translated "originator." No matter which name you select, it will affirm the preeminence of Jesus Christ in the church. The church had its origin in Him, and today it has its operation in Him. As the Head of the church, Jesus Christ supplies it with life through His Spirit. He gives gifts to men, and then places these gifted people in His church that they might serve Him where they are needed. Through His Word, Jesus Christ nourishes and cleanses the church. No believer on earth is the head of the church. This position is reserved exclusively for Jesus Christ. Various religious leaders may have founded churches, or denominations; but only Jesus Christ is the Founder of the church which is His body. This church is composed of all true believers, and it was born at Pentecost. It was then that the Holy Spirit came and baptized the believers into one spiritual body."²²

God is the Head of the Church, not you or me. God has given us His Word to show us what the church should be about and how it should carry out God's plan. Since God is the Head, He has given us our instructions which are to love God, love others, and make disciples. These three are intertwined. If we truly know and love God then we will love others, and in turn, seek to make disciples. This should come naturally, but at times our sin and selfishness gets in the way so we must constantly be reminded and refocused to make disciples. God did not call us to "grow a Church,"

²¹Thru The Bible With J. Vernon McGee

²²Bible Exposition Commentary (BE Series) - New Testament - The Bible Exposition Commentary - New Testament, Volume 2

“build a building,” or “have big budgets.” While some of these may be true, what we have been called to do is make disciples. Jesus had 12 disciples in which He changed the world. Jesus was the Head of those disciples and they looked to Him. As we make disciples, may we look to the Author and Finisher of our faith.

The fact that there is "*one body*" in this world (**Eph. 4:4**) does not eliminate or minimize the need for local bodies of believers. The fact that I belong to the universal church does not release me from my responsibilities to the local church. I cannot minister to the whole church, but I can strengthen and build the church by ministering to God's people in a local assembly. Let's yield to Jesus and His plan and purposes.

DAY 4 SHEPHERDING THE FLOCK

READ 1 Peter 5:1-4

Key Idea: God has given pastors to the church to feed, lead, and care for the members of the body.

The New King James Version uses the word “elder” in verse 1. We need to understand this word and what it means. The Greek word is *presbyteros* which means a mature man having seasoned judgement (experiences). The New Testament specifies that elders are men. (The feminine singular, *presbytera*, never occurs in the Bible.) The feminine plural word is *presbyteras*; it occurs in 1 Timothy 5:2 and refers to “aged women,” not women with an official title. It is important that we understand words and meanings in the Bible. Understanding words helps us to understand why we believe certain things. Therefore, based on Scripture, men are to be “pastors” or “elders” as we understand the word in this context.

God gave the church some special offices. **Ephesians 4:11-12** says, “*And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, ¹²for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.*” This comes straight from God's Word. Notice it says that one of the main jobs of the pastors is to equip God's people for ministry. Pastors are to instruct, guide, teach, disciple, and preach the Word of God. It's our job to show others Jesus, and at the same time, remind ourselves that we also need Jesus.

J Vernon McGee says, “We call the pastor of a church a minister, but if you are a Christian, you are as much a minister as he is. You don't have to be ordained to be a minister. The pastor has a special gift of teaching the Word of God so that his members, those who are under him, might do the work of the ministry -- they are the ones to go out and do the visitation and the witnessing. I am afraid we have the church in reverse today.”²³

²³Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee

Now it's just as much the minister or pastor's responsibility as it is anyone's to share the Gospel and be in the Word of God. Sometimes we think that is reserved to the pastor only, but it is for all Christ followers, the pastors included.

If you have taken the Discovering Church Membership 101 class then you may remember this:

This is the Role of the Pastors:

1. The equipping of the members for ministry is the number one priority of the pastoral staff. (Eph. 4:11-12)
2. The pastors have as their objective to mobilize an army of ministers who are maximizing their unique gifts, heart, abilities, personality, and experiences in a meaningful place of service through our church.
3. The pastoral staff will give personal guidance to members in discovering their shape and place of ministry.
4. Many of our struggles as individuals, families and churches would disappear if we would love God, love others, and seek to serve our Lord according to how He has shaped us.

This is the main role of the pastors. We will come back to this as we seek to lead God's church so that all of us are on mission with Him and following His plan, pastors included. As you begin or end your day spend some time praying for your pastors.

DAY 5 MINISTRIES

READ Exodus 35:30-36:2

Key Idea: God has provided among His followers certain people with gifts and abilities to serve in different ministries.

In Romans 12:4-8 we have already seen that there are different gifts and ministries. In the Old Testament, in the book of Exodus, God gave special abilities to people like Bezalel and Aholiab to make and design things to be used in the Tabernacle. There were workers in metals, embroiderers, perfumers, engravers, various craftsmen, carpenters, and stone workers, in addition to the priests and Levites.

Of course the needs of the church body are different today. We have musicians, teachers, caregivers, people who repair cars and homes, encouragers, and comforters. There are people who work with computers, transportation, childcare, audiovisual, lighting, sound technicians, and people who produce printed material. It takes all of God's people to do the work that is needed. Take some time to read Exodus 18:13-27.

Did you read Exodus 18:13-27? Good. No one is superman or superwoman. Moses was trying to do everything himself until his father-in-law, Jethro, stepped in and told him that he needed some help and that if he didn't get it, he would wear himself out. We are human so we have limits, and it is good that we know those limits. When we know our limits and allow other people to use their gifts, then not only is help received, but others are able to use their gifts. Do you oversee a ministry, do you oversee a team, or are you doing something by yourself? Think of people who God might want to use to help in such a team.

We will soon have a list of ministries that you can look over and see where you may serve if you are not already doing so. What if every believer at Harp's Fayetteville and Hollonville was serving in at least one area of ministry? It has been said that 20% of the people do 80% of the work, and that is often true. But what if you used your gift in God's Church? Again, if you have not done the spiritual gifts inventory, I encourage you to. You could take that list, and set up a meeting with a pastor or ministry leader to see where you could use your gifts and talents for the Lord. As we move further into these devotions, you will be hearing more about this. I encourage you to pray about how God would have you to use your gifts and your talents for Him.

WEEK 11 ORGANIZED FOR THE TASK (2)-----Dennis Watson

As we saw last week, the church is organized and has to be because it consists of many parts and has a mission and purpose. Organization is a number of individuals systematically united for some end or work. We are organized to carry out our mission and purpose. This week we look at some specific ways we are organized.

DAY 1 SUNDAY SCHOOL

READ Exodus 18:13-27

Key Idea: Sunday School at Harp's Crossing is our method of organizing the body into small groups for carrying out our mission and purpose.

Call it what you will—family group, small group, connecting group, or Sunday School, they are all basically the same. They are the body organized in small groups to carry out the mission and purposes of the body.

Sunday School at HCBC is the main tool for fulfilling the church's mission of "Loving God and leading others to love Him too." It is imperative that we all keep in mind this is what we are all about. Through our Sunday School classes this mission is accomplished and the responsibility is not just for the class but each member.

Sunday School at HCBC fulfills all 5 of the purposes of our church: worship, fellowship, ministry, outreach and discipleship. Of course, not all five are done every week but over time all five purposes will happen in and through Sunday School classes.

Sunday School at HCBC is age graded from the "cradle to the grave." This allows for common ground to be established providing fellowship and accountability. We are not strict regarding age groups among adults but with the children and students we seek to have them together with others their age or grade.

Sunday School at HCBC is the entry point for the lost and the unchurched and an opportunity for class members to meet people where they are. Sunday School is the activity to invite lost and unchurched people to come and meet other people so that they can hear the gospel and experience the warmth and love of God's people.

Sunday School at HCBC is for everyone no matter what age or level of spiritual maturity. It is the place to connect people to God, His word, other believers, ministry and mission. Here all people can be exposed to all aspects of God's church. Sunday School is one of the best times and places to connect people to God.

I hope you are connected to a Sunday School class; if not, why not get connected this week? If you are connected, invite others regularly to come with you. People are likely to come if invited. The sharing in Sunday School is a two-way street. People need you and you need people.

DAY 2 ORGANIZED FOR MINISTRY

READ Mark 10:13-16

Key Idea: Jesus was concerned about all people and wanted everyone brought into a growing relationship with Him.

Orphans, widows, poor, wealthy, divorced, old, young, rich and poor—Jesus cared and ministered to all people. In today’s passage He was concerned for children. The word here for children covers from infants to preteens. The disciples rebuked the people bringing children to Him, seeking to discourage them. The disciples thought that Jesus saw children as unimportant. In the eyes of Jesus no person is unimportant. Jesus was indignant with His disciples and gave them two commands—“keep letting them come and stop hindering them.” Jesus wanted all people to come to Him and wanted no one hindering their coming.

At Harp’s Crossing we have many ministries that seek to encourage people to come to Jesus and His church. These ministries are here to reach out to people and provide for our own members to get connected and to be connecting others to Jesus and His church. These are not about programs, they are about people; connecting people to God, His church, missions and ministry. Here are just a few and in the pages that follow you will find a list of current opportunities to get connected to ministry:

Preschool and Children’s Ministry

Student Ministry

Men’s Ministry

Women’s Ministry

Music Ministry

I hope you will find your place and begin to serve in and through your church.

DAY 3 ORGANIZED FOR THE TASK INCLUDES BUSINESS

READ Ephesians 2:19-22

Key Idea: Much of what the church does we think of as being “spiritual,” but when we are serving the Lord all things are spiritual even when we are doing the business aspects of the church.

The context of today’s passage has to do with how God through Jesus eliminated the wall of division between Jews and Gentiles. In Christ and in His church the division that had existed between Jews who were God’s chosen people and recipients of the law and the others called Gentiles was removed. Of course this which he spoke of creating “one new man from the two” is the church. The church exists as the universal church all over the world and the local church. Paul gives us the picture of the church being a body like our body that has many parts and those parts have particular roles to play and duties to perform. He uses terms like “built,” “joined,” and “built together” to show that every member of the body is important to its health. In Ephesians 4:16 he says that “each joint supplies” something that helps the body work together. This includes teaching, singing, witnessing and other tasks we think of as “spiritual.” Then there are plenty of other tasks that may not seem spiritual. In **Matthew 22:21** Jesus tells His disciples, “*Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.*” Paying taxes does not seem to be a spiritual activity. There are some things we do because as citizens of the USA we are to do. We do them because we are seeking to be good citizens as representatives of the gospel. So in that way everything we do is spiritual activity.

Within the church there are some tasks that must be done from a legal standpoint so that the body can fulfill its mission. There are within our body committees and teams that deal with administration having to do with money, personnel, and physical resources. This requires people who have business experience, building and physical resource, financial and human resource training and experience. I am a pastor. I am not a business person and business, money and human resource knowledge is not my forte’.

The Lord has placed within the body people who do have the abilities and they serve on financial, personnel and building teams. We are blessed to have capable and gifted people who have provided wise leadership in these areas. Our Deacons help meet practical needs. We have committees and teams who create and oversee budgets. We have teams and committees that seek to make sure we are as a church following the law regarding money, personnel and building requirements.

“No one person knows God’s will for His church” (Henry Blackaby). It takes

teams of people using their training, abilities and expertise working together to know best what and how to do what needs to be done. Give thanks for all of God's people who are using their gifts, training and abilities to make their church more effective in its mission.

DAY 4 COOPERATING TOGETHER

READ Romans 16

Key Idea: It takes the body working together to carry out the instructions of Jesus to carry the gospel to the whole world.

How many members of the church body can you name quickly that you have worked, studied, or served with? In Romans 16 Paul mentions the names of thirty-five individuals with whom he has worked alongside of in the work of the gospel and the church! The body needs to have people who are becoming close-knit in carrying out our mission. It is true that no one person alone can fulfill the instruction of Jesus to evangelize the whole world. It takes the whole body working together.

In Romans 16 Paul uses a word that is descriptive of the relationship between believers working together. The word is a compound word with the word from which we get the word 'synthesis' which means to combine. The other part of the word is a word for energy or work. It means to "work together." It is translated "fellow worker." In verses 3, 9 and 21 Paul uses this word to describe the working together relationship he shared with these believers to accomplish the work of spreading the gospel message. They were woven together in Christ and they were woven together in the passion to make sure the gospel message was spread to all people.

In my life I have been on many mission trips. There is something very special about the sensation of a mission trip. When a group of people are on a mission trip they know why they are where they are and they know that there are certain things they want to accomplish. The umbrella over the whole thing is the gospel message. If the group is doing construction the reason is the gospel. If it is a friend-making trip, it is for the gospel. These people on the mission trip are one in purpose—spread the gospel. There is a strong bond established. It is the unity of the task and the passion.

Paul was knit together with these people he mentioned in Romans 16 and many others. That which knit them together was Christ and the passion that all people will know and love Jesus. In order to cooperate together we need to meet together regularly. We need to do activity that has to do with our mission of loving Jesus and leading others to love Him too. Let's be one in Christ and spread the gospel.

DAY 5 COOPERATING TOGETHER TO REACH THE WORLD

READ Acts 1:4-8; Psalm 67

Key Idea: No one person alone can fulfill the Lord's instruction to carry the gospel to the whole world. As a church we connect up with other believers and organizations to take the message to the world.

Harp's Crossing Baptist Church is a Southern Baptist Church. Each SBC church is independent. It chooses its own pastor, owns its own buildings and assets, and determines its own budgets. There are approximately 50,000 Southern Baptist Churches and church-type missions. That which ties us together is spreading the gospel of Jesus to all people. We contribute 10% of our regular offerings to the Southern Baptist Convention Cooperative Program. Through the Cooperative Program churches share in the work of spreading the gospel. There are many Southern Baptist agencies that are financially supported by the Cooperative program. For more information visit <http://www.sbc.net/aboutus/>.

We also cooperate with the Georgia Baptist Mission Board (<http://gabaptist.org/>) and the Southside Baptist Network (<http://www.southsidebaptistnetwork.org/>)

Here is a short statement about the Cooperative from the website: "When Southern Baptist Churches support the Cooperative Program in their respective states, their state Baptist convention uses those funds to fuel the ministry and mission goals established by the churches in that state. Each state Baptist Convention forwards a percentage of the funds received by the state to the Southern Baptist Convention, providing financial support for more than 10,000 missionaries in North America and around the world, theological education through six Southern Baptist seminaries for more than 16,000 full-time and part-time students, and moral advocacy and promotion of religious liberty through the ERLC. Cooperative Program funds forwarded from the states also provide support for the SBC operating budget and the work of the SBC Executive Committee."

The key to our association is cooperation. The churches that make up the SBC are tied together by a cooperative effort to do the work of the great commission. That is 50,000 churches pooling resources to carry the gospel into the world. On a smaller scale, HCBC, is a cooperative effort of believers working together to carry out our mission and purpose. I am thankful that the entire load of the gospel message is not on my shoulders alone nor is it on the shoulders of Harp's Crossing Baptist Church alone. God gave us the church and working together is His plan!

WEEK 12 MY PLACE IN MINISTRY----- Chris Watson

I am pretty confident that the reason believers are still here is because we are to bring glory to God by shining the light of Jesus in a world of darkness. As much as salvation is a blessing and a joy, our reason for continuing is Christ. Paul said it this way *“to love is Christ to die is gain”* (**Philippians 1:21**). Every believer has been gifted to serve. The serving is in and through the church. Everyone cannot serve in the church. There are places to serve the Lord in the community and beyond. Again, this is all done in and through the church. In the coming weeks you will be hearing more about this as we share concerning PLACE ministries.

DAY 1 SETTLE, SERVE AND CARRY ON

READ Jeremiah 29:4-11

Key Idea: As God’s people we are not to merely accept things as they are but we are to shine God’s light.

We have just come off of the election of a new President in our great country. To say it has been interesting would be an understatement. Our country is in a mess and as it seems most folks are not following Jesus. This is where we are, we are living in perilous times. We can whine about it or seek to make the most of it. In today’s scripture we find the people of Israel in captivity in Babylon. Jeremiah sends the exiles a letter to encourage them so they would know how to live during this time of exile in a place and time of ungodliness. We can learn so much from Jeremiah’s words today.

Warren Wiersbe sums it up the best:

“Jeremiah sent a letter to the exiles in Babylon to tell them how to behave in their new land. A man with the heart of a true shepherd, Jeremiah wanted to enlighten them and encourage them in their life in Babylon. Governed by special laws concerning clean and unclean things, the Jewish people would have a difficult time adjusting to a pagan society. Jeremiah wanted them to be good witnesses to the idolatrous Babylonians, and he also wanted them to be good Jews even though separated from their temple and its services. He addressed himself to the needs of three kinds of people.

Those with no hope (vs. 4-6). The exiles had lost everything but their lives and what few possessions they could carry with them to Babylon. They’d lost their freedom and were now captives. They’d been taken from their homes and had lost their means of making a living. They were separated from relatives and friends, some of whom may have perished in the long march from Jerusalem to Babylon. No matter how they looked at it, the situation seemed hopeless. How should we handle such a depressing

situation? Accept it from the hand of God (v. 4) and let God have His way. It does no good to hang our harps on the willow trees and sit around and weep, although this may be a temporary normal reaction to tragedy (Ps. 137:1-4). One of the first steps in turning tragedy into triumph is to accept the situation courageously and put ourselves into the hands of a loving God, Who makes no mistakes.

Those with false hope (Jer. 29:6-9). The false prophets had convinced the people that the stay in Babylon would be a brief one, perhaps two years (vs. 8-9). Thus, there was no need to settle down and try to resume a normal life, but Jeremiah told them just the opposite. Since they would be there as long as seventy years (v. 10), there was plenty of time to build houses and set up homes. It was important that the exiles have families so there would be people available to return to Judea when the captivity ended. This small Jewish remnant was holding in its hands the future of God's great plan of salvation, and they must obey Him, be fruitful, and multiply (v. 6).

It would be easy for the Jews to wage constant warfare against their idolatrous Gentile captors, but Jeremiah instructed them to strive to get along with the Babylonians. The exiles were to be peacemakers, not troublemakers, and they were to pray sincerely for their enemies (Matt. 5:43-48; 1 Tim. 2:1-3; Titus 3:1-2). It was possible to be good Jews even in a pagan land. Remember, if we reject the wooden yoke of submission, we end up wearing only an iron yoke of subjugation (Jer. 28:12-14). Thus, the best course is to yield ourselves to the Lord and to those who are over us, no matter how badly they may treat us. (See Peter's counsel to Christian slaves in 1 Peter 2:18-25.) To indulge in false hopes is to miss what God has planned for us.

Those who have true hope (vvs 10-14). True hope is based on the revealed Word of God, not on the "dream messages" of self-appointed prophets (v. 10, NIV). God gave His people a "gracious promise" (v. 10, NIV) to deliver them, and He would keep His promise. God makes His plans for His people, and they are good plans that ultimately bring hope and peace. Therefore, there is no need to be afraid or discouraged.

In every situation, however, God's people have the responsibility to seek the Lord, pray, and ask Him to fulfill His promises, for the Word and prayer go together (Acts 6:4). The purpose of chastening is that we might seek the Lord, confess our sins, and draw near to Him (Heb. 12:3-13). According to Jeremiah 29:14, these promises reach beyond the Jews captive in Babylon and include all of Israel throughout the world. Jeremiah was looking ahead to the end of the age when Israel will be regathered to meet their Messiah and enter their kingdom (Isa. 10:20-12:6)."²⁴

²⁴ Bible Exposition Commentary (BE Series) - Old Testament - The Bible Exposition Commentary – The Prophets.

So as God's people we are not to spend our time just existing but shining the light and having a godly influence on the world. Years ago, Nick Akin wrote a song and in it he asks, "are you living or just existing, what are you seeking? Is it Christ?" Are you and I existing or truly living? Let's shine the light and live for the Lord.

DAY 2 KEEP SERVING

READ 1 Peter 4:7-11

Key Idea: Keep serving the Lord in all circumstances.

Similar to Jeremiah's time, Peter was encouraging believers who were suffering and going through difficult times. The end is near, it is nearer than it was in the time of this writing by Peter and it is nearer today that it was yesterday. Peter was offering encouragement as the times got tough and he reminded the believers what they were to do.

Be sober and watchful in prayer – As in those times, we need to seek to have a clear mind and always be in a state of prayer. God has been teaching me the last few months that prayer is essential and vital in the life of all believers, families, and the church. While God wants to use us we must be prayerful and constantly refocusing our eyes on Him. How is your prayer life? Who are you praying for and what are you praying and believing God for? Is your prayer life necessary or can you take it or leave it?

Show genuine love – God is love and has showed us how to love. Love is not some mushy feeling that says, "Be happy, get along, and do whatever you want." Peter is telling the believers to love other believers with God's love. This means show true concern and care for others. This also means speaking truth in love. How are you loving others? Are you loving them with God's love? What about the believers who are hard to love? Ask God to help you love them.

Get along and don't argue – Oh this is so much easier said than done. We must learn to work out our differences with others. We are sinful people, saved by grace, but our sin nature will still creep up. We must not run from a situation but stay in there and work it out.

Use your gift and minister – Serve as God would have you to. We have already talked about serving both in God's church and in the community. This passage was emphasizing for God's people to serve and minister using the gifts that God had given them and the same is true for us.

Be good stewards of God's grace – We did nothing to deserve God's grace.

That is why it's called grace. We are not only to receive it and keep it for ourselves, but we are to share it with others, showing the love of Jesus. How are we stewarding God's grace?

Speak the Word of God – Read the Word, know the Word, memorize the Word and walk with God. We are to live the Word of God but we should also speak it. God has called us to go into the all the world and make disciples.

All to bring glory to God – All of these we are to do for God's glory. This is all about serving God, and in serving God we are also serving others. Always serve the Lord. Don't look to see what others are doing or not doing and don't make excuses or throw in the towel. Walk with God and serve Him only. Remember and follow the words of Joshua, *"as for me and my house we will serve the Lord."*

DAY 3 TIME TOGETHER

READ Acts 2:42-47; John 13:35

Key Idea: The better we gather together the better we will scatter.

It's been called community, "doing life together," and fellowship, among other things. We see in our Acts passage today that the early church loved each other and met the needs of each other. Jesus told the disciples that they would know they were His disciples by their love one for another. The early church met daily, they ate, studied, fellowshiped and prayed together. They spent time together. It has been said that one way to spell TIME is LOVE. In other words, you spend time with those you truly love.

Spending time and gathering together wasn't an option for the early church. They needed it and saw it as necessary. What about you? Do you see spending time with God's church as an option or as a necessity? I love spending time with God's church. There are times when I would rather stay in bed like on a cold, rainy day but once I get with other believers I am so glad I did. I am encouraged, challenged, changed, and cared for, just to name a few. I leave so glad that I was able to gather with God's church. For some though they see it as an option. I pray that is not the case for you but if it is, ask why you might feel like this. Is it that you are not a believer? Is it that you don't truly love God's church? Maybe you have become complacent or maybe you are facing a tough time and don't like to be around others? But remember, it's where we need to be.

Many churches today are about creating a certain "environment" to cater to a group of people, often unbelievers. While that is not necessarily wrong, one of the greatest things that unbelievers will be drawn to is true

- He came to teach God’s way to live Luke 11:1- **DISCIPLESHIP**
- He came to lead us to worship the Father John 4:23-24- **WORSHIP**
- He came to serve others Matthew 20:28- **MINISTRY**

Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s. 1 Corinthians 6:19-20. We are not our own, we have been bought with a price. Everything we do is not for ourselves, but as believers should be for God’s glory. As a believer our mind, bodies, will and thoughts are not to be for us but for Jesus. Everything we do should be for His glory.

The Apostle Paul knew this. He realized everything He did was for God’s glory. Whether sitting in jail or preaching the Gospel he realized it wasn’t about him. I’m not sure about you but sometimes I get in the flesh and think it is about me, what I want and what I desire, what about you? I can lose focus and get sidetracked and seek to turn the glory to me or even have a pity party. This is not from the Lord though, but from the enemy. Why do you do what you do? What is your motivation? Is it for your glory or God’s? Only God’s glory and desires will last, ours will fade away.

DAY 5 FINDING YOUR PLACE IN MINISTRY

READ 1 Corinthians 12:4-11

Key Idea: When you were saved the Holy Spirit gave you a gift and fit you for ministry in and through the church. As we continue this journey about being a part of the church and maturing as a believer, we will also spend thirteen weeks finding your PLACE in ministry in and through your church.

If you have been through the 101 and 201 class you may know the terminology of SHAPE. Shape stands for Spiritual gifts, Heart, Abilities, Personality and Experiences. We have used this for a number of years in seeing what our gifts are and where we fit in God’s church. We will be transitioning to PLACE which stands for Personal Discovery, Learning Spiritual Gifts, Abilities Awareness, Connecting Passion with Ministry and Experiences with life. This is similar to SHAPE but PLACE ministries is a bit more thought out and will work well in seeing all of God’s church use their gifts for God’s glory.

It has been said, accurately, that “20% of the people do 80% of the work.” This also translates to those people serving in areas that are not part of

their PLACE. In other words, they may be serving but it is not their passion and or desire to be doing what they are doing but they are meeting a need. Imagine if every Church member was serving in a capacity that fit their PLACE. Everyone serving in a place that really got them excited. What would that look like in God's church and what would that look like outside the church? I believe it would transform us all in addition to God's church.

Once a person puts their trust in Christ they should grow as a believer. They should connect to Sunday School and worship and also find someone to disciple them. As they grow it is ideal for them to find their place of ministry. Often a person is saved but is not disciplined or they don't find their place of service. When a person finds their place of service they not only fill a need but more importantly they find satisfaction in the Lord and in service as they use their gifts.

John Piper says, "God is most glorified when we are most satisfied in Him." One of the ways we are satisfied in Him is when we are serving and using our gifts. Are you serving? Are you serving in an area inside and or outside of God's church that you are really passionate about? I pray that you are. If you have not found that place, begin praying now that the Lord will show you where you should be serving. In the next Devotional Guide you will be reading more about how to do just that.

WEEK 13 CHURCH MEMBERSHIP AND ME-----Dennis Watson

The church exists as the church universal and the local church. The body of Christ worldwide is one, united in Jesus Christ, giving glory to God and proclaiming the message of the gospel. There are local churches that minister in a specific geographical locale. Harp's Crossing Baptist Church is a body of baptized believers in covenant together to carry out our Mission, "To love Jesus and lead others to love Him too." A covenant is a commitment to God and an agreement between people to work together for a common benefit. At the end of this week the Harp's Crossing Membership Covenant is spelled out. For this week we will look at each part.

DAY 1 WHY MEMBERSHIP?

READ Romans 12:3-5; 1 Corinthians 12:18

Key Idea: When God saves a person He makes them a part of the church.

Both of the passages for today we have already looked at in a larger context but I want to zero in on two specific verses being very careful not to remove them from their context. The first is Romans 12:5. A literal rendering of this would read: "So the many, one body, are in Christ and each one of one another members." We have already seen that in several passages Paul refers to the church as the Body of Christ and that it is like the human body with many parts each having a specific function. Here he really brings home the point that we are in a very special relationship with each other. In Ephesians 4:16 Paul says that we have been "joined and knit together." There is a special and purposeful bond especially within the local body of believers. We have been coordinated together. We need to develop that special and purposeful bond by working closely together.

The second verse I want to focus on is one of my favorites regarding the church. It is 1 Corinthians 12:18. I will be consistent and give you a literal translation—"Now but God set the members, one each of them in the Body as He wanted." You became a believer because God did a work in your life. We say that we decided but it is more accurate to say we came to a point where we confessed Jesus as our Lord and Savior. To confess biblically is to agree with God about what He has said. Literally it means "to say the same thing." The Bible teaches us that He has placed us in the church just as He wanted us to be. So when we join a local church we are agreeing with Him that we understand that this is where He wants us to be.

If you have confessed Jesus as you Lord and Savior, agreeing with God about your need for a Savior, and that Jesus is God's Son and the Savior of man, you also need to confess (agree with God) about your part in

His church. He has placed you in the body. Will you agree with Him and become a part of a local body of believers?

Confessing Jesus as your Lord and Savior is an ongoing mental and spiritual activity. I am married. I did not just get married forty-two years ago and that was it. It began forty-two years ago but I am married and live like a married man every day. Confessing Jesus is like that. I am His child. I am a follower of Jesus. That is the posture I want to live daily. The same is true of His church. I am a member. I want to live like, and as, a member every day. As members we have tasks that can only be effectively fulfilled as all being one in Christ and each one participating and living what we are—children of God and members of His body. As members we need each other!

DAY 2 I WILL BE A UNIFYING MEMBER

READ John 17:20-26

Key Idea: Each member of the body must seek the unity of the body.

John 17 is the Lord's Prayer. We call the prayer outline Jesus give's in Matthew 6 the Lord's Prayer but it is really the "model prayer" Jesus gave to teach us and to show us how to pray. In John 17 Jesus prays after He had washed His disciples' feet. Part of that prayer is that, "*They all may be one.*" He gives the basis of that oneness as, "*that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me.*" The basis of the oneness is being in Christ. When we are in Christ we are in God and then we are together in Jesus Christ the Son of God. All of the differences disappear. In this passage Jesus prayed three times that we may be one (verses 11, 21, 22).

The marriage analogy works in so many ways to illustrate the relationship that needs to exist in the church. In marriage it does not work for one person to insist on their own way. It takes work, it takes communication and it often takes effort to do some fine tuning. Seeking to understand the other person and their point of view is necessary. God puts husbands and wives together and we learn from each other. In marriage iron sharpens iron for sure. One thing you always see when iron is sharpening iron is sparks! In marriage and in the church we must work to get along and to be one! It is not just going to happen.

Work for and pray for unity in the church. Take a few minutes today and then regularly to read through the membership covenant at the end of this section. Be actively a unifying member.

DAY 3 I WILL BE A RESPONSIBLE AND ACCOUNTABLE MEMBER

READ Colossians 3:12-17

Key Idea: A huge part of any relationship is the two-way street of responsibility and accountability.

When our two oldest children were teenagers the average person didn't have a cell phone. We did not give our kids curfews. There seemed to be built into our home relationships responsibility and accountability. Responsibility has to do with doing what is right in connection with others and accountability is carrying out responsibilities and being answerable to what you are doing—all the time. My wife and I always told the other where we were going to be and when we would be home. So, we just transferred that to our kids. We expected them to tell us where they were going and when they would be home. They were expected to have change with them to use a pay phone if there was a change of plans or they wanted to do something later that included staying out a little longer. It worked! They respected us and we did them. If they were responsible and accountable we were almost always willing to go along with their change of plans. It all boiled down to respect, responsibility and accountability.

I really like accountability! It keeps me on course. I like it that people know and care about what I am doing and where I am. I can honestly say that many times it has kept me out of trouble! I have a lot of people holding me accountable just by nature of relationships. This includes family, friends and church members. People are always watching. We need to be responsible to our families and our friends. We also need to be responsible to church members. Who is looking for you when the body gathers? Who is counting on you to do what you said you would do?

As the body of Christ we need to respect one another, be responsible and accountable. Who will miss you when you are not present? Who do you miss and do you contact them to check on them? Do you make commitments and then follow through? Are you actively serving others and staying in touch? Are you closely connected with a Sunday School class or ministry team to the extent that you are accountable and responsible? We are a covenant body—we need one another.

Church membership is not just about your wants, needs, likes and dislikes. It is about connecting to others in meaningful ways that enhances the lives of others. Ask these questions—

Who do I need to check on?

Who needs an encouraging word?

Who can I meet for coffee?

We all need accountability and we all need to live responsibly.

DAY 4 I WILL DEVELOP THE MIND OF CHRIST

READ Philippians 2:5-11

Key Idea: The body of Christ is a miracle. In fact, salvation is a miracle. For this reason, the fact that you and I are members of the body of Christ is a miracle. In order to function properly as a member of the body of Christ we must develop the mind of Christ.

W.A. Criswell, the former pastor of the FBC Dallas, TX, said this in a sermon in 1957 regarding this passage: “It is the greatest statement of the person, the deity, the humiliation, the resurrection, the glorious supreme sovereign reigning of Christ of any passage to be found in the Bible. All of the great cardinal doctrines that cluster around the person of Christ are in this passage: His deity, His humanity and incarnation, His atoning death on the cross, His resurrection, His kingship, His return, His reign world without end, when “every knee shall bow . . . and tongue confess that He is Lord, to the glory of God our Father.””

Paul gave the theological explanation about Jesus in the context of encouraging believers not to be self-centered but to look out also for the interests of others. The word for mind in this passage means to ‘exercise your mind’ or ‘let your thinking be.’ Paul tells believers that in order for them to be like-minded and in one accord they needed to exercise the thinking of Christ and then he gives six characteristics of Christ.

Jesus did not grab and hold on to power and position.

Jesus poured Himself out in surrender to do His Father’s will.

He became like a man from human perspective. He was fully God and fully man.

He became a servant.

He took on the form of a man as a baby, a child, young adult and adult. He took on this temporary, lowly form.

He humbled Himself to the point of dying on the cross.

Since Jesus gave Himself up and did not seek to exalt Himself or to preserve His high position, God lifted Him up. He raised Him from the dead and gave Him the greatest name of all.

For the believer, we need to keep our eyes on Jesus. He is our example and the One who enables us to live power-filled lives. In this case, we need to set our minds on Jesus and the mindset He had as He followed His Father's will in becoming our Savior. Our goal should not be power and recognition but simple, humble surrender to God's plan for us. We do not need to be power-grabbers. We need to seek to be a servant of others. In taking this mindset we leave being lifted up to God. He did it with Jesus and He will do it with us. If we exalt ourselves we will be humbled. If we humble ourselves He will exalt us in His way and in His time.

DAY 5 I WILL BE A FUNCTIONING MEMBER

READ 1 Corinthians 12:12-17; Romans 12:4

Key Idea: There are many parts to the Body of Christ. With many parts there are many functions. Each of us, as members of the Body, need to know what God has gifted us to do and what He has PLACED us here for. We should all strive to be a functioning member of the Body of Christ.

This is an incredible picture of the Body of Christ. Each part has a role. The eyes see, the ears hear, the nose smells. Without all of these, something would be missing. Paul asks if the whole body were an eye where would hearing be?

As I write this devotion it is the peak of the college and professional football season. The college bowl games are winding down and we await the NFL playoffs and the Super Bowl. To say the least, I have been watching a good deal of football. On an NFL team there are 53 players on the roster. In the NCAA, max number is 105 in preseason training. From week to week there are about 70 players that dress out for home games. However, even with these numbers, there are only eleven players on the field for one team at a time. There are defensive players, offensive players, and special teams. Specialization really comes into play. For instance, there are players who simply hike the ball and block, but their specialty is snapping the ball. There are kickers who kick off and kickers who kick field goals and extra points. Some throw the ball, some are receivers, and some run the ball. I could go on and on but each player has a role and each player an assignment. It is fun to watch as it all comes together.

The same is true in the church. Each member has a role and an assignment. On the football field it is imperative that each player fulfill their role and assignment for the team to be effective. Once again, the same is true in the church. Each member must be functioning in his or her role for the church to be effective in its mission. When God saved you He gave you His Spirit and He gave you gifts, abilities, interests and passions to be used in and through the church.

In the church, as in other organizations, cooperation and coordination are essential for proper function. Each person working and relating with others according to roles, tasks and abilities means that the organization is clicking on all cylinders.

Are you a functioning member? I hope so. Later this year we will devote time, effort and energy to assist members in finding their place of ministry in and through the body. Begin to pray now that we will all be functioning members of the Body of Christ.

What Is Expected Of Me As A Member?

At Harp's Crossing we never ask members to do more than the Bible clearly teaches. We only expect our members to do what the Bible expects every Christian to do. These responsibilities are spelled out in the Membership Covenant.

HARP'S CROSSING MEMBERSHIP COVENANT

Having received Christ as my Lord and Savior and having been baptized, and being in agreement with Harp's Crossing's statements, strategy, and structure, I now feel led by the Holy Spirit to unite with the Harp's Crossing church family. In doing so, I commit myself to God and to the other members to do the following:

1. I will protect the unity of my church
 - ... by acting in love toward other members
 - ... by refusing to gossip
 - ... by following the leaders

Therefore let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another. **Romans 14:19 (NKJV)**

Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart. **1 Peter 1:22 (NKJV)**

Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs. **Ephesians 4:29 (NIV)**

Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be no advantage to you. **Hebrews 13:17**

2. I will share the responsibility of my church
 - ... by praying for its growth
 - ... by inviting the unchurched to attend
 - ... by warmly welcoming those who visit

To the church . . . We always thank God for you and pray for you constantly.
I Thessalonians 1:1-2 (TLB)

The Master said to the servant, "Go out to the roads and country lanes and urge the people there to come so my house will be full." **Luke 14:23 (NCV)**

So, warmly welcome each other into the church, just as Christ has warmly welcomed you; then God will be glorified. **Romans 15:7 (TLB)**

3. I will serve the ministry of my church

. . . by discovering my gifts and talents

. . . by being equipped to serve by my pastors

. . . by developing a servant's heart

Serve one another with the particular gifts God has given each of you
I Peter 4:10(PHILLIPS)

[God] gave . . . some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up.

Ephesians 4:11-12

Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who... [took on] the very nature of a servant. **Philippians 2:3-4, 7**

4. I will support the testimony of my church

. . . by attending faithfully

. . . by living a godly life

. . . by giving regularly

Let us not give up meeting together . . . but let us encourage one another.
Hebrews 10:25

Whatever happens, make sure that your everyday life is worthy of the gospel of Christ. **Philippians 1:27 (PHILLIPS)**

Each one of you, on the first day of the week, should set aside a specific sum of money in proportion to what you have earned and use it for the offering. **I Corinthians 16:2 (TLB)**

A tenth of [all your] produce . . . is the Lord's, and is holy.
Leviticus 27:30 (NCV)

Now that we have sought to connect to God through His church we will move on to another topic. This is called “I Am Connecting to God Through Spiritual Habits.” In this time of preaching and devotional focus, we will look at spiritual habits that need to be put into place in order for Jesus followers to always be growing. Chad Poe, a recent speaker at the student Ski Bible event, talked about being “full of the light of Jesus.” He used the illustration of those little glow in the dark stars that we put on the ceilings of our children’s rooms. They absorb light when the lights are on. When the lights are turned off they continue to shine with the light they absorbed and after a little while they cease to shine. What a great picture! As Jesus followers we have no light of our own but as we abide with Jesus regularly, we absorb His light. His light is in us and that is the light that shines. We need spiritual habits so we will always be absorbing His light and shining that light.

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