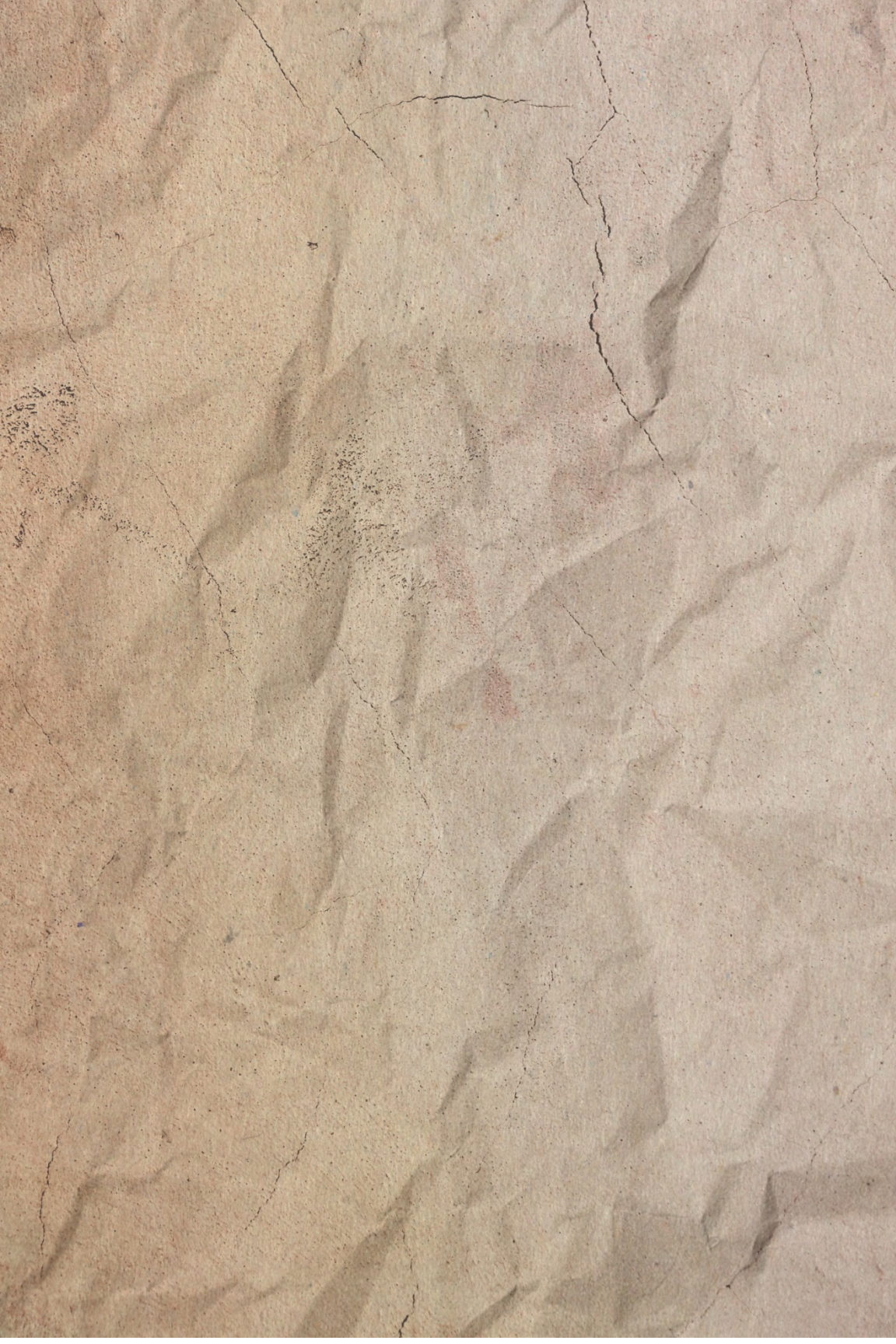




# THRIVE

this book belongs to:





# Your Guide to THRIVE

From Waite Park Church

During the next five weeks our church will be going through a Focus Season where we will be “focused” on both learning and doing what it takes to thrive spiritually. These booklets allow us to take what happens on Sunday morning and use it as a foundation for the rest of the week.

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**Sermon Notes:** Use this portion of the booklet to take notes during the sermon. You can watch the livestream online at <http://www.waiteparkchurch.org/livestream> or use our website sermon page, podcast, or YouTube channel to stay caught up on messages.

**Solitude:** During this Focus season you’re encouraged to set aside significant time one day a week for seeking God through solitude. Each practice of solitude will have its own emphasis according to that week’s message.

**Small Group Questions:** Respond to each question before you meet so that you can be prepared to share when the time comes. In doing so, you won’t be caught off guard and you’ll be able to offer thoughtful responses.

**Family Devotion:** Take one night a week in which your family can share and reflect on what we’re training for as a church. These are mostly geared towards young children but can still be useful for all.

**Daily Soul Training:** Use the daily devotional provided in this booklet to continue to explore the main idea that week throughout each day.



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# SOLITUDE SESSIONS

Solitude is a critical practice to grow deeper roots in our faith. Spending time alone with God without distractions helps to enter God's presence and begin listening for His voice.

Adele Calhoun writes,

“Though we may be unfamiliar with the discipline of solitude, most of us recognize it as something we wanted when we were first in love... In solitude the heart waits for God and God alone. Here the soul opens wide to listen and to receive. “

Each week we'll encourage you to take 30 minutes to an hour on any day of your choosing to get away and be with God. Find a place where you will be undisturbed. It can be helpful to get out of your normal environment to focus on God. You might choose a park, a room in your home, or you might even sit in your car in the driveway. Leave your phone behind or at least in “do not disturb” mode. Start the time listening to a worship song or reading Psalm 139 to prepare your heart to meet with God.

Remember, we want to slow down as we enter His presence. Practicing solitude is difficult. Don't let distractions discourage you. Ask God as needed to help you stay engaged in His presence though the duration. He wants to meet with you! Enjoy the time with your Creator!





## WEEK 1 // ROOTED IN CHRIST

When you think about thriving, what comes to mind? Maybe you think about how close you are to your family or whether or not your children are “successful.” Maybe you think about your financial stability or your physical wellbeing.

If we were to think about thriving spiritually – we might come up with a whole host of ways to assess whether or not we’re currently thriving. We might think about how much influence we have, how much ministry we do, how much we’ve learned about God recently, or how much we’ve been praying for other people.

When it comes to thriving, the Bible talks a lot about roots. In Matthew 13 Jesus himself warns of people who are like plants with shallow roots – they quickly fall away when trouble or persecution comes.

The analogy makes sense – when a plant has healthy roots in the right places, it thrives. Alternatively, if the roots of a plant are in jeopardy then the whole plant is in jeopardy too.

Clearly this is important and it should cause us to ask some questions like:

What exactly are my roots?

Where are my roots currently planted?

How do we choose where our roots grow?

For the next week – let’s explore this issue together and be honest and vulnerable in our assessment of ourselves. As we do, let’s invite God to stir in our hearts, to open our eyes to the reality of our roots, and to give us the grace we need to be deeply “planted” in the right place. If we’re taking Jesus at His Word then this deserves our full attention.

WEEK 1	SERMON NOTES	09/22/19
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# S O L I T U D E

ROOTED IN CHRIST

WEEK 1

## **Meditate:**

Start by praying through Psalm 139.

Remember to slow down! Let God lead these times of solitude. Take a few minutes asking God to remove distractions and help focus on him.

Read Jeremiah 17:5-10. Read prayerfully multiple times.

## **Reflection:**

Ask God to reveal where your heart is rooted. Spend several minutes listening to God. Where are you tempted to plant your roots?

- Ego - desire to be recognized as good or great
- Family expectations - conform to what our family wants us to be
- Societal values (success, money, looks, wokeness, etc.) - receive life from other people recognizing our skill
- Any others?

Ask God to show you what needs to change to remove the power any of these areas have over you. Let God speak to you on how to change and surrender these areas over to him more.

What practices can deepen your roots in Christ? Pick two of the following and reflect on how you can incorporate them in your life to grow your relationship with God. Be realistic. Be specific.

Worship, Solitude, Prayer, Fasting, Scripture

## **Listening:**

"The degree to which we are able to give Jesus access to what is deeply beneath the surface in our lives, is the degree to which we will experience freedom in him." Peter Scazzero

Spend time asking God to help you slow down and give Him more access beneath the surface of your life.



3. Jot down an answer for the following questions.
- a. What causes you the most anxiety?
  - b. When you are anxious, what do you turn to for comfort?
  - c. What, if it happened, would give you the most joy and “your life would be complete?”
  - d. When have you felt “small”?

What do the above answers reveal about where you're tempted to plant your roots? (e.g. money, success, family, reputation, good deeds, being in control, etc.)

4. What practical actions could help you to change where you're growing your roots? What is preventing you from being deeply rooted in Christ?



ROOTED IN CHRIST	
FAMILY DEVOTION	WEEK 1

**Read: Jeremiah 17:7-8 (NIRV)**

<sup>7</sup>“But I will bless anyone who trusts in me.  
I will do good things for the person who depends on me.  
<sup>8</sup>They will be like a tree planted near water.  
It sends out its roots beside a stream.  
It is not afraid when heat comes.  
Its leaves are always green.  
It does not worry when there is no rain.  
It always bears fruit.”

God says that when we trust in Him, we'll be like a tree planted near water. We'll be like a tree whose roots are beside a stream. A tree like that doesn't have to be afraid of heat – it's never thirsty, its leaves don't dry out, it doesn't worry when there's no rain, and it grows fruit.

In the same way, if we are willing to trust God he can keep us spiritually healthy. We won't have to be afraid during difficult times because God will always be with us and caring for us and giving us exactly what we need. Just like a tree needs water in order to grow, we need to stay connected to God in order to grow.

The passage that we read also tells us that healthy trees bear fruit. When people are spiritually healthy, they don't produce actual fruit (like apples or oranges) but they do produce good works. Spiritually healthy people are people who grow in their ability to be good and do good. When we trust that God's way is the best way and that God's way leads to the best life, we'll be more likely to make choices that are good for us and for others.

# LET'S TALK

1) ASK: Why do trees have roots? What do roots do?

TEACH: When we trust in God, we're like a tree with amazing roots. Just like roots keep a tree anchored to the ground, God can help us feel strong and brave and unshakeable. Just like roots help a tree to absorb water and nutrients, God can give us everything we need. Just like roots store up nutrients for difficult times, God can teach us to be prepared for difficult times too.

2) ASK: What are some ways that we can show God that we trust Him?

TEACH: There are many ways for us to show God that we trust Him:

- We can show that we trust God by praying to Him when we need help.
- We can show God that we trust Him by living life the way He wants us to. When we live according to God's way – we're trusting that His way is best.
- We can show God that we trust Him by reading the Bible. The Bible is God's way of teaching us about Him and when we learn about God through the Bible, we're trusting in God's Word.

3) PRAY: Take a moment to pray that God would help you to trust in Him and ask Him to grow your roots down deep in Him.

Paul's prayer is that once we're rooted and established in love, that we would have power to grasp the width, length, height, and depth of Christ's love for us. And not just that we would comprehend it intellectually but that we would know it personally. Paul says that such knowledge of God's love would fill us with the fullness of God.

Notice three things.

- 1) At salvation we're rooted and established in God's love. Romans 8:39 says that nothing in all of creation can separate us from this love of God.
- 2) Just because we're rooted in God's love, doesn't mean we'll feel it or comprehend it or even know it personally.
- 3) You don't have to pray that God will love you more or that you'll be more loveable to God. The prayer is that you would be more aware of His love but not more loved.

All Christians are rooted and established in the love of Christ and all Christians get to explore this love, to experience it, to plumb the depths of it, and to pray that we would know it more. This experience and knowledge of God's love is a spiritual fruit and must be gained through a spiritual work. If we want to know the reaches of Christ's love for us, we must be men and women who spend time with God – in prayer and in scripture.

In 1962 the theologian Karl Barth was once asked how he would summarize the essence of the millions of words he had published, he replied, "Jesus loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me so."

**RESPOND:**

Read Romans 8:35-39 and pray to God, thanking Him for His love and asking for power to know His love for you more and more. Afterwards, follow Paul's example and pray the prayer of Ephesians 3:16-19 over other Christians that God brings to mind.

Jesus says, “Remain in me.” The word “remain” is to be continually present or connected. In just 4 verses (4-8), Jesus uses this word 6 times. It’s almost as if he doesn’t want us to miss the importance of this.

The great preacher, Charles Spurgeon, once remarked, “You know a root is a fixing thing. Plants without roots may be thrown over the wall; they may be passed from hand to hand; but a root is a fixed thing. How firmly the oaks are rooted in the ground... the old oaks bow to the tempest, curtsy to the storm, and soon they lift up their branches again in calm dignity; they cannot be blown down. Well now; if you have got the root of the matter you are fixed; you are fixed to God, fixed to Christ, fixed to things divine. If you are tempted, you are not soon carried away.”

When we follow Jesus, we’re not like weeds, able to be pulled from the garden and tossed over the wall, we’re not to be a bouquet of flowers moving from one vase to the next. We’re to be continually present in Him. Fixed. Rooted.

Jesus uses the word “fruit” 6 times as well. The result is clear – if we continually remain in Jesus, we’ll bear fruit. Notice the correlation: In verse 5 Jesus says, “apart from me you can do nothing” and in verse 7 he says, “ask... and it will be done for you.” In other words, if you want to do something worthwhile, it will be done for you through Jesus, not apart from Him. Remaining in Christ through prayer results in the fruit of answered prayer. A Christian should be able to look back on their lives and see in their wake a series of prayers answered, mountains moved, and lives transformed. This is how we show ourselves to be His disciples.

**RESPOND:**

Spend some time in prayer right now for the soul purpose (pun intended) of remaining in Christ. Grow your roots, be fixed and nourished by Jesus. Don’t jump right into looking for the fruit of answered prayer by making a series of requests. Healthy roots produce healthy fruit. Connect with Jesus.

## READ: PSALM 1

Verse 1 is a powerful picture of the effects of community. The author of Psalm 1 shares an image of someone growing more and more satisfied with the company of those who would mock the way of God. First they walk, then they stand, then they sit.

You would think then that the author would talk about the power of righteous community but the following verse takes a different direction: Blessed is the one whose delight is in the law of Yahweh and who meditates on his law day and night. That person is like a tree planted by streams of water. This person grows more and more satisfied with the way of God.

It's easy to make excuses for not being in the Word regularly. Maybe we're busy, maybe we don't like reading, perhaps we already have enough to read as it is. Sometimes we can even find a spiritual sounding excuse to not read scripture: we don't want our relationship with God to feel like a chore and so we only read when we're feeling "led to."

The Holy Spirit, through the author of Psalm 1, bypasses all of that. Blessed is the one who DELIGHTS in the law of Yahweh. Who meditates on it day and night. That person is like a tree planted by streams of water. The well-rooted delight in God's word and consider it day and night. Notice too that when you read this Psalm, there's no middle ground. There's no half-hearted approach. Verse 6 says there's two ways. The way of the righteous and the way of the wicked. Which way are you headed?

When the Church Father, Augustine reads Psalm 1, he writes, "He will meditate by day and by night, is to be understood either as without ceasing; or by day in joy, by night in tribulations." This person meditates on God's law throughout the day, regardless of his circumstances. We know which way this person is headed.

## RESPOND:

Practice delighting in the Law of the Lord by reading Psalm 19 and reflecting thoughtfully on how God's Law has impacted your life. Afterwards, offer a prayer of thanksgiving to God for the Bible and ask Him for help in delighting in His Law more and more.



Jesus says, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.”

The heart, for Jesus, is the seat of the will and the emotions. When Jesus speaks of loving God with all of our heart, it’s a picture of a person who runs after God with everything they’ve got. It’s a conscious pursuit that’s motivated by a deep love.

The soul, for Jesus, is the life of the body. This is the energizing force within us and it’s also a reference to our spiritual life. The clearest picture that describes this comes from Paul: “offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship.” That’s what it looks like to love God with all your soul – to offer up your entire life as a living sacrifice. To allow your whole life to be one continuous act of worship. Not that we would never stop singing but that all we do would be for God’s glory.

The mind, for Jesus, is the place of intellect and thought. To love God with all of our mind means that even our thoughts are subject to God’s way. We’re to be conscious of not just our outward life but also our inner life. Our thought-life (including our dreams, desires, and fantasies) are to be pleasing to God. Not only this but we must also pursue God with our intellect – to desire sound doctrine, to hunt down answers to our questions, to face doubts, to root out heresies and to iron out inconsistencies.

The tendency for most of us is to be strong in one of these areas. Maybe we’ll have an emotional (heart) pursuit of Jesus but we’ll ignore the mind. Maybe we’ll love theology (mind) but fail to order our lives around Him (soul). Maybe we’ll live for Him (soul) but we’ll neglect our intimacy with Him (heart).

**RESPOND:**

God the Son took on flesh and He told us what it means to love Him. It’s the holistic and “all-in” approach of Heart, Soul, and Mind. What area do you tend to neglect? Spend some time in prayer, asking God to show you what you need to work on and consider one way that you can improve on it today.

The words of verses 6:4-5 are referred to as the “Shema” and they’ve been used in the morning and evening prayers of many Jews for thousands of years.

In this prayer, Israel is called to love the Lord with all their heart, soul, and strength. It’s what Jesus is referring to in yesterday’s devotional reading. You might notice some discrepancy which is most likely due to varying understandings of how the body works as well as translating concepts from one language to another.

It’s interesting to note here that “strength” refers to abundance and might be better understood as: love God to your fullest capacity. In other words, go far beyond what comes naturally. Stretch yourself in your love for God. Love God with everything you’ve got.

But how do we do this? And how do we do it consistently? This passage takes an incredibly lofty concept and offers incredibly concrete and practical steps. Teach it to your children, talk about it at home, when you’re on the go, when you lie down, and when you get up. Put reminders around your home and even around your body. In other words, if you want to love God with all of your life you’re going to have to speak it, hear it, see it, and feel it.

Some might call this an example of “the sacramental life.” In the sacramental life, we use physical reminders and actions to mediate and experience God’s grace.

**RESPOND:**

Look around your home and around your car and even around your body. What physical things surround you that explicitly remind you to love God? What can you do to change your environment and encourage your roots to grow deeper? A cross on the wall? A scripture passage taped to a mirror? An ornament hanging from your rearview? A Bible on your desk at work? A religious bracelet, a ring, or necklace? What can you do to surround yourself with reminders to love God with everything you’ve got?

The main thrust of Paul's encouragement here is that believers would continue to grow in the faith that they started in which began when they received Jesus as Lord. As we do, we're to be overflowing with gratitude.

C.S. Lewis once remarked, "We all want progress. But progress means getting nearer to the place where you want to be. And if you have taken a wrong turning then to go forward does not get you any nearer."

Sometimes we're tempted to think that new ideas or new interpretations or new theology is progress. When we deviate from the faith that we were taught, that was handed down by the apostles, we might begin to think that we're making forward progress. Yet the truth is, going forward does not always mean progress. This is why John Wesley wanted his faith to be "truly primitive." It's why St Vincent of Lerins encouraged the Church to pursue truth through the measure of "antiquity" (preferring the old to the new). And it's why the theologian Thomas Oden made it his life's work, "to contribute nothing new to theology."

Do you want to be deeply rooted in Christ? Plumb the depths of the Gospel, of salvation, of Jesus' death and resurrection, justification and regeneration. Do you know the core of your faith well enough to share the gospel succinctly with someone else? If someone were to ask you, "what must I do to be saved?" would you know how to answer? Salvation comes from trusting in the perfect sacrifice of Jesus for the forgiveness of sins. Our righteousness can never save us. Each of us has sin that condemns us before God until we receive forgiveness by believing in Jesus and turning to follow Him.

**RESPOND:**

Pray to God, asking Him to deepen your understanding of salvation and the core doctrines of Christianity while also asking Him to expose false teachings and novel beliefs that are contrary to the faith handed down to us in Scripture.



## WEEK 2 // SPIRITUAL FRIENDSHIPS

Consider this: God exists in a triune community. He's One Being in Three Persons. The Perfect One exists in community. The epitome of perfection is found in community. Before there was anything, there was a Community of Persons.

This same triune God made us in His image. Is it a leap to say that we too are made for community? Perhaps you have your doubts and objections.

Consider this: Adam had intimacy with God like nothing we've ever experienced. He was formed by God from the dust of the ground and God breathed the breath of life into His nostrils. Then a garden was made for this man and in it was every tree, pleasing to the eye, and good for food. He walked with God in the garden and God gave the man purposeful work – to care for the garden. After all of this, it is God Himself who says, "It is not good for man to be alone." Hear this another way, "I am not enough for man to thrive."

If last week focused on our need to be rooted in Christ then this week is an admission that we need more than Jesus if we want to thrive. Adam was with God in a paradise built specifically for him and it wasn't enough.

We'll notice too that it's this same community that led to the Fall. Community is powerful. It can give life and it can destroy life. It can cause us to thrive and it can cause us to wither. This means two things: (1) Your friends are powerful and (2) Your friendship is powerful.

This week, let's thoughtfully explore how friendship affects thriving and what it means for each of us.



WEEK 2	SERMON NOTES	09/29/19
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<b>S O L I T U D E</b>	
<b>SPIRITUAL FRIENDSHIPS</b>	<b>WEEK 2</b>

**Meditate:**

Start by praying through Psalm 139.

Remember to slow down! Let God lead these times of solitude. Take a few minutes asking God to remove distractions and help focus on him.

Read Colossians 3:12-17. Read prayerfully multiple times.

**Centering Prayer:**

Spend time in God’s presence in gratitude for His love. Acknowledge the love the Creator has for you. Sit in this communion of love for as long as possible, offering your loving attention to God not for anything in return but simply because He is worthy of love.

**Petitioning Prayer:**

Prayerfully consider: List any current friends you would consider to be spiritual friends. List any potential spiritual friends. (A spiritual friend has similar faith, worldview, and headed in the same direction as you are.)

- Pray against barriers in building strong spiritual friendships.
- Pray for courage to be more vulnerable in friendships and relationships.
- Lift up any areas where you would like to grow in being a friend.

**Listening:**

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

Spend time asking God to help you slow down and giving thanks for these friends.





# SPIRITUAL FRIENDSHIPS

FAMILY DEVOTION

WEEK 2

## Read: Ephesians 4:27-32 (NIRV)

**28** Anyone who has been stealing must never steal again. Instead, they must work. They must do something useful with their own hands. Then they will have something to give to people in need.

**29** Don't let any evil talk come out of your mouths. Say only what will help to build others up and meet their needs. Then what you say will help those who listen. **30** Do not make God's Holy Spirit mourn. The Holy Spirit is the proof that you belong to God. And the Spirit is the proof that God will set you completely free. **31** Get rid of all hard feelings, anger and rage. Stop all fighting and lying. Don't have anything to do with any kind of hatred. **32** Be kind and tender to one another. Forgive one another, just as God forgave you because of what Christ has done.

God wants each of us to help each other. We're not supposed to live just for our own benefit but we're also supposed to make choices that are helpful to others. So people who used to steal from people are encouraged to begin working so that they'll be able to give (not take) from others.

The same is said for the words that we speak – we should use our words to encourage and help people not to hurt or hinder them. We should even pay attention to how we feel when other people hurt us. The Bible says that we should get rid of all hard feelings and stop fighting and lying – those things hurt people rather than help people. When other people hurt us, the Bible tells us to forgive them the same way that God forgives us when we hurt him or do things that He doesn't want us to do. Think of how much better the world would be if everyone lived this way!



# LET'S TALK

- 1) ASK: Why do people sometimes hurt people or choose to do bad things?

TEACH: Usually when people hurt people or choose to do something bad – we do it so that we can get something we want. Sometimes we'll want something that someone else has and so we'll try to take it for ourselves. Sometimes we'll want to say something, even if it will hurt someone's feelings. Sometimes we don't listen to what other people want us to do because we want to do something else instead.

- 2) ASK: What can we do to be more helpful for other people?

TEACH: There are many ways for us to practice living in a way that benefits others.

- We can understand that what we've been given is supposed to be used to help others. This way, we'll want to share more of what we have.
- We can see how God treats us and try to treat others the same. God forgives us and loves us and so we should try to be like God and try to forgive and love others too.
- We can practice doing good by looking for opportunities to help people.

- 3) PRAY: Take a moment to pray that God would help your family to help others more often.

This psalm is called a “song of ascents” meaning that it’s a pilgrim song – it’s about a community gathering together to worship God. This unity then, isn’t a description of “not fighting” one another but instead it’s describing a mutual unity of encouraging one another in our pursuit of God.

Relationships that spur one another on, that come together to worship and pursue God, relationships that promote our faith are precious. The Psalmist says that these relationships are like the precious oil that’s extravagantly poured onto Aaron, the first high priest. This is a picture of richness, of wealth, of extravagance, luxury, and rare blessing. If you have good spiritual friendships – you have something of great value.

The imagery of dew that descends from Mt. Hermon to Mt. Zion can be lost on us. Mt. Hermon is the highest point in Israel (9,232 ft in elevation) while Mt. Zion is a hill (2,510 ft. in elevation). It’s a picture of the best of both worlds – refreshing dew from a majestic mountain that covers the holy hill. These spiritual friendships are refreshing and life-giving.

From this (meaning from this place of unity in pursuing God together) God bestows his blessing. Godly community that supports and encourages our faith is a means of grace that God blesses. In a sense, we’re all pilgrims on a spiritual journey and if we’re wise, we’ll surround ourselves with fellow pilgrims who will help and encourage us and in this mutual unity God will pour his blessing on us.

**RESPOND:**

The journey of a pilgrim is one of passion, sacrifice, obedience, and expectation. Take a moment to consider – does this describe the life of faith that you bring to your community? If you were to think of yourself as a thermometer – do you raise or lower the temperature of your community of believers? Spend some time asking God to help you to better encourage your community’s efforts in pursuing Him.

Paul's words seem harsh at first glance and even at odds with what we know to be true about Jesus – that He is a friend of sinners. Yet Paul isn't saying that we should never associate or spend time with people who believe differently from us. What is he saying?

To be yoked with someone is a reference to Deuteronomy 22:10 where two animals of a different type and size are yoked together. Paul is saying that we shouldn't put ourselves in a position where we're attached to someone else in a way that allows them to unduly influence our relationship with God. We're to stay away from compromising partnerships. Paul may have had in mind certain guilds, secret societies, or various communities that Christians would have participated in and found themselves taking part in religious rituals to false gods.

This teaching would have been hard for Paul's audience – so much of the Roman world was interwoven with paganism that it would have seemed near impossible to avoid joining in. Paul's audience would have undoubtedly felt the cost of this command. Less networking would potentially mean less money. Yet following Jesus isn't about doing what's convenient or beneficial. Easy to say when someone else is in the spotlight, right?

What relationships do you have the cause you to sin? What relationships would you be in danger of losing if you refused to sin with them? A romantic relationship with expectations of sexual sin? What about friends whose primary way of connecting with you involves getting drunk or high? How about a partner or coworker with unethical business practices? It's easy to want to thrive – as long as it doesn't mean giving up something we value.

**RESPOND:**

Not every sin-entangled relationship needs to be cut off. Sometimes all it takes is a series of hard conversations. The question is, "Are we willing?" If a friendship continues to draw you away from God, are you able to choose God instead? Pray that God would reveal if there are any partnerships in your life that cause you to be unequally yoked and that pull you away from Him. Then decide what you're willing to do about it.

Many Proverbs use an ancient rhetorical device that you might call “synthetic parallelism.” This happens when the second half of the proverb carries the meaning of the first half but also adds to it. The sentence structure shows through more clearly in the ESV translation:

Faithful are the wounds of a friend;  
profuse are the kisses of an enemy.

The first part of the sentence lets us know that when a true friend hurts us, it’s often for our own benefit – these “hurts” are faithful.

The second part of the sentence tells us that an enemy may give a lot of kisses. This is a reference to flattery – empty praise to further one’s own interests. Yet this second part creates an implication – the profuse kisses of an enemy aren’t faithful and in the same way, the faithful wounds of a friend won’t be profuse.

Take note: Receiving godly friendship requires a degree of emotional health. Those who are willing to receive wounds from a friend will quickly learn to embrace and seek out such friends as they often save us from experiencing greater pain later in life. Those who only accept flattery and are only willing to surround themselves with cheerleaders will perceive their actual friends as being enemies. These same people will be equally resistant to any notion that God could ever be upset with their choices or that He would ever find reason to discipline them. As such, they remain unteachable and their growth is stunted. Thriving is not an option.

If we want this kind of friendship, we need to be willing to lay a foundation of trust and vulnerability with people. You won’t receive faithful wounds unless you give permission and even then, someone will have to know you mean it.

**RESPOND:**

Process this proverb with God in prayer. Do you have this type of friend? Are you afraid to let people in? Are you willing to trust that others want what’s best for you? What are your specific prayer needs regarding this?

Read verse 5 slowly. Jesus sees the faith of the men carrying their paralyzed friend and in response to seeing their faith He forgives the sins of the man. It's a moving story that shows the power of community. There's a few points worth noting here.

- 1) Find friends who can take you to Jesus.

The paralyzed man had friends that weren't paralyzed. It was essential to his healing that he had community that could pull him up and out of his current situation. Hear the analogy in this: If we only spend time with people at our level, we won't grow. We need to be humble enough to have people in our lives that can challenge us and push us further than we'd be able to go without them.

- 2) Take your friends to Jesus.

We all know people who are spiritually paralyzed. Maybe they don't know where to find Jesus or feel like they can't get through the door or don't fit in with the people crowding around Him. The question for us is – are we willing to try even when others aren't putting forth much effort themselves? Will we invite others to come to Jesus even if they don't seem interested or able?

- 3) There's strength in numbers.

One friend alone wouldn't have been able to climb this house, dig a hole in the roof, and lower the man down to Jesus. It took a community. Who are your friends that will join you in bringing people to Jesus? What would it look like to partner with them?

**RESPOND:**

The response is twofold.

(1) Do you have community that can take you further than you've been able to go by yourself? Do you have mentors that can challenge and encourage and be an example to you? If not, do something about it.

(2) Do you have friends that you can do ministry with? Do you have people that will join you in carrying people to Jesus? What would it take for you to start doing this with your community?

On Wednesday we read about the importance of having friends in our lives who would lovingly correct us. Here, we see our responsibility to not just have those friends but also to be those friends.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, in his book, *Life Together* writes:

“Nothing can be more cruel than the leniency which abandons others to their sin. Nothing can be more compassionate than the severe reprimand which calls another Christian in one’s community back from the path of sin.”

This flies in the face of modern forms of Christianity which believes that judgement of other people’s actions as sin is always wrong. It challenges the notion that to love my neighbor is to fully embrace all that they are and do.

Tim Keller suggests that a God who never gets angry isn’t a God of love but rather is a god who doesn’t care. In the same way, if we are unwilling to gently rebuke our brothers and sisters and lovingly lead people towards freedom – we are not loving but rather we are simply uncaring.

However we must not miss the careful word choice of the Holy Spirit through Paul. Read verse 1. Notice that this work must done by the right person (one who is led by the Spirit) for the right motivation (to restore) in the right way (gently). There is a person, a motivation, and a way that to approach sin that is not helpful or beneficial.

### RESPOND:

The response to this devotion isn’t to brainstorm who in your life needs your rebuke. Rather, we must focus on becoming the type of person that our friends need us to be – One who is filled by the Spirit, who seeks to restore, and who has a gentle approach. Of those three things, which least describes you? What do you need to work on the most? Pray that God would help to conform that area of your life to the image of Christ for the sake of your community.

Francis Chan once said,

“If I just read the scriptures, I wouldn’t even think so much about the gathering. My first thought wouldn’t be, ‘let’s have a gathering.’ Out of the scriptures I would think, ‘I’m on a mission. I love this God with all my heart, soul, mind, and strength and now I’ve gotta go out and make disciples.’ That’s what I would get out of scripture and what I believe would naturally happen is suddenly I would find other people who are on that mission because we’d be the weirdest people on earth. Right? We would stick out. We would be so different. And that pressure to stay on mission – I would actually need those brothers and sisters in my life and tell them, ‘Hey don’t let me slow down and I won’t let you slow down. We’ve got to stay on this mission together.’ This is why I wasn’t into fellowship anymore. I didn’t need more people to talk to. I don’t need other people to do American church but to stay on mission everyday? I need people for that because I’m going to get distracted - there are so many things I would rather do than make disciples.”

Zeal and passion are contagious. Fire has the unique ability to spread and give itself to others without being diminished itself. You see this in action during a Christmas Eve candlelight service. One lit candle can set off a chain reaction, spreading across a sanctuary of candles without having lost anything at all. Unfortunately a lukewarm Christian will never start a fire and a wet blanket will snuff out a flame. Each of us is called to spur one another on to love and good deeds yet we can’t give what we don’t have. If we want a community on fire for Christ, we must first kindle our own hearts.

**RESPOND:**

When you think of Christian community (small group, church, friends, family members, etc.) how do you see yourself contributing to other people’s passion for love and good deeds? Spend some time in prayer, asking God to clarify what needs to happen in your life for you to be able to spur others on.





## WEEK 3 // DEAL WITH YOUR STUFF

There's a well known proverb in Alcoholics Anonymous:  
"You're only as sick as your secrets."

David, in Psalm 32, puts it this way:

<sup>3</sup> When I kept silent,  
    my bones wasted away  
    through my groaning all day long.  
<sup>4</sup> For day and night  
    your hand was heavy on me;  
    my strength was sapped  
    as in the heat of summer.

The truth is, it's impossible for us to live with accumulating a few skeletons to shove in our closets. These secrets keep us from being fully known by our community. We have two options: to find trustworthy people that we can confide in or to put up a façade and hide our "stuff."

Look how Ephesians 5 talks about hidden sin:

<sup>10</sup> and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord. <sup>11</sup> Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. <sup>12</sup> For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret. <sup>13</sup> But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible, <sup>14</sup> for anything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says,

"Awake, O sleeper,  
    and arise from the dead,  
    and Christ will shine on you."

When anything is exposed it becomes visible and anything that becomes visible is light. Consider the moon – when it is exposed, it reflects light and becomes to us a source of light. Similarly, if we are willing to shine a light onto our darkness, what once was darkness will now be a light for others. This week, let's explore what it will take to deal with our stuff.

WEEK 3	SERMON NOTES	10/06/19
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<b>S O L I T U D E</b>	
<b>DEAL WITH YOUR STUFF</b>	<b>WEEK 3</b>

**Meditate:**

Start by praying through Psalm 139.

Let's start by slowing down! Let God lead these times of solitude. Take a few minutes asking God to remove distractions and help focus on him.

Read Psalm 32. Read prayerfully multiple times.

**Reflection:**

What areas are holding you back from reflecting Christ more? Spend time in prayer over each one asking God bring any barriers in following him to the surface.

- Addiction - good or bad habits leading to neglecting more important things or numb you to dealing with life's problems
- Habitual Sin - knowingly doing something you should not, but continually do it anyway, you may or may not regularly feel guilt over it
- Unresolved Anger/Resentment - feelings that cause you to devalue someone or interact with them in an unhealthy way
- Our Past - unhealthy or learned patterns of behavior from your family or culture
- Mental Health - untreated or unmanageable anxiety or depression that hinder healthy relationships or fulfilling your responsibilities

**Listening:**

Spend time trying to understand if a personal need is being met by an addiction or sin. Is there a spiritual practice that can replace the addiction or sin? Who can you tell about your struggles? Spend time feeling hurt or pain that surfaces. Spend time surrendering all these items to God. Ask God for healing and restoration.

Remember, to deny or ignore any of these is to give them power over you!





# DEAL WITH YOUR STUFF

FAMILY DEVOTION

WEEK 3

## Read: Proverbs 28:13 (NIRV)

Anyone who hides their sins doesn't succeed. But anyone who admits their sins and gives them up finds mercy.

A four year old boy was on a hike with his father and he found a branch that would make for a perfect hiking stick. He showed his dad the stick and they celebrated the find together. It was just the right size and weight for the boy.

A little while later they came to the shore of a lake and began to play a game – guessing which objects around them would float or sink. Seashells, stones, pinecones, feathers, acorns – anything they could find. Eventually the boy said, “Dad! Do you think my hiking stick will sink or float?!” His father replied, “I’m not sure, but don’t throw it in unless you’re absolutely sure that you’re okay with losing it.” The boy said, “I’m sure!” And he threw the stick in the water.

Just then, the boy’s face changed. His hiking stick was drifting away from them and the boy was visibly sad. His father said, “Do you know what regret is?” His son looked down and said, “No.” “What you’re feeling right now, that’s regret. It doesn’t feel good, does it? Remember it. Lean into it. Regret is a teacher.” With every moment, the stick floated further away. The father turned around, emptied his pockets, and jumped in the lake to fetch the stick for his boy.

Everyone will do something in the excitement of a moment that they’ll later regret. Sometimes we’ll want to hide these choices from others or pretend they didn’t happen because we don’t want people to know that we do bad things or make bad decisions. The truth is, no one is perfect and the best thing to do when we do something we regret is to ask for help or let someone know. Hiding our mistakes from people we love is often one more thing we’ll wish we hadn’t done.

# LET'S TALK

- 1) ASK: What kinds of things have you done that you've wished you didn't do?

SHARE: Choose an appropriate story from your life where you did something that you regretted.

- 2) ASK: What can we do when we do something we shouldn't have done?

TEACH:

- We can tell God. Of course, God sees what we do and knows what we do but when we tell God ourselves, we can ask Him to forgive us and to help us. Also, it feels good to be honest with God and to share our lives with Him. The good news is, nothing surprises Him. He's never shocked by our behavior.
  - We can tell someone that we trust that loves us and ask for their help. Sometimes when we make mistakes there are things we can do to fix it. When we can't fix it, it's still good to have people who know us and who can encourage us.
  - We can remember how it feels and learn to grow in wisdom, self-control, and goodness.
- 3) PRAY: Take a moment to pray that God would help your family to be more open, honest, trusting, and loving towards one another. Pray too that God would help us to not hide our sins or our mistakes from each other but to ask for help and to practice honesty instead.

In Christian books about relationships, “Guard your heart” almost always gets interpreted to mean: “Don’t fall for that boy or girl too quickly.” It’s highly unlikely that the biblical author had in mind infatuated teenagers.

The Bible Project sheds light on the ancient Hebrew understanding of what the heart does:

“The heart is the generator of physical life. It’s also the center of your intellectual and emotional life and there’s more. In Biblical Hebrew, the heart is where you make choices motivated by your desires. So, David, “had it in his heart to build a temple for his God.”

To guard our hearts is to protect the inner life. To “Deal with our stuff” then is a key component of guarding our hearts.

When we deal with our stuff we:

- guard our hearts from becoming hardened to the conviction of the Holy Spirit.
- allow our hearts to be known by others and therefore we’re no longer able to deceive ourselves.
- are willing to admit what’s inside of us and protect against becoming like a whitewashed tomb where we pretty up the outside but are rotting on the inside.

### RESPOND:

Consider what it means to guard your heart by allowing yourself to deal with your stuff. What prevents you from dealing with your stuff? Often times it is because we value our reputation, because we are suspicious or not trusting of others, sometimes it happens because we want/need the approval of others. Other times we fail to “deal with our stuff” because we think we’re the only ones and we lack the self-compassion to realize that we’re no different from anyone else. Turn to God in prayer and ask Him what it is that prevents you from dealing with your stuff. What lies or falsehoods keep you from being wholehearted? What do you need to guard your heart from?



To put off our old self here means that we are willing to leave our former way of living and thinking behind as we walk anew in Christ Jesus. This doesn't mean that we bury our past or hide what we've done – Paul elsewhere will allow his past to humble him:

For I am the least of the apostles and am unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.

(1 Corinthians 15:9)

So in what way are we to put off our old self and put on Christ?

- To put off falsehood and speak truthfully (4:25)
- To not give in to anger but to be self-controlled (4:26)
- To not give in to bitterness but to seek reconciliation (4:26)
- To not take but to give to those in need (4:28)
- To not speak hurtful words but helpful words (4:29)
- To not be divisive but unifying (4:31-32)
- To not be sexually immoral, but holy (5:3)
- To not speak carelessly but thankfully (5:4)
- To not hide sin but to expose it (5:8-14)
- To not be foolish but wise (5:15-17)
- To not be filled with wine but with the Spirit (5:18-20)

Sometimes parts of our old self are harder to put off than others. Sinful patterns can mold our personality and our personality will shape our identity and it may be the case that we struggle to know who we are without certain sinful behaviors or attitudes or desires.

Yet we are invited to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness. In doing so, we find that who we were was not nearly all that God intended for us to be.

**RESPOND:**

As you read the list from the devotion, what stood out to you or what other thing came to mind that God is wanting you to deal with? Take it to Him in prayer and ask Him for as much help as you're willing to accept.

Read the Old Testament and we soon realize that family and the decisions of our family have an incredible ripple effect that extends beyond parents, into the lives of their children, out of the home, and into the community and the community's future.

Look no further than the first family of civilization and you see that Adam and Eve's marriage ultimately led to the Fall of Creation. Afterwards they had two sons and one of them killed the other. Cain's descendant Lamech follows his example and brags to his wives about killing a young man for injuring him. Noah gets drunk and curses his son. When Abraham comes on the scene he tells people that his wife is his sister, he sleeps with his wife's servant Hagar and he leaves Hagar and Ishmael in the wilderness to fend for themselves. You're not even halfway through Genesis and it's clear that the choices of parents can be devastating for children.

The passage that we read today might seem harsh at first glance. Many commentators agree that God's law here is an act of mercy in which God is promising a limit to the effects of generational sin. In other passages in the Old Testament, God makes it clear that children do not directly suffer for the sins of their parents (Ezekiel 18:20) yet Exodus nonetheless admits that children will suffer indirectly for the sins of their parents. In that sense, children are punished by the sinful consequences of their parents.

Yet also take note at the imbalance of the passage. The blessing is disproportionate to the curse. Those who love God and keep his commands will secure a blessing from God for a thousand generations after them.

**RESPOND:**

Dealing with our stuff also means dealing with our family stuff. It doesn't take long to see that a lot of our stuff is family stuff. Pray that generational cycles of sin would stop with you. Pray for help in identifying and overcoming the consequences of your family's choices and secure a new blessing for generations that come after you.

Carl George is one of the most well known Church growth experts in America and he once said that good small groups require two things to be effective:

- 1) Acknowledging our brokenness
- 2) Loving interrogation

He referenced John Wesley's accountability groups as well as Recovery groups like Alcoholics Anonymous or Celebrate Recovery. Grief groups will usually do this too. These are places where people feel free to acknowledge their brokenness and also have permission to ask tough questions of each other.

Only when we acknowledge our brokenness can healing begin.

Look what Dietrich Bonhoeffer says in, *Life Together*:

“The most experienced psychologist or observer of human nature knows infinitely less of the human heart than the simplest Christian who lives beneath the Cross of Jesus. The greatest psychological insight, ability, and experience cannot grasp this one thing: what sin is. Worldly wisdom knows what distress and weakness and failure are, but it does not know the godlessness of man. And so it also does not know that man is destroyed only by his sin and can be healed only by forgiveness. Only the Christian knows this. In the presence of a psychiatrist I can only be a sick man; in the presence of a Christian brother I can dare to be a sinner. The psychiatrist must first search my heart and yet he never plumbs its ultimate depth. The Christian brother knows when I come to him: here is a sinner like myself, a godless man who wants to confess and yearns for God's forgiveness. The psychiatrist views me as if there were no God. The brother views me as I am before the judging and merciful God in the Cross of Jesus Christ.”

**RESPOND:**

Pray that God would allow you to see your brokenness (past and present) with more clarity than ever before and that He would give you strength to acknowledge your brokenness before others.

We struggle to talk about sin in our culture today. When we do talk about it, we usually try to soften the blow as much as possible. We never want anyone to feel shame for anything they've done. We shout our abortions and are loud and proud about our sexual sin.

What do we need forgiveness for as long as we have societal acceptance?

Most of us have never wept over our sin. We assume that people are generally good even though Jesus says, "No one is good except God alone." Even many who believe that Christ is God assume that they're getting into heaven because they're a good person and God accepts them for who they are.

When we don't see or don't acknowledge our own sinfulness then it's hard for us to be joyous and grateful at our forgiveness. When we feel entitled to heaven and to God's gifts, we fail to respond appropriately to His goodness.

We might even downplay the price God paid for our sin. You may have heard someone say, "If I could die for the sins of the world, I probably would" or "Sure, Jesus died but He rose again three days later. That's not much of a sacrifice, is it?" When it's all said and done we may end up with the impression that our Savior didn't really do all that much and that we didn't really need much saving in the first place.

When William Carey died in 1834 his gravestone read: "A wretched poor and helpless worm, on thy kind arms I fall." When God takes on flesh and dies for the sins of the world – it's not equivalent to you giving your life for the sake of humanity. It's equivalent to you dying for worms. Not because we are like worms but because compared to God and without God we are like worms.

**RESPOND:**

Chances are you won't weep over your sin today but start getting into the habit of asking God to reveal the depths of your sin to you. This will allow you to see the heights of His forgiveness and it will cause you to overflow with love, joy, and gratitude.

Sometimes dealing with our stuff means acknowledging not our sin but simply our limitations and weaknesses. Dealing with our stuff means embracing who we are and living according to the way that God gifted us and created us.

It's in this place of weakness that the Apostle Paul saw God's power most often. When we can acknowledge our weaknesses then we can more readily depend on God and operate out of his strength rather than our own. This is what causes Paul to preach without eloquence or human wisdom (1 Corinthians 2:1). Paul doesn't want to operate through the strength of his flesh but He wants to get out of the way so that the Spirit can penetrate hearts and minds. In another place Paul says that the Spirit helps us in our weakness to the point that if we don't know what to pray, the Spirit will be praying for us through our wordless groans. Which prayer do we imagine to be more effective? The prayers of the Spirit or our own prayers? It's no surprise then that God chose Moses (a man who was "slow of speech") to be His mouthpiece to Egypt.

In verse 10 Paul shares where He sees "weakness" in his life: in physical weakness, in insults, in hardships, in persecution, in difficulties.

He's says it's during these times of weakness that he's strong (in and through Christ). Sometimes it's hard to deal with this stuff. Maybe we're out of a job, maybe we're lonely, maybe we're the butt of a joke, maybe we're overlooked, maybe we've lost someone close to us. Any number of things make us "weak" and when they come our way, we must deal with our stuff appropriately.

**RESPOND:**

What is it about our weakness that ultimately leads to strength? Weakness fights pride and produces humility. Weakness fights self-sufficiency and produces dependence on God. Weakness fights the tendency to work from the flesh and works instead from the Spirit. Ask God to help you be honest about your weakness and to reveal how He's wanting to use it for your benefit.



## WEEK 4 // SOWING PEACE

Some churches have a time during worship service called the passing of peace. Members will turn to one another, shake hands and take turns saying “Peace be with you.”

For some, when the worship service is over the pastor will raise their hand toward the congregation and say, “Go in peace, to love and serve the Lord.”

Both of these phrases, “Peace be with you” and “Go in peace” are words spoken by Jesus throughout the gospels. Isaiah 9:6 refers to Jesus as “The Prince of Peace” and the letters written to the New Testament Churches are filled with prayers and blessings of peace.

Clearly, peace is a big part of Christianity but just how big is it for Christians that don’t experience persecution and aren’t on the battlefield? Is it relevant to our lives today?

The biblical concept of peace means more than non-violence or lack of conflict. In the Old Testament, the word for peace (shalom) refers to a state of wholeness. Shalom happens when the world operates according to God’s will. When Jesus says, “Blessed are the peacemakers” He’s saying that blessed are those who don’t just pray, “Thy kingdom come, thy will be done” but they also actively work to bring about God’s will on Earth. The peace that peacemakers bring is a wholeness that sets the world right.

Christians then, find themselves in a broken, fallen world and their work is to carry on God’s work of restoring all things according to the will of God. Ultimately this goes far beyond making sure people get along and leave “well enough alone.” Furthermore, sowing peace isn’t just about restoring human relationships but it’s also about restoring our relationships to God. This week, let’s discover how sowing peace will lead to thriving.

WEEK 4	SERMON NOTES	10/13/19
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# S O L I T U D E

SOWING PEACE

WEEK 4

## **Mediate:**

Start by praying through Psalm 139.

Let's start by slowing down! Let God lead these times of solitude. Take a few minutes asking God to remove distractions and help focus on him.

Read 1 John 4:7-21. Read prayerfully multiple times.

Spend time in prayer listening to what God could be speaking through this passage into your life. Write down anything that comes to mind.

## **Reflection:**

Scripture encourages us to pursue love above all else. Think through your week and the interactions you've had with people. Answer the following question: How often have I demonstrated love? How often have I not demonstrated God's love through unwholesome talk, etc?

- 1) Are there areas in your life that are easier to show love? Why?
- 2) What attitudes and actions surfaced this week that do not demonstrate love?
- 3) How can you replace that response with a more loving one next time?
- 4) Reflect on ways you can remember God's love for you. How can embracing God's love for me help me to love others better?

## **Listening:**

"Spread love everywhere you go: first of all in your own home. Give love to your children, to your wife or husband, to a next door neighbor . . . Let no one ever come to you without leaving better and happier. Be the living expression of God's kindness; kindness in your face, kindness in your eyes, kindness in your smile, kindness in your warm greeting." Mother Teresa

Spend time asking God to help you slow down and to lean into God's love.





S O W I N G P E A C E	
FAMILY DEVOTION	WEEK 4

**Read: Isaiah 9:6 (NIRV)**

A child will be born to us.

A son will be given to us.

He will rule over us.

And he will be called

Wonderful Adviser and Mighty God.

He will also be called Father Who Lives Forever  
and Prince Who Brings Peace.

Even though these words in the book of Isaiah were written about 700 years before Jesus was born, they tell us about Jesus.

Four titles are given to Jesus:

- Wonderful Adviser
- Mighty God
- Father Who Lives Forever
- Prince Who Brings Peace

Today we want to focus on the last title, “Prince who brings Peace.” In what ways did Jesus bring peace?

1. He brought peace by dying on the cross for our sins so that we could be made right with God. In other words, Jesus brings peace between us and God.
2. He brought peace by creating the Church – a place where people of every nation can come together to worship God.
3. He brought peace by showing us a better way to live and teaching us love everyone – even our enemies.

# LET'S TALK

- 4) ASK: How would you explain “peace” to someone who had never heard of that word before?

TEACH: Peace doesn't just mean not fighting – although it certainly can mean that. It also means getting along well or it can mean something like calm and relaxing. Peace happens when everything works well together, the way that it should.

- 5) ASK: Jesus is called the Prince of Peace and we know that God wants the world to be peaceful. Can you think of ways that you can help the world be a more peaceful place?

TEACH:

- We can make the world more peaceful by telling more people about Jesus so that they can be forgiven and be made right with God.
  - We can make the world more peaceful by loving our friends, our family members, our neighbors, and even our enemies.
  - We can make the world more peaceful by being quick to forgive others when they hurt us instead of holding onto our anger and making things worse.
- 6) PRAY: Take a moment to pray that God would help your home to be more peaceful, that God would help each of you to be more peaceful, and thank God for the peace that Jesus brings to the world.

When Peter visits Cornelius' home, Cornelius invites Peter to preach the message that God has for them.

Peter responds by sharing, "The good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all." Why does Peter refer to the Gospel as the good news of peace? As Peter continues to preach, he explains just how Jesus brings peace.

- When Jesus lived he did good and healed people from the power of the devil (v. 38)
- Through the death of Jesus, anyone is able to believe in Him and receive forgiveness of sins through Him (vv. 39-43).
- This "anyone" includes both Jews and Gentiles so that the Church is a reconciled people of all nations. (vv. 44-48)

What does peace do? Peace overcomes the devil. Peace restores people to God. Peace reconciles people to one another.

Jesus is not just the Prince of Peace for the world but He's the Prince of Peace for your life personally. He protects you and heals you from the devil. He restores you and makes you right with God through the forgiveness of sin. And He unites you with every nation in the Body of Christ.

Romans 5:10 says:

For if, while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!

Once we see how foundational peace is to the Gospel and once we realize the peace that Jesus gives us between ourselves and God, then we will understand the significance of being men and women who sow peace.

**RESPOND:**

Prayerfully consider and thank God for the ways that He has brought peace in your life. Afterwards, ask for God's help in sharing this peace with others.

Paul's world is strange to us at first. We don't worry about eating food that had been sacrificed to idols. We don't worry about "clean" or "unclean" foods. For the most part, we don't worry about what's moral or immoral for us to eat.

Paul says plainly: The Kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking. In other words, Christianity is not about following the right set of behaviors. Instead, the Kingdom is a matter of righteousness, peace, and joy.

So Paul says that instead, we ought to be motivated by peace and mutual edification. For Paul, this means giving up our freedoms in order to have more harmony with those who have less freedom or more stringent convictions.

Consider the following quote inspired by a conversation between John Mark Comer and Mark Sayers:

"There's an ache for community. But then for community to flourish it needs a high level of commitment and commitment is a form of restraint. In order to experience intimate community you have to be willing to let go of autonomy. To know and be known by others requires time, proximity, consistency, vulnerability... You can have community or autonomy, the choice is yours but you can't have both."

We see this being played out in this passage, don't we? Men and women who sow peace must also be willing to give up their autonomy. Are we willing? Are we able? Just how far will we go to see our faith thrive and to care for the thriving of others?

**RESPOND:**

Prayerfully reflect: How far are you willing to go to sow peace? Are you willing to so commit yourself to your community that you'd be willing to give up or change certain lifestyle choices for the sake of the health of your community? Ask God to show you where your autonomy conflicts with your community and to give you wisdom and love to properly order your life.

God is not a God of disorder but of peace. For Paul, this translates to ordered worship. It seems the Corinthians had gotten into the practice of worshipping and prophesying without regard for one another. This disorder was incompatible with the God of peace. We sometimes have a tendency to think that the more “spiritual” something is, the more spontaneous and uncontrolled it is but when we read scripture, we see a different story.

What would it look like for you to intentionally sow peace on a Sunday morning when the church gathers to worship? Remember that Paul isn’t addressing leaders here, he’s addressing the whole church. Those who weren’t taking turns prophesying were more than likely lay members and not leaders. Paul’s challenge to them is to sow peace as they participate in worship. Sure, we don’t have people in our congregation fighting over who gets to prophecy next but the heart of Paul’s instruction is that we be considerate and thoughtful of others in worship.

We might consider how our interactions, involvement, attitudes, behaviors, and contributions sow peace. This isn’t about making sure your kids sit still or keeping your cell phone on silent. This is about seeing and perceiving the way that my participation adds to my worshipping community: do I bring shalom? Do I help us to operate according to God’s will? Or am I mostly showing up and doing my own thing and not thinking about contributing to the shalom of the gathering?

**RESPOND:**

Walk through a typical Sunday morning in your head. Do you come on time? Do you greet visitors? Do you find someone sitting alone and purposefully sit with them? Do you serve on a team? Do you catch up with others and check-in with friends? Do you take notes during the sermon? Do you allow yourself to be distracted by your phone? Consider your Sunday morning experience in terms of sowing peace – what could change? This isn’t a practice in nitpicking but rather an exercise to help us to be more conscientious of sowing peace in public worship.



How do we prepare ourselves to withstand inevitable evil that will come our way? Paul provides us with a number of spiritual resources that we can't neglect if we want to be fully protected: truth, righteousness, readiness to share the gospel of peace, faith, knowledge of salvation, and the word of God.

How does a readiness to share the gospel help us to withstand evil?

The Asbury Bible Commentary sheds light:

The allusion here is most likely to Isa 52:7, and the implication is that bearing good news to others helps Christians keep their own souls from spiritual lethargy and thus less vulnerable to the Devil.

Isaiah 52:7 reads:

How beautiful on the mountains  
are the feet of those who bring good news,  
who proclaim peace,  
who bring good tidings,  
who proclaim salvation,  
who say to Zion,  
"Your God reigns!"

A readiness to share the gospel and sow peace benefits not just the world around us but also keeps us from spiritual lethargy. Are you ready to share the gospel? As 1 Peter 3:15 puts it, "Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have."

### RESPOND:

What should we do other than to put on these sandals? Make yourself ready. Find a method for sharing the gospel that works for you and practice it from time to time, by yourself and with others. Notice that both Paul and Peter are not limiting their instruction to evangelists or church leaders. The readiness that comes from the gospel of peace is for each of us.

Esau sells his inheritance rights for a bowl of soup. Who could do such a thing, we wonder? What short-sightedness! Yet don't we see and haven't we known Christians who would give up their eternal inheritance in order to fit in with culture? Don't men and women who are coheirs with Christ trade their inheritance for friendship with the world? Are we really that different from Esau?

So what can we do?

The author of Hebrews tells us to first embrace discipline which will produce peace and righteousness for those who are trained by it. Trained seems to be a key word there, doesn't it? Only those who accept discipline and hardship as a "teacher" will receive peace and righteousness through it. Why does accepting discipline lead to peace? The sooner we accept it and learn from it, the less we'll need. The more we resist discipline, the more friction that we experience in our lives and in our relationship with God.

Afterwards we make every effort to live in peace with each other and to be holy. It's from this position that we are able to help others to not fall short of the grace of God.

Here's the logical flow: Accepting discipline produces peace and righteousness which enables us to care for the spiritual lives of others. The author of Hebrews doesn't want us to miss the significance of the responsibility before us. In verse 17 we're reminded that even though Esau sought his forfeited blessing with tears, he could not change what was done. Why mention this? To show us what's at stake.

To sow peace means to accept God's discipline, to grow in peace and righteousness, and to get involved in the lives of those around us who need our support.

**RESPOND:**

What's God speaking to you about? Your need to embrace discipline? Your need to live in peace with others? Your need to get involved in the lives of those around you? Choose one area of growth and bring it before God in prayer.

The God of the Universe took on flesh and revealed His moral law to us. And what Jesus says is that it's not just the "big" sins like murder that we need to be concerned with and pay attention to – even something like being angry with a brother or sister is to incur guilt. Name calling and insults will be brought up on judgment day. In another place Jesus tells us that we will give an account for every careless word we've spoken.

So what should we do?

Seek reconciliation. Jesus says that if we find ourselves offering a gift at the altar and recall that we have an unreconciled relationship – we're to drop everything and before we worship God, we're to seek reconciliation with one another.

There's a clear sense of urgency here and there's also a set of priorities here. Jesus is God incarnate and He says: I care more about your relationship with other people than I do about your religious works. It's not a new message. God desires mercy and obedience above sacrifice and He always has.

In the first instance, Jesus tells us to be aware of the hurt we're causing others and the proper response is to consider judgement.

In the second instance, Jesus tells us to be aware when others feel hurt by us and the proper response is to be assertive in our pursuit of peace with them. This especially does not come naturally. We much prefer to hope that time heals all wounds or to avoid any potentially uncomfortable interaction. Let's be honest, it can be awkward and maybe even potentially fruitless to seek reconciliation with someone who has something against you. It's a risk. It takes vulnerability and assertive love to do what Jesus asks of us.

**RESPOND:**

Pray and ask God if there are relationships where you're mistreating people. If so, consider judgment day and ask for forgiveness. Are there relationships that you're aware of where people feel hurt by you? If so, seek reconciliation. If you're not sure if it's appropriate to seek those people out, seek counsel first.



## WEEK 5 // LIVING WITH PURPOSE

“God has a wonderful plan for your life.”

One popular strategy for sharing the gospel begins with that sentence but some Christians disagree with that idea. Take Ray Comfort for example, in his booklet “God Has a Wonderful Plan for Your Life: The Myth of the Modern Message”, Ray outlines how he would never imagine telling the victims of 9/11 “God has a wonderful plan for your life” hours before they died. Since no one knows the day or time, he says, it’s inappropriate to tell anyone that God has a wonderful plan for their life.

That’s a sobering thought, isn’t it?

Often times we imagine that finding our purpose has to do with unlocking a hidden mystery of the universe or perfectly aligning our passions and our skills with our pursuits. In that line of thinking – successful and famous people are simply those who found and pursued their purpose.

Everyone else floundering in mediocrity simply has yet to find their purpose and once they do – they’ll be fulfilled.

The truth is, God has a plan and a purpose for you (as well as for all the lives lost on 9/11). His purpose for you isn’t a hidden mystery that needs to be unlocked through an individual pilgrimage of the soul but rather He’s revealed it in scripture and desires for all humankind to live according to their purpose.

This week, let’s commit ourselves to understanding the wonderful plan that God has for our lives and to encourage one another as we seek to live it out.

WEEK 5	SERMON NOTES	10/20/19
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# S O L I T U D E

LIVING WITH PURPOSE

WEEK 5

## **Mediate:**

Start by praying through Psalm 139.

Let's start by slowing down! Let God lead these times of solitude. Take a few minutes asking God to remove distractions and help focus on him.

Read Colossians 3:23-24. Read prayerfully multiple times.

## **Reflection:**

Imagine you are attending your own funeral. Spend time thinking about who would be there.

Family

Friends

Co-workers

Church friends

Take time reflect what each person would share about you. What memories would they want to share? How would they describe your personality and temperament? What would they say mattered to you?

How do these responses align with how you would like to live your life?

How do these responses align with how God would desire you to live?

If there are any responses that God is speaking to you, write them down. Prayerfully consider how to act on it.

## **Listening:**

"Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom." Psalm 90:12

Spend time asking God to help you slow down and trust him to be the center of your life.







LIVING OUT OUR PURPOSE	
FAMILY DEVOTION	WEEK 5

**Read: Ephesians 2:10 (NIRV)**

<sup>10</sup> We are God's creation. He created us to belong to Christ Jesus. Now we can do good works. Long ago God prepared these works for us to do.

Each one of us is created by God. The Bible says that God created the deepest parts of our being before we were born and that we're amazingly and wonderfully made by Him.

Why did God go through this trouble of creating us? God's word says that we were made for Jesus! We're a special gift from God the Father to God the Son and God's desire is for all of us to enjoy Him and live with him forever according to His plan.

Because of this God also prepares good works for us. Children know this better than adults do. Work is fun. Children love to play house, play kitchen, help fix things around the house, help clean, help cook, some children even love to help change diapers. Why? Because meaningful work adds joy and purpose and value to our lives.

God the Father knows this and so He has work for us to do! The question is, what kind of work does God have for us?

# LET'S TALK

- 1) ASK: What's your favorite kind of work to do?
- 2) ASK: What do you think you'll want to do when you're older?
- 3) ASK: What could be examples of "good works" that God has prepared for you?

## TEACH:

- It's hard for us to know what the future has in store for us but we can trust that God knows exactly where we'll be and what we'll need. Anytime we see a problem or a "good work" that we can do – it's safe to assume that God saw it coming before we did and it's very likely that God prepared that work just for us.
  - God also shares in the Bible the types of work that He desires from us. This includes things like: Feeding the hungry, giving clean water to the thirsty, providing for the poor, visiting the sick, caring for prisoners, teaching, giving good advice, helping people when they sin, forgiving others when they hurt us, and praying for people.
- 4) PRAY: Take a moment to pray that God would help your family would be sensitive to the good works that God has prepared in advance for you to do. Ask God to help you to live purposeful and fruitful lives.

## LIST YOUR EARTHLY ROLES

We all have different roles. Some of us are siblings, some of us are grandparents, some of us are employers, some of us are employees, some of us are moms and some of us are sons, you might be a small group leaders, or business owners, or both. We all wear different hats. What are yours?

List your 5 main roles in order of most important to least important. Don't get hung up on the order. It's okay if some of your roles seem equally important to you.

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_

In the days that follow, we will create a mission statement for each role and take a close look at how we are or aren't living with purpose. Use the directions below for guidance or inspiration but don't worry about following them too closely. Make it your own. You won't be graded. Don't stress about it.

**How to create a mission statement:** The mission statement has three movements. It describes (1) why you exist, (2) what your role is, and (3) the primary ways that you live it out.

**Here's an example for the role of a pastor:** God's purpose for my role as pastor is (1) to glorify Him (2) by equipping the saints for ministry and caring for the spiritual life of our people (3) through being devoted to prayer & the ministry of the word of God, visionary leadership, preaching & teaching, and pastoral care and counseling.

## ROLE 1 MISSION STATEMENT

Create a mission statement:

God's purpose for my role as \_\_\_\_\_ is...  
(write role #1 here)

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What evidence is there that Christ is at the center of this role? (ex. My wife and I pray together every night).

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In what specific ways should your relationship with God cause you to live out this role differently than if you didn't know God?

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What are some changes that you can see that you need to make in how you're currently living out this role?

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## ROLE 2 MISSION STATEMENT

Create a mission statement:

God's purpose for my role as \_\_\_\_\_ is...  
(write role #2 here)

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What evidence is there that Christ is at the center of this role? (ex. My wife and I pray together every night).

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In what specific ways should your relationship with God cause you to live out this role differently than if you didn't know God?

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What are some changes that you can see that you need to make in how you're currently living out this role?

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ROLE 3 MISSION STATEMENT

Create a mission statement:

God's purpose for my role as \_\_\_\_\_ is...  
(write role #3 here)

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What evidence is there that Christ is at the center of this role? (ex. My wife and I pray together every night).

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In what specific ways should your relationship with God cause you to live out this role differently than if you didn't know God?

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What are some changes that you can see that you need to make in how you're currently living out this role?

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## ROLE 4 MISSION STATEMENT

Create a mission statement:

God's purpose for my role as \_\_\_\_\_ is...  
(write role #4 here)

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What evidence is there that Christ is at the center of this role? (ex. My wife and I pray together every night).

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In what specific ways should your relationship with God cause you to live out this role differently than if you didn't know God?

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What are some changes that you can see that you need to make in how you're currently living out this role?

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ROLE 5 MISSION STATEMENT

Create a mission statement:

God's purpose for my role as \_\_\_\_\_ is...  
(write role #5 here)

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What evidence is there that Christ is at the center of this role? (ex. My wife and I pray together every night).

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In what specific ways should your relationship with God cause you to live out this role differently than if you didn't know God?

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What are some changes that you can see that you need to make in how you're currently living out this role?

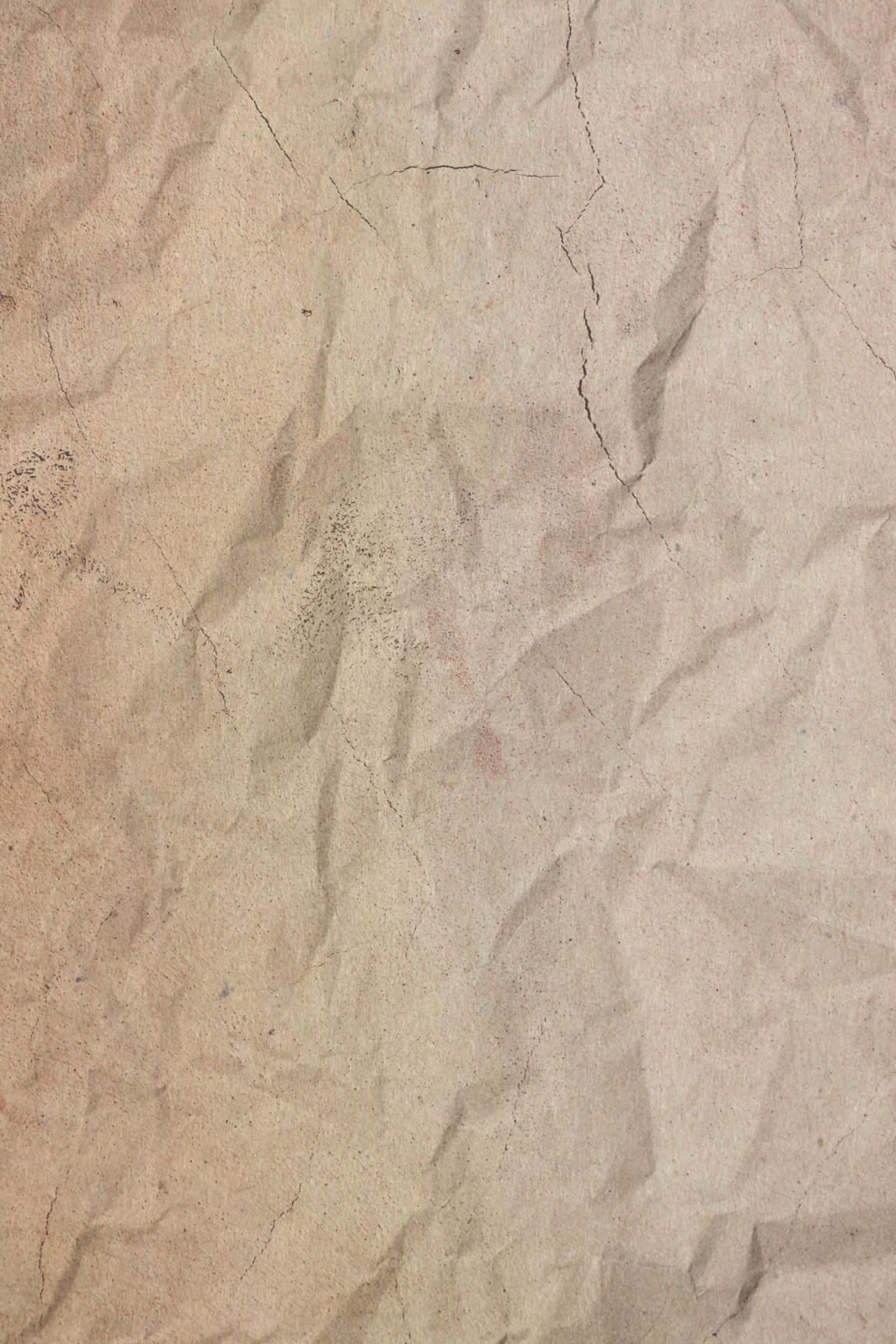
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“But blessed is the one who trusts in the Lord, whose confidence is in him. They will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream. It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green. It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit.”

Jeremiah 17:7-8