

The image features a sunset sky with orange and blue clouds. In the foreground, the silhouettes of a young boy on the left and an older man on the right are shown playing cricket. The boy is in a batting stance, holding a bat. The man is in a bowling stance, with a ball in the air above him. A large, light blue circle is superimposed over the scene, containing the text.

**JESUS**  
AT THE  
**CENTER**  
OF OUR  
**FUTURE**

**DAILY DEVOTIONAL**



In a rapidly changing world, it's more crucial than ever to anchor ourselves and the next generation firmly in Christ's unchanging truth and love. In this devotional booklet, we embark on a transformative journey, exploring how Jesus can and must be the focal point of our lives, families and communities. We'll discover how placing Jesus at the center empowers us to navigate life's complexities with faith, hope and resilience.

Each day, we'll dive deep into the profound implications of having Jesus at the center of our future, from nurturing a vibrant relationship with Him to equipping our children and youth to be bold ambassadors of His kingdom in a secular age. Through reflection, prayer and practical application, we'll learn how to cultivate a generational legacy grounded in the transformative power of Christ's love and truth.

Join me as we seek to elevate Jesus to His rightful place at the center of our lives and the lives of those we influence. Let's build a future where Jesus reigns supreme, shaping every aspect of our existence and ushering in His kingdom here on earth.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a large, stylized 'B' followed by a horizontal line and a cursive 'J'.

Bryan Jones, Senior Pastor



# DAILY PRAYER AND REFLECTION QUESTIONS

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*"... Our Father in heaven..."*

Matthew 6:9b (NLT)

- What do You want to say to me today as my Father?

*"... may Your name be kept holy."*

Matthew 6:9c (NLT)

- What do You want to reveal to me about Your power today?

*"May Your Kingdom come soon."*

Matthew 6:10a (NLT)

- Help me make Your priorities my priorities today.

*"Give us today the food we need,"*

Matthew 6:11 (NLT)

- Is there anything specific You want me to do with my time or the people I'm around today?

*"and forgive us our sins, as we have forgiven those who sin against us"*

Matthew 6:12 (NLT)

- Reveal to me anyone I need to forgive or ask for forgiveness.

*"And don't let us yield to temptation..."*

Matthew 6:13a (NLT)

- Is there anywhere I'm vulnerable to temptation?

# DON'T LET IT LAND!

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*And now, dear brothers and sisters, one final thing. Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honorable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise. Keep putting into practice all you learned and received from me—everything you heard from me and saw me doing. Then the God of peace will be with you.*

**Philippians 4:8-9 (NLT)**

Every single day, you will be bombarded with thoughts, some good and some bad. The major problem is you have a real enemy who wants to cut you off from the truth and life in the Spirit. How does he do that? Lies. He will get you to compare yourself with others constantly, doubt God's goodness, and believe things that aren't true. This is his number one tactic and why he's referred to as the *father of lies*. If you aren't aware of this, you're destined to fail. The world is too dark, and the enemy too unwavering for you to stumble into victorious living. So, what's the solution? What's your weapon? Philippians 4:8-9 is a truth that cuts through the lies of the enemy. Memorize it. Repeat it. Live in it.

Think of yourself as an air-traffic controller. Your job is to cut through the lies of the enemy. When you feel unworthy, you remind yourself that's not true. If you're in Jesus, then you're a co-heir with Christ. If you feel like you won't ever overcome that struggle, you remind yourself that's not right or pure; we are more than conquerors in Jesus. When you feel insecure that you haven't done enough with your life or the mistakes from the past surface, then you remind yourself that's not admirable and that there is no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus. The point is to use Philippians 4:8 as a grid to choose what lands in your mind and heart. Every thought and idea shouldn't have permission to land; only you can give permission for things to land in your heart. Don't be fooled by this. People can say all sorts of things, hurt and tear us down, but only you can permit those thoughts to stick in your mind. Stop giving others and the enemy more power than they have. It's not wise to ponder on thoughts that aren't helpful. A child-like faith requires us to become less aware of our surroundings and more aware of our Savior. You can't choose what comments, hurts, and pains enter the airspace of your life, but you can choose which ones dwell there.

**APPLICATION:** Choose what thoughts you allow to dwell and land in your heart.

**PRAYER:** Ask the Spirit if there's anything you are holding onto. Release any thoughts that aren't true or helpful!

# GUARD YOUR BIRTHRIGHT

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*And Jacob said, Sell me this day thy birthright. And Esau said, Behold, I am at the point to die: and what profit shall this birthright do to me? And Jacob said, Swear to me this day; and he sware unto him: and he sold his birthright unto Jacob. Then Jacob gave Esau bread and pottage of lentiles; and he did eat and drink, and rose up, and went his way: thus Esau despised his birthright.*

**Genesis 25:31-34 (KJV)**

This week, I have found myself tempted, attacked and discouraged more than normal weeks. In my weakest moment, there's always a thought to cave into the pressures, numb instead of fighting, take an easy way out, and not do the right thing, which is usually the difficult thing. Sometimes, so many people fall into some destructive sin or fall away; I worry about how I can stay strong and not ruin everything in a moment of weakness. Esau was a prime example of this. His cravings and desires caused him to make a terrible mistake. He gave up his birthright for a bowl of soup. A birthright meant the right to the land, the people, and the promises of God. All of that for a bowl of soup. We are surprised and even judgmental of his decision, but none of us are completely free from the desires and cravings of this world. I love what one commentator said:

*History shows that men prefer illusions to realities, choose time rather than eternity, and the pleasures of sin for a season rather than the joys of God forever. Men will read trash rather than the Word of God, and adhere to a system of priorities that leaves God out of their lives. Multitudes of men spend more time shaving than on their souls; and multitudes of women give more minutes to their makeup than to the life of the eternal spirit. Men still sell their birthright for a mess of things.*

If you find yourself tempted or if you find yourself distracted, then I invite you to slow down. Break away for a moment, go for a walk, sit in your favorite chair and remember what matters most. Live for eternity. Whenever a discouragement or temptation comes my way, I remind myself *don't sell your birthright*. Don't trade the temporary joys of the world for the unending pleasures for eternity. Ask the Spirit of God to help you become more passionate about Him than anything this world offers. Open your heart to Him and allow Him to fill you with power and vision for the future that causes the things of this world to grow strangely dim. He will be faithful. He will do it.

**APPLICATION:** Don't allow a temporary pleasure to kill the life of the Spirit in you!

**PRAYER:** Bring whatever you feel tempted or discouraged about to God. Be honest, and don't hold back. He knows what's in your heart. Ask Him to take that from you and help you become more passionate about Him. Sit with Him and feel His love and delight for you.

# GUARD AGAINST COMFORT

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*Mordecai sent this reply to Esther: "Don't think for a moment that because you're in the palace you will escape when all other Jews are killed. If you keep quiet at a time like this, deliverance and relief for the Jews will arise from some other place, but you and your relatives will die. Who knows if perhaps you were made queen for just such a time as this?"* Esther 4:13-14 (NLT)

A friend once told me the two things threatening our walk with God are our comfort and calendar. I haven't forgotten that. His point was that for some people, our calendar is so full and busy that we don't have time for God. He told me many people say they love God but don't have a calendar reflecting it. I know it feels harsh and possibly legalistic, but he's right. I can't say I love my wife and kids and never spend time with them. Love isn't a sentiment; it's an action. Jesus didn't just love us in sentiment; He showed His love by climbing on the cross and dying our death. His love for us was revealed by where He spent time.

The other thing that can threaten us is comfort. Sometimes, we don't want to do anything that causes us to step out of our comfort zone. This is what's happening in the text above. Esther finds out about a plot to wipe out the Jews, and a man named Mordecai calls her to go to the king. This is a massive step out of her comfort zone and actually a risk to her life. See, if the king didn't summon you and he's not happy with you interrupting him, you could be killed for disturbing him. Esther is okay with sitting this one out, but Mordecai reminds her that God has positioned her where she is for such a time as this. Think about that. God has positioned Esther, you, me and everyone for such a time as this, and comfort can keep us from going. For some, it could be a comfort that could cost their lives. I got a video from our partners in India who are being beaten up for sharing the Gospel. It was hard to watch. For many of us, it's a discomfort that causes us to speak up, share with others, and risk our images or popularity to talk about Jesus. God has called you to be a light, but comfort can cause you to dim the light of Christ wherever you go. There's a fear for so many of us fitting in that it can silence us, but God is looking for people to go for Him. May we be bold wherever God has placed us.

**APPLICATION:** God has placed you in your community, neighborhood, family and work for such a time as this.

**PRAYER:** Ask God to help make you bold, to give you strength and endurance to shine brightly for Him, and to help you care more about His opinion than the opinions of men!



# GUARD YOUR WORDS

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*When we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we can turn the whole animal. Or take ships as an example. Although they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are steered by a very small rudder wherever the pilot wants to go. Likewise, the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark.*

**James 3:3-5 (NIV)**

How's your heart? Have you ever been asked that question? It's hard to know how to answer, but the truth is there's a way to know how your heart is really doing. The key is to trace your words. Your words reveal what's in your heart. Are your words full of life, hope and kindness, or are they negative, angry or filled with fear? The point is your words reveal the condition of your heart. When my heart is healthy and spiritually in tune, my words are filled with hope and life. When I'm exhausted or dry in my walk with God, my words reveal that.

Words have started wars, created addictions and crushed peoples' souls. You may even have some shrapnel in your heart right now from a word carelessly fired at you. We have all been affected by words. Unfortunately, negative words can have a tremendous effect on our lives. James above wants us to know that our words can be used as a blessing or a curse. We must watch the words we speak in anger; however, on the flip side, your words today can heal and create new life. Look for the people God has surrounded you with and speak life that causes their souls to flourish and grow. Choose words to build up in a culture that constantly tears down. So many of us wonder how we can have a huge impact. I'm convinced that if you simply use your words to speak in life and truth to people, then your impact will be radical. Look for opportunities to speak hope into people today and watch what God does. Your words matter! Jesus didn't see people as they were; He saw them as they would be. We shape the future by speaking into people and shaping their destinies. I'm in ministry because someone saw something in me, encouraged me and spoke life into me. Your words can create futures, possibilities and new realities, but you have to allow God to fill you with His Spirit. Then, He will use your words and life to build up others.

**APPLICATION:** Allow your words to be a blessing to people today instead of a curse.

**PRAYER:** Ask God to reveal who around you needs to hear words of blessing today. Ask the Spirit if there is anyone in your life who has been negatively affected by your words. Ask Him what words you can share with them. Be faithful wherever He leads.

# GUARD YOUR ATTITUDE

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*“Just kill me now, LORD! I’d rather be dead than alive if what I predicted will not happen.”*

*The LORD replied, “Is it right for you to be angry about this?”*

*Then Jonah went out to the east side of the city and made a shelter to sit under as he waited to see what would happen to the city. Jonah 4:3-5 (NLT)*

Have you ever seen a child, grandchild, niece or nephew pout? When they don’t get their way, they pout and complain to try to get what they want or to respond to not getting what they want. Surely, pouting is something we outgrow, isn’t it?

Jonah is sometimes referred to as the pouting prophet. Jonah has his ideas and plans, and they don’t align with God’s, so he does what none of us would ever do: he pouts. He complains. He grumbles and sits out for a little while. Jonah doesn’t want the Ninevites to be shown grace. They were a ruthless and wicked people to the Jews, so when God tells Jonah that He’s going to show them grace, Jonah is angry. It’s important to know that when we are angry or upset, we can often skew reality or be dramatic. Jonah asks to die. Elijah tells God when he’s upset that he is the only prophet left, which God reminds him isn’t true. Sometimes, we don’t see clearly when we get upset, hurt or frustrated. Like a pouting child who often only sees a portion of the truth or situation, we can be the same with circumstances or things that happen to us. Part of guarding your heart is guarding your attitude—when you don’t get what you want. When bad things happen, and things don’t go according to plan, may we be people who trust God. May we be people who follow Him even when it doesn’t make sense. There is something He sees that we can’t. His wisdom is beyond ours. Pouting has never once changed God’s mind, and it’s never changed a Christian for the better. It’s okay to grieve and be sad, but don’t pout or give up. Trust God with whatever you walk through, and remember He is good.

**APPLICATION:** Allow your attitude to be like Jesus today.

**PRAYER:** May God allow your heart to trust Him in all His ways. Spend some time thanking God for His goodness. Allow a deeper faith and trust to grow in you!

# GUARD YOUR TIME

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*Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish but understand what the Lord's will is. Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord.*

**Ephesians 5:15-19 (NIV)**

I was challenged years ago in my time with the Lord not to wish away seasons. Think about it: we say things like, *I can't wait until this week is over*, or *Things will be better once this season ends*. There are two things I have realized about this. Number one, it seems like it's always a season, and number two, time is the only thing we can't get more of. We have to be careful not to waste what we can't get more of. The Bible speaks about time as an investment. We give time, we spend time, and we invest time. This has changed the ways I speak about difficult seasons. While I don't enjoy difficult seasons, it's forced me to try and be present to God and others. Jesus' purpose on this earth, biblically speaking, could have been solved in a weekend. He could have come to this earth, died on the cross, and rose again. Yet, He spent time, gave time, and invested time into others. He didn't just rush through everything to get to His destination.

Your days are numbered, and we are called to guard our time. We'll never get this exact season again with these exact people. There are people I went to high school I will never talk to, previous neighbors I will never talk to, or co-workers I will never speak to again. That season is gone, and this verse tells us to make the most of every opportunity. The verse is a call not to get drunk or distracted from the world's pleasures but rather through the Spirit. This isn't a condemnation of alcohol; instead, it's showing the one who has been drinking is under the control of alcohol, they have been affected by it, and so have their actions. When we are under the control of the Spirit, we will be affected by Him, and our actions will show it. We must be people who look for every opportunity to love God and love people. Don't wish the season away; instead, look for the divine opportunities that are right before you, and God will work in ways you never imagined. Be faithful.

**APPLICATION:** Make the most of every opportunity in front of you, even the hard ones.

**PRAYER:** Ask God to give you the ability to trust Him in the hard times. Ask the Spirit to give you spiritual eyes to see and ears to hear where He is leading.

# DON'T MAKE EXCUSES

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*"Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law My servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go. Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful."* Joshua 1:7-8 (NIV)

Today, I was reminded of the promise that God's mercies are new daily. That means that they are limited for that day. Don't confuse this. God is not limited, but His mercies are limited to each day. Why? I believe because this is what keeps us in a relationship with God. There is a daily connection. I used to wonder how I could be so close to God one day and feel distant the next day. Now I know. His mercies are new each day, which means yesterday's manna won't be sufficient for today's problems. I don't eat and think, wow, *I'm full*, and then get surprised that I'm hungry the next day. I know it, and I expect it. You should expect spiritual hunger and thirst or be aware of your distance each day; that's why we spend time with God to fill us up.

I used to ask people if they were morning or night people when telling them to spend time with God. I realized God didn't ask Joshua this; He simply showed him the way to deep spiritual life and building your life around God. A missionary named Dawson Trotman said the first words he would read each morning were from the Bible, and the last words he would read before bed were from the Bible. What was he doing? He was meditating on God's Word like Joshua was called to above. He understood that God's mercies are new each day, and that's how he chose to start and end his day. If I don't feel close to God, I can't make excuses for not spending time meditating on Him. Meditating means filling my mind and heart with God's truth. It means to allow Him to fill me up. There is a promise that when we do this, we will be prosperous and successful, and what that means is that God will guide us and direct us even in the difficult things. Even the bad things will allow us to prosper spiritually speaking because when Jesus is at the center of our lives, then He can have His way through us. God's ways are always better, but we can't know God's ways until we know His heart, and to know His heart, we must spend time with Him. There are no shortcuts.

**APPLICATION:** Spend time with God each day and night.

**PRAYER:** Ask God to fill you each morning and night. Pray that God will make you committed to Him!

# BUILDING A FOUNDATION

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*“Anyone who listens to My teaching and follows it is wise, like a person who builds a house on solid rock. Though the rain comes in torrents and the floodwaters rise and the winds beat against that house, it won’t collapse because it is built on bedrock. But anyone who hears My teaching and doesn’t obey it is foolish, like a person who builds a house on sand. When the rains and floods come and the winds beat against that house, it will collapse with a mighty crash.”*

**Matthew 7:24-27 (NLT)**

People build their lives on all kinds of things: bank accounts, athletic achievements, academic accolades or social status. None of these things are inherently evil. But when we make them our foundation, our reason for living, our idol, then we’ve clearly displaced Jesus from the center of our lives.

In these final verses from the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus clearly distinguishes between those who follow His teachings and those who don’t. For those who build on Jesus as the foundation, there’s nothing to fear when the rain beats down and the floodwaters rise. But for those who have rejected Jesus’ way, an unenviable and inevitable end is in store—calamitous collapse.

One thing that’s always stood out to me from this passage is that the storms of life come for both groups. Following Jesus doesn’t exempt you from going through difficulty. In fact, Jesus assured us that as we follow Him, we will experience hardship and opposition (see John 16:33; 1 Peter 5:8).

How have you fared during previous storms in your life? If you’re in one right now, how’s your foundation holding up? Are you standing firm upon Jesus? Or are the things of this world you depended on causing you to crumble?

**APPLICATION:** Take a few moments to take stock of your life in this season. Can you honestly say that you’re building on the foundation that is Christ and His teachings? If not, what’s taking His place? What step do you need to take to bring Jesus into His rightful place? Ask God to show you.

**PRAYER:** Father, thank You for Your Son, Jesus. Help me build my life upon Him and His teachings. Grant me the conviction to cast down any idol that has taken His place of priority in my life. Sustain me, God, as only You can. In Jesus’ name, amen.

# FOLLOWING THE GREATEST EXAMPLE

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*Don't let anyone think less of you because you are young. Be an example to all believers in what you say, in the way you live, in your love, your faith, and your purity.*

1 Timothy 4:12 (NLT)

You may read the verse above and want to check out because, as much as it pains you to admit it, you're not young—or at least, not *that* young anymore. It happens to the best of us! Stick with me, though, as I believe this verse has something for all of us.

Paul is writing to Timothy, a younger person whom he has helped encourage and disciple. Timothy is pastoring a church at this point, and as a younger man, he may have been dealing with feelings of inadequacy, insecurity or self-doubt. Probably all of us have been in a position to lead those older than us at some point or another. It can be intimidating. Paul seeks to encourage this younger man further as he follows Christ and leads others.

When was the last time you encouraged a younger person?

It's easy to be dismissive of the next generation. And this isn't a new phenomenon—it seems like every generation has some level of derision for the one that follows. But what if we collectively made it our mission to encourage and love the next generation well? What if we equipped and empowered them to not just be the church of tomorrow but the church of today? Gen Z and Gen Alpha are made in the image of God, just like you and me. They are deeply loved by God, just like you and me. And they have a wonderful capacity for Kingdom impact, just like you and me.

So, let us spur them on! And along the way, let us not forget what Paul says to Timothy. That young people can be an example to all believers. We have things we can learn from the next generation. Perhaps God wants to use a younger person to be a tremendous blessing in your life. Are you open to that?

**APPLICATION:** How are you impacting the next generation? Ask God how He might want you to do so. How are you being encouraged by the next generation? Ask God how you might position yourself to have this happen.

**PRAYER:** God, thank You for the people You place in our lives to encourage us toward You. Please help me be aware of opportunities I have to impact the next generation. Please grant me the humility and openness to be impacted by them as well. In Jesus' name, amen.

# CREATING THE FUTURE

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*“But be careful. Don’t let your heart be deceived so that you turn away from the LORD and serve and worship other gods. If you do, the LORD’s anger will burn against you. He will shut up the sky and hold back the rain, and the ground will fail to produce its harvests. Then you will quickly die in that good land the LORD is giving you. “So commit yourselves wholeheartedly to these words of mine. Tie them to your hands and wear them on your forehead as reminders. Teach them to your children. Talk about them when you are at home and when you are on the road, when you are going to bed and when you are getting up. Write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates, so that as long as the sky remains above the earth, you and your children may flourish in the land the LORD swore to give your ancestors.*

**Deuteronomy 11:16-21 (NLT)**

On a scale of 1-10, how committed are you to the Lord?

No one else is around. There’s no one to impress. As you take stock of your relationship with God, where’s it at? Thriving? Are you deeply committed to Him in every area of your life? Floundering? Are you in a dry season where you feel disconnected and disinterested in what He has for you? Somewhere in between?

As we all take stock, let’s heed the wisdom Moses recorded in Deuteronomy 11. If we allow our hearts to be deceived, we may begin to worship other gods. Not totem poles or carvings, but perhaps popularity, security, pleasure or something else altogether. Moses makes it clear that when we do so, there are consequences. And when we think about consequences, we likely primarily think of the impact on us. But I think there’s something else at stake beyond ourselves: the next generation.

When we turn from God, chasing the idols and indulgences of this world, the next generation suffers. We model for them that it’s okay not to prioritize God, and then we wonder why they don’t prioritize God. In the 2000 blockbuster hit film *Gladiator*, Russell Crowe’s character Maximus Decimus Meridius famously says *brothers, what we do in life echoes in eternity*. Your action, or inaction, matters. Our faithfulness to God here and now will have a definitive impact on those who come behind us. In the passage above, Moses instructs us to teach the Word to our children. To talk about the Word regularly, making it a regular rhythm of our daily lives.

**APPLICATION:** What’s your next step? If your commitment to God is waning, where do you need to repent and recommit? If it’s strong, who are you being led to disciple and encourage toward Jesus?

**PRAYER:** God, help my faith and commitment to You grow. Help me never be content with the status quo but constantly move closer to You. Show me what steps I need to take, and help me walk in obedience to You. In Jesus’ name, amen.

# SHEPHERDING

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*Direct your children onto the right path, and when they are older, they will not leave it.* Proverbs 22:6 (NLT)

And now we come to perhaps the most famous verse as it pertains to the next generation. And, in truth, it can be a verse that comes with some bitterness. Because there are certainly parents who have done their best to direct their children onto the right path. But when those children grew older, they did, in fact, depart from that path. So, how do we reconcile that reality with what this verse says?

First, and perhaps most importantly, this verse is a general truism, not an absolute promise. The book of Proverbs largely speaks to how things generally are in various circumstances, not so much in concrete promises. The truth is that sometimes righteous men in the Bible go on to have wicked sons. Sometimes the opposite is true. Just study the history of Israel and Judah's kings. In another sense, our heavenly Father's son Israel went astray despite perfect love from a perfect Father.

So, if you're reading this as the parent of a prodigal, perhaps now is the time to let go of any anger, guilt or shame you've been holding onto. Trust that God sees, knows and loves your child even more than you do. As a parent, it's hard for me to imagine anyone loving my children more than me. But when I read Psalm 139, I'm reminded that God was the One handcrafting my children in the womb, knowing everything about them before I even met them.

The parable of the prodigal son is a good one to keep in mind as we consider young people we love who may grow up and distance themselves from God. Yes, the prodigal went through a season of wild living. But he eventually came to the end of himself and returned to the loving arms of his father. If that young person you love is currently astray, keep praying for them. If they're not dead, He's not done. Don't give up.

And if your child is still young, be intentional in showing them Jesus as they grow. Pray for them daily. Saturate them with the Word of God. Be authentic and consistent in your own faith, modeling for that child what it truly means to follow Jesus. Prioritize Christ-centered community over any of the other many things that might vie for your time (a significant part of this is being plugged into a healthy church). Talk about your faith. Share the Gospel with your child. Do all that you can do, then trust God with the rest.

**APPLICATION:** What young person can you pray for right now? Your own child? A relative? Someone in your community? Pray that God would move through the supernatural power of His Holy Spirit to move that young person from death to life. If we don't pray for the young people we love and have been entrusted to care for, who do we think will?

**PRAYER:** Father, You are sovereign, even when things in my life or the lives of those I love are difficult. I pray that many young people will pass from death to life, acknowledging You as Lord and Savior. Help me to love them well and show them You in my words and actions. In Jesus' name, amen.



# CHILDLIKE FAITH

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*Jesus called a little child to Him and put the child among them. Then He said, "I tell you the truth, unless you turn from your sins and become like little children, you will never get into the Kingdom of Heaven. So anyone who becomes as humble as this little child is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven."*

**Matthew 18:2-4 (NLT)**

Do you remember when you were a kid, and all you wanted to be was a grown-up? When you're young, you feel like the next major milestone will finally unlock something special for you: being able to stay up later, getting to drive, finishing high school, and getting your first *real job*. But as much as you can want to fast-forward into adulthood, Jesus makes it clear that there's something special about being like the little children.

The truth is that the complexities of the adult life can weigh us down. In the midst of our responsibilities, ambitions, worries and bills, something innocent can get buried. Jesus invited us to return to the simplicity of a childlike faith. Imagine this scene in Matthew 18. Jesus is surrounded by adults who are all eager to catch His attention. Jesus is an important man whose time is valuable. As the crowd clamors and presses in on Jesus, He intentionally makes a child the focus.

Children come to God with an innocence and openness that most adults lose somewhere along the way. They are largely free of the weight of past mistakes and anxiety about what lies in the future. Jesus calls us to emulate this childlike faith. Doing so requires humility and a willingness to be dependent on the Spirit.

Proverbs 16:18 (NLT) says this: *Pride goes before destruction, and haughtiness before a fall.*

Is pride preventing you from growing in your relationship with God? Pride is subtle and deceptive, leading you to believe that, really, you're doing just fine. But are you living wholly dependent on the Father like a small child does with their parent? Heed the words of Jesus, and humble yourself before God!

**APPLICATION:** Where do you need to repent? Is there something you know is obviously sin you're allowing to remain unchecked in your life? Confess that to God. Is there something more subtle but still dangerous, like pride, which has taken root? Ask God to humble you as you seek to follow Him.

**PRAYER:** Father, thank You for welcoming me. Please help me remain humble and wholly surrender to Your Lordship in my life. Take my pride away and grant me an awareness of anything that would separate me from You. In Jesus' name, amen.

# THE WEIGHT OF INFLUENCE

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*"And anyone who welcomes a little child like this on My behalf is welcoming Me. But if you cause one of these little ones who trusts in Me to fall into sin, it would be better for you to have a large millstone tied around your neck and be drowned in the depths of the sea."*  
**Matthew 18:5-6 (NLT)**

The leading of children is a sacred trust.

Whether you're a parent, extended family member, volunteer, coach, pastor or counselor, leading a child is a wonderful and weighty responsibility. But do we always see it that way? I'm afraid we may not. In the midst of our own issues and struggles, we may, at times, *phone it in*. But we must take seriously the sacred trust God has given us to shape and mold the next generation.

Jesus' words here are heavy. He says that to mislead a younger person into sin, it would be a better outcome to have a millstone tied around your neck and then be launched into the depths to drown. Millstones could weigh several hundred pounds. It's a striking illustration to those hearing Jesus speak. And it should also communicate to us how seriously we should take our ministry to the next generation.

Now, you may hear what Jesus says and decide it'd be better not to try at all than to try and fail. But consider the words of James, Jesus' brother, in James 4:17 (NLT): *Remember, it is sin to know what you ought to do and then not do it.*

So, we cannot simply remain on the bench. We must get in the game and impact the next generation for Jesus! You have young people in your life who need to be surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses to the faith. How will you impact them? Who are you bringing alongside you to help shepherd them in their discipleship journey? In her book *Sticky Faith*, Kara Powell speaks of the *new 5:1 ratio*. Rather than having one adult to watch five children, we want to surround each child with five caring, committed, Christlike adults who can invest in and encourage them toward Christ.

**APPLICATION:** How seriously have you taken your opportunities to impact the next generation? Have you given it your all, or perhaps your second-best table scraps? God expects more, and the next generation deserves better. Ask God to show you how to step up and lead young people toward Christ.

**PRAYER:** God, thank You for the privilege of being Your ambassador. As I seek to reach and disciple the next generation, help me walk humbly in step with Your Spirit. In Jesus' name, I pray, amen.

# RAISING UP

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*Jesus traveled through all the towns and villages of that area, teaching in the synagogues and announcing the Good News about the Kingdom. And He healed every kind of disease and illness. When He saw the crowds, He had compassion on them because they were confused and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. He said to His disciples, "The harvest is great, but the workers are few. So pray to the Lord who is in charge of the harvest; ask Him to send more workers into His fields."*

**Matthew 9:35-38 (NLT)**

We are called to model our lives after Jesus. This isn't a revolutionary or controversial statement. But do we? As we read the gospels and see how He lived, do we act on what He said and modeled for us? Consider what Jesus does in just these few short verses.

First—He shares the Good News about the Kingdom. When was the last time you had a Gospel-centric conversation... outside of church or small group? You may be tempted to give yourself a pass since you're not a pastor or missionary. But we're all called to be His ambassadors (see 2 Corinthians 5:20). Second, we see Jesus have compassion on people. I'll be the first to admit that compassion isn't always my first response when dealing with people, especially if they've wronged me in some way... like blocking the intersection when it's my turn to go. And yet, Jesus asked His Father to forgive the very people who were crucifying Him (see Luke 23:34).

Lastly, we see Jesus give instructions to His disciples. I would submit to you that these instructions weren't just for the twelve but for all of us who follow Him today. Jesus tells us to pray and ask God to raise up those who might go and share the Gospel. He says that *the harvest is great, but the workers are few*. Stated another way—there are more people out there who need to hear about Jesus than people are proclaiming His truth. So, let's ask God to embolden and empower ambassadors for the Kingdom!

**APPLICATION:** Pray that God would raise up many to proclaim His Word. Ask Him how you might be used as a voice to point others to Him. As we close out our week of focusing on the next generation, pray specifically for Gen Z and Gen Alpha—that God would raise up many to love and lead them.

**PRAYER:** God, help me to live as Your Son Jesus did. Grant me the courage and conviction to share about You. Please fill me with compassion for the lost. Please raise up many to proclaim Your truth, especially to the next generation. In Jesus' name, amen.

# THE HEART OF THE FATHER

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*“Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!”*

Luke 11:11-13 (NIV)

*“I thought to Myself, ‘I would love to treat you as My own children! I wanted nothing more than to give you this beautiful land—the finest possession in the world. I looked forward to your calling Me ‘Father,’ and I wanted you never to turn from Me.”*

Jeremiah 3:19 (NLT)

My dad wasn't around much during my growing-up years. There were no conversations about God or faith, and before I was a teenager, my dad had moved out. As a result, it never crossed my mind that God is a Father. I had no idea He invited me to be part of His forever family. I became a follower of Christ at age 21, but needless to say, it's taken a long, long time to experience God as a Father. I'm finding this is a struggle for so many people.

You may have had a different experience with your earthly father. Maybe he was more engaged and present in your life. Maybe he made it easier for you to relate with God as a Father. If that's true, celebrate! People like that seem to be rare these days.

But here's the reality: no matter how great or how awful your earthly dad is or was, he could never come close to how God is able to and wants to Father you. Our parents could never be perfect (obviously!), and it seems one of their primary roles was to help us know God as Father. We were, in a sense, meant to be handed off to the one true Father. After all, God is the One who made up the idea of fatherhood in the first place!

When we're able to deliberately and confidently call God *Father*, it reveals we've grasped something beautiful and fundamental about God. He delights in sharing His love toward us as a kind and gracious Father.

**APPLICATION:** Write *God is my Father* on a notecard or sticky. Put this somewhere you'll see it often and ask God to help you know Him as a Father more now than ever before.

**PRAYER:** God, I am Your son/daughter. You are my Father, and I need You to Father me. Amen.

# SHAPED BY THE FATHER

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*For You created my inmost being; You knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise You because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Your works are wonderful, I know that full well.*

Psalm 139:13-14 (NIV)

*Yet You, LORD, are our Father. We are the clay, You are the potter; We are all the work of Your hand.*

Isaiah 64:8 (NIV)

Have you ever felt like you didn't fit in, like you didn't have a place, or maybe unsure about your purpose in life? One of the central ways God helps us find our place is through our parents. Mom and Dad were meant to help us find our way. They were meant to partner with God in shaping us into the people He had in mind when He dreamed us up.

Some of us received great direction from our parents. Others of us, not so much. But no matter how well or poorly your mom and dad guided you, you have a God who created you in such a unique way that you have a unique purpose that only you can fill. He wants to shape you and mold you into something beautiful. The Father's hand is on you.

You may not know who you are or why you're here, but God does! Or you may have some idea and want to keep changing and growing. The good news is that you don't need to figure life out on your own. God is the One who made you and knows you inside and out. You are the work of the Master's hand, and just as a mother and father help a child become who God created them to be, God wants to Father you in this way, too. He is the Master Artist, and you are His *masterpiece* (Ephesians 2:10).

**APPLICATION:** As the clay needs to be soft in the potter's hands, we also need to be open, humble and surrendered to the Father's hands. Ask God what steps He wants you to take as He shapes and molds you, then listen and follow His Fatherly guidance.

**PRAYER:** Thank You, God, for making me unique and beautiful. As my loving Father, I ask You to continue shaping me into the person You had in mind when You made me. Amen.

# CLOSENESS OF THE FATHER

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*"I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be My people." And "I will be your Father, and you will be My sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty."* 2 Corinthians 6:16b, 18 (NIV)

*A Father to the fatherless, a Defender of widows, is God in His holy dwelling.*  
Psalm 68:5 (NIV)

At a recent men's retreat, I was guided to remember childhood experiences with my earthly father. I remembered the loneliness I felt when my dad was at work during the day. I remember feeling scared, especially when I would say or do something that would trigger my mom to some level of rage. I also remember being anxious at school. Who would take care of me? I asked God to show me where He was during that time. He reminded me how He revealed Himself to me through people at church. He reminded me of the overwhelming feeling of love I experienced when I learned Jesus died on the cross, taking the punishment I deserved and rose from the dead to bring me new life. I remember feeling a sense of assurance that, no matter what, I would always be with the Father.

Why do so many of us feel anxious and alone, even if our dads were doing the best they could? Then it hit me... God is everywhere all the time, all at once, and can Father us like no one else. Our earthly fathers can't possibly father us like God can. I remember as a child asking God to take care of me, and the sense of peace when I heard Him say, *I will be with you, and I will take care of you.* I began to lose my fear of being alone. I remember learning to trust God would take care of me. He was Fathering me. I had become His child.

By the way, at the end of the men's retreat, one of the leaders read a verse over us to conclude the retreat. It was Jeremiah 1:19 (NLT), *"They will fight you, but they will fail. For I am with you, and I will take care of you. I, the LORD, have spoken!"* Wow! God showed me He had written those exact words for all of us long ago, but that day, He showed me He had spoken them into my heart as a child and reminded me that He is a Father who is always close.

**APPLICATION:** Ask God to put thoughts in your mind of what He wants to say to you as your Father.

**PRAYER:** Father, thanks for being my Dad and always being close. Remind me what You want me to know today. Amen.

# THE COMPASSION AND COMFORT OF THE FATHER

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*Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God.*  
2 Corinthians 1:3-4 (NIV)

*As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear Him.*  
Psalm 103:13 (NIV)

God cares for you more than you know!

When I first became a follower of Christ, it was all new. I didn't own a Bible, I knew nothing about prayer, and I'd only been to church a handful of times. God knew I was lost and confused, so He brought someone into my life to get me started and help me along the journey.

My life had become a real mess. I had bombed my education, damaged many friendships and was in debt over \$20,000. The choices I'd been making for many years were ruining my life. It was time to make some difficult changes.

One of the hard decisions was selling the car that I absolutely loved. But without a car, I wouldn't have been able to get to work. Surprisingly, my new friend offered me his car. He only asked that he borrow it from me on Friday mornings so he could run errands. Not only that but often, when I woke up to go to work, he had walked a mile from his house to my apartment to put notes and lunch on the front seat. There were also times when I came home, and he had been there to do my laundry and fill my refrigerator. This man became the father I never had, and I became the son he never had. It was through this father/son relationship that I came to learn the compassion and comfort of God.

God doesn't want us to view Him as a Father who is cold, distant and difficult to relate to. He wants us to have a warm, affectionate, personal relationship with us. He wants us to recognize His gentle concern and care for us.

**APPLICATION:** Relax. Spend time today, allowing God to love you. Receive compassion and comfort from the Father into all your hurts and worries. Name them and invite Him into your life.

**PRAYER:** Father, I say yes to Your love. I put down my defenses and the ways I try to take care of myself without You. I trust You now to care for me in my troubles, and I pray You'd give me opportunities to comfort others with the love I receive from You. Amen.

# VALUED BY THE FATHER

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*“Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground outside your Father’s care. And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So don’t be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.”*

**Matthew 10:29-31 (NIV)**

*See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!*

**1 John 3:1a (NIV)**

You’re a treasure—one worth fighting for and dying for. God values you more than you know. Today’s Scriptures teach us that our identity and worth come only from the One who made us.

The mention of *two sparrows* in the first of today’s Scriptures would have been a well-known image to the original readers of this text. It would have brought to mind birds commonly sold or traded in the marketplace for food or other goods and services. Interestingly enough, birds were often sold in pairs (just like Matthew records). Birds were victims of prey. They often sought to escape capture. If the Father cares for even the smallest birds, imagine how much more He values you!

The reality is that all of us, in one way or another, look for validation and acceptance in places that never satisfy. We’ve taken our God-given desire for dignity and value and looked to people, places and circumstances to tell us who we are and to help us find our worth. Yet no amount of praise, success or accomplishment can fully communicate our value to God.

*God loves you as you are, not as you should be.*

Brennan Manning

**APPLICATION:** What’s the most precious, beautiful, valuable thing you can think of? Keep that in mind today, and every time you think of it, remember the immeasurable value God has for you.

**PRAYER:** God, thank You that You don’t judge me by my biggest mistakes. Thank You for Jesus who has made me new and secured my worth forever. Help me feel Your pleasure. Help me live from the eyes of a good, good Father, so I don’t seek my worth and value anywhere else. Amen.



# DISCIPLINE OF THE FATHER

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*Know then in your heart that as a man disciplines his son, so the LORD your God disciplines you.*  
Deuteronomy 8:5 (NIV)

*Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as His children. For what children are not disciplined by their father? If you are not disciplined—and everyone undergoes discipline—then you are not legitimate, not true sons and daughters at all. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.*  
Hebrews 12:7-8, 11 (NIV)

My wife is a rule follower. I am not—or at least I wasn't. She learned from an early age that there's a way things work. Decisions matter, and what we do today shapes us into the people we become. I, however, had very little correction or discipline (gosh, none that I can even remember) in my growing-up years. I developed a pattern of doing whatever I wanted and then trying to figure out how to avoid the inevitable negative consequences.

Let's face it: none of us have arrived, and none of us make all the right decisions. Even the rule followers need transformation and re-direction. And as a Father, God wouldn't be a good Father without providing discipline. In fact, fatherhood is the primary way training, nurture and maturity are developed.

The Bible provides example after example of the sort of training a father exercises over a son to mold his character—whether that's God as our Father who disciplines us for our good or our human fathers who seek to develop our maturity and the ability to navigate life.

Sadly, many people have had very negative experiences with their physical fathers—sometimes due to abuse, neglect, absence or other factors. On the other hand, God the Father is the source of truth and love (John 17:17; 1 John 4:16). And what's more, He loves us too much to leave us alone. He corrects us lovingly to help us become the people He designed us to be.

**APPLICATION:** Come to God as you are. Bring to Him your weaknesses, failures, and sins. There's no hiding! He already knows! Ask Him to guide you along a better path. And as difficult as it may be, follow His direction. The discipline and correction He gives will lead you into greater wisdom and life.

**PRAYER:** God, thank You for loving me so much that You don't leave me in my sin. I have a hard time with correction, but I ask You to direct my steps and intervene in my life so I can become more like You. Amen.

# THE FOREVER LOVE OF THE FATHER

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... “Yes, I have loved you with an everlasting love...” Jeremiah 31:3 (NKJV)

*But from everlasting to everlasting the LORD’S love is with those who fear Him, and His righteousness with their children’s children.* Psalm 103:17 (NIV)

I remember meeting the girl who’s now been my wife for 28 years. I remember the moment I fell in love with her. I remember where I was sitting, the color of the couch and how far away we were from the front door. I’ll never forget that moment. She was headed to work, and as I said goodbye, in that very moment, something exploded in my heart. That’s the moment my love for her began.

God doesn’t have a moment like that for you. There was never a time when God started loving you. That’s because God’s love has no beginning and no end. Scripture tells us that, yes, we are alienated and enemies of God because of our sin and disobedience (see Colossians 1:21). But we also learn in Romans 5:8 that God demonstrated His love for us in that *while we were still sinners, Christ died for us*. In other words, God’s love has always been there, and His love is greater than our sin. No matter what you’ve done or where this life has taken you, you are never too far away from the love of God. Remember, you have been criticizing yourself for years, and it hasn’t worked. Try receiving God’s love and see what happens!

*The best proof that Christ will never cease to love us lies in the fact that He never began.* Geerhardus Vos

**APPLICATION:** Take your fears and doubts and come close to God. Set aside time today to simply sit with the Father, who *has* always and *will* always love you.

**PRAYER:** Father, thank You for loving me when I was far away. Jesus, thank You for loving me in my sin. Holy Spirit, I surrender myself before You and ask You to fill my heart with Your love and acceptance. Amen.





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580 Brookwood Point Place • Simpsonville SC 29681

864.688.8200 • [brookwoodchurch.org](http://brookwoodchurch.org)