

S A C R I F I C E

Twenty-One Day Prayer Intensive

Day 1

This week we are focused on works with God. We want to begin to see what Jesus sees in our everyday walking and waking world. Let God's Spirit help us see God moments and suddenlies He has ordained for us to walk in to serve and love the people around us.

The goal is to make sure our doing is grounded in our being. Our being reflects what we have received and therefore what we can give away.

"Just as Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased." At once the Spirit sent him out into the wilderness," Mark 1:10-12 (NIV)

The Father tells Jesus He is pleased with Him, reminds Him as if He didn't already know His identity and sends Him out to start His ministry officially. For Jesus, He was tested immediately and we know He came back in power and ready to start His ministry on earth. We will focus on two things today. Our strength and confidence are found in our identity with God. Secondly, God sends us out to the world around us to represent what we have discovered about God to share with others .

Why cover this in the beginning of a week where our focus is on serving and helping others? Good question. Because I think we make bringing the Good News of the gospel outside the walls of the church too difficult. His life gives our life power, meaning and also focus. And too often, we complicate it by wanting our giving and sharing with others to be perfect.

And the main focus of this week is to do the works of God. Love God, love people. And the truest way to do this is to give away what you have. Jesus told His disciples, "Freely you have received, freely give."

Let's look at God's words to His son Jesus. "You are My son; with you I am well pleased." Well pleased. Before Jesus had done anything, God is pleased with Him.

Mark uses a very descriptive picture of the Father ripping open the heavens to tell Jesus what He thought of Him before any ministry was started. It was if the Father could not wait for this moment to publicly declare His love for his Son.

Before one miracle, healing, salvation, sermon, God is pleased. This is the strength of every child of God; to know the Father is pleased with us before we do anything. God loves us and is pleased we are in Jesus Christ. We are His children. We are loved for who we are to Him, not because of what we do.

For many Christians, the idea of loving or serving a person outside the walls of the church can be challenging and intimidating. We don't have to prove anything in our doing. We simply want to reflect what we have received and give it away. There are literally thousands of ways to give away the love of God and what we have received to others. The question is, what would you give away every single day if you could? Do you know?

Let me give you some examples:

- Loved people want to show love. How would you do this in the world around you? Is it a card? Hug? Words? Serving in some way?

- Healed people want to see others healed. Is that praying for people? Inviting them into a small group? Looking for opportunities to share hope and life-giving words?

- Redeemed and restored people look for the broken. Do you share your story? Do you serve at a Mission for the homeless? Do you walk people through their own journey?

- Blessed and gracious people want to be a blessing in some manner to others. Is that financial? Is it time? Is it words?

People who have discovered true purpose in Christ live on purpose. People who have been forgiven much, love much.

The more we know who we are and what we have received, the more we give it away to others. Our doing comes from our being. When we have experienced the goodness of God, we want to share it with the world around us.

We want to make the love of God tangible this week and hopefully all year.

Before we leave this moment, make a list of what you have discovered about God. What has changed your life. What do you know about Him and what have you received from Him?

How has your life been transformed? This is part of what you have to give away.

What bubbles up from your heart as a Christian? And how do you love to express it?

Remember, we don't have to prove anything. We are loved for who we are, not what we do. We are sons and daughters, freely we have received, freely we give. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you make a list of all the ways you love to share your faith, your life and your gifts with people around you. And then ask God to show you the opportunities.

Questions:

- 1. What stood out or what did God highlight to you as you read the devotional?**
- 2. What invitation is God extending to you personally?**
- 3. What action step do you need to take to move in obedience?**

Day 2

"Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here—has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit." Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see again." Acts 9:17-18

So, many of us know the story of Saul, who would later become the Apostle Paul. He was a very influential and zealous religious leader who was persecuting the early church after the resurrection of Jesus. In the beginning of Acts 9, he is described as breathing out murderous threats against Christians, having them thrown in jail and even killed. Jesus actually reveals Himself to Saul on the road to Damascus and asks why Saul is persecuting Him by the actions taken against the early church. He is temporarily blinded by his encounter with Jesus and has to be taken to a house to await what God now wants to do with his life. God sends Ananias to pray for Saul, Saul is filled with the Holy Spirit and then something like scales fall from his eyes. Saul has had a God moment and neither he nor our world will ever be the same because of it.

I want to use the scales as a metaphor for this devotional. One of the responsibilities of being Christian is to be a representative of the kingdom of God around us. But in order to do this effectively, we must be able to see as God sees. God transforms Saul by changing his heart and then allowing him to see anew. God reveals His desire for Saul to now do the true work of serving people with the gospel of Jesus Christ. God gives Saul new spiritual sight through Christ, and physical sight as Ananias prayed for him. When the scales fell, new purpose, new vision and a new mission started.

All of us have scales on our eyes. It can be for any number of reasons, especially because of the contentious times we are living in. In Saul's mind, there was no way he could ever think about loving Christians. And yet, through an encounter, Jesus changed all of that. The question to all of us today is simple: are there scales on our eyes and hearts that keep us from loving or serving people well? Has pain or politics clouded our vision? Are there people God has prompted us to engage in some way and yet we have been resistant because it would be inconvenient or frustrating? Are there neighbors or coworkers we shun because we don't like the way they live? Have you felt the Holy Spirit prompt you to engage, connect or reach out to someone who bothers or even offends you? God is pretty good at that right? He loves to invite us into moments to see people transformed, including moments where we too will be changed as we begin to see people the way He does. Remember Jonah? Even in his half-hearted obedience, repentance and revival broke out and a city was saved. Often, God moments are hidden behind things we may not want to do.

More than likely, God has already brought a person or people to mind. If not, He will. Because the world is filled with people who need Jesus and to see tangible love expressed through the church.

We are asking for our church to ask God to remove the scales from our eyes and our hearts that we may love and serve the world around us. Ask God's Spirit to fill you, to speak to you and for help to remove anything that keeps us blind for the people He desires to reach. Remember, it is God that changes people. We are simply called to love and serve well and in doing so, God bring the transformation and receives the glory.

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P.S. Did you follow through on what God showed you yesterday?

Day 3

This week we are focused on works with God. We want to begin to see what Jesus sees in our everyday walking and waking world. Let God's Spirit help us see God moments and suddenlies He has ordained for us to walk in to serve and love the people around us.

"Then Peter said, "Silver or gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk." Taking him by the right hand, he helped him up, and instantly the man's feet and ankles became strong." Acts 3:6-8 (NIV)

This is such a powerful God moment in scripture. Peter and John are on the way to church for a prayer meeting. And on the way there is a man who was born lame, unable to walk and asking for money. So as Peter and John are passing him by, the request for money stops them in their tracks.

And a kingdom principle occurs. The man becomes human to them. Not a cause. Not a problem. Not someone or something to be ignored. But a person, made in the image of God, in need. One of the secrets to God moments and suddenlies is when we see the need is connected to a person.

Peter and John found themselves in close proximity to this person in need and it compelled them to act. This is what nearness does. It makes needs personal. When people are indifferent to a need, most of the time it is because they are removed from it. But God calls Christian to move close to engage need.

Peter and John give what they have. They didn't have money so they gave this man what they did have. A faith to see the man healed. It was not what the man expected but by stopping, they gave this man God's desire for him in this very moment. Imagine it, the man more than likely believed it would only be in heaven where he would be able to walk. His request was one of survival. He simply wanted money to survive the day. Peter and John, in a moment of boldness, declare healing for the man and help him to his feet. God's kingdom came near. And when God draws near, healing happens and lives are changed.

But there are two examples of God moments in this story. We Pentecostals love the miraculous, and rightfully so, because we believe miracles are part of faith. We serve a supernatural God. No situation is too far out of reach. But let's take this story one step further. I want to highlight a number of other heroes often overlooked in this situation. In the beginning of chapter 3, it says the lame man was carried every day to be placed at the gate called Beautiful. Don't miss this. Every day, nameless people took on the responsibility to help this man find provision. Every day, people put this lame man in position to help him in his need. This everyday faithfulness, this mundane act, set this man up with an encounter from heaven.

We do not know how many days, weeks or years these people helped this man. We only know because of their consistent service, daily needs were met until the miracle took place. They were anonymous heroes caring for an outcast. And they remained engaged and committed every day. This too, is the kingdom of God.

Our care and faithfulness matter to God and to other people. Big or small, give what you have and whether you see the miracle in the moment, or you are simply faithful in the mundane, know this: God is always at work in our lives for the benefit of others. And when we do our part, God always gets the glory. Ask God to show you the moments He wants us to engage through our obedience.

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Day 4

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"Now, to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us," Ephesians 3:20 (NKJV)

Paul starts this set of verses with what He is praying believers in Jesus, and in verses 16-19 we read:

- That we would be strengthened in our spirit
- That Christ would dwell in our hearts
- That we would be rooted and grounded in love
- That we would know the height, the depth, the width and the length of God love for us
- And to be filled with the fullness of God

If this is Paul's desire for us, it must become our prayer and our desire for others as well. For them to know and experience God in the same way we have.

Paul then reminds us that it is He, God, who is able to do this. And not just able to do it, he begins to use superlatives to give us a much broader understanding of what Paul wants to communicate. God is able but so much more than able.

Listen to the definitions of the wording Paul uses when describing God's ability and His power:

Exceedingly- not sparingly but to the extreme and great extent

Abundantly- large quantities, plentiful, vast reservoir

Above- meaning there is nothing superior to God's ability

The word All- all means everything, leaving out nothing

Listen to the words again: Exceedingly, abundantly, above all we could ask or think

Can we take a moment to ponder what Paul is saying? We can't come up with anything in our thinking or imagination God cannot do. God and His ability are beyond the limits of our understanding. Paul started this verse saying Now to Him who is able...nothing is impossible to Him.

The second part of this verse is the key. God, by His power, begins to work within us. When God wants to do something through us, He begins to work within us first. He wants to make room that we may believe. He challenges our assumptions, lies and limits. He invites us into the possibility of what He can do. And then He beckons us to step out and reach out to others.

When we look at the world around us and by world, we are speaking of people, what do we focus on? In your family, with coworkers, strangers, and situations beyond our control, do you see human limitations or God-given possibility? The difficulty of the situation or the potential testimony of a transformed life? No one is beyond the power of the cross or the cascading love of God expressed through Jesus. We do not engage what we don't believe will change. If we are to effectively reach those God will highlight to us, then we must remind ourselves He is able and allow the Holy Spirit's power to change us.

Let this devotional reframe our thinking and expectation. God is able and His power is at work within us that we may believe and step out in faith.

Ask God to open your heart to His possibilities so others may experience Jesus through you. Remember, God is the God of the impossible and no person or situation is too far out of reach.

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Day 5

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"Again Jesus began to teach by the lake. The crowd that gathered around him was so large that he got into a boat and sat in it out on the lake, while all the people were along the shore at the water's edge. He taught them many things by parables, and in his teaching said: "Listen! A farmer went out to sow his seed.""
Mark 4:1-3 (NIV)

When Jesus spoke by using this parable, He was illustrating the word of God and the condition of the human heart. Seedtime and harvest were one of four things mentioned in Genesis God has established and promised they would always remain. Whenever and wherever seeds are planted, there will be a harvest. Seedtime and harvest are both a physical law, as well as a spiritual reality. When we share our faith in Christ, the seed goes forth. When we love and serve as Christ did and how the Bible commands, the seed goes forth. When we sacrifice, love and deny ourselves for the benefit of another, the seed goes forth.

We are all called to sow. We are stewards of all God has given us: Time, resources, abilities, spiritual and practical giftings, influence, relationships and all we know about Jesus. All of these things have the potential to multiply impact and affect the lives of people.

The farmer sowed. The farmer acted, chose the seed to be sown and then put it in the soil. Every single day we sow seed through our thoughts, actions, words we say and by the way we treat people. Every single day. And what is scary, often we do not even pay attention to what or how we sow in the hearts of other people.

But what if we did? What if we became much more intentional and were deliberate with what we wanted to invest in the people around us? In how we chose to sow, give, serve and love in our world? What if we were thoughtful of the seeds we wanted to plant in the hearts of people we encountered every day?

Mark 4 tells us not every heart or situation will be able to receive nor bear fruit. But this is not ultimately our issue. The parable is clear. The farmer sows seeds. We are to sow, and to sow intentionally and consistently.

What if it takes a hundred conversations with your back yard neighbor for a God moment to happen? What if it takes 100 visits to your favorite coffee shop, being kind to the barista before a God opportunity arises? And all the while your kindness tilled the ground for their hearts to receive the gospel.

What if it takes 100 times to as a co-worker how they are for them to share personally about a difficulty in their life?

What if it takes 100 personal invites to get someone to come to the church or life group to experience the love of God personally? Sow the seed. And by seeds, we don't just mean words. Back up your words with action, proof if you will, that your life reflects what you say.

Paul reminds us it is not our responsibility to make the seed grow or to close the deal by force. He told us in 1 Corinthians 3 that he planted, Apollos watered but it was God who gave the increase. This is what the Holy Spirit does. But we can be a direct participant to reveal what Jesus is like by how we choose to love people.

Isaiah 28 says "Listen and hear my voice; pay attention and hear what I say. When a farmer plows for planting, does he plow continually? Does he keep on breaking up and working the soil? When he has leveled the surface, does he not sow caraway and scatter cumin? Does he not plant wheat in its place, barley in its plot, and spelt in its field? His God instructs him and teaches him the right way.

If God can give instruction on how to plant and sow for crops in a field, how much more can He lead us in how we can sow into people? He knows what they need and He can lead us in words, thoughts, actions and

deeds. Ask the Lord for some things He would like you to sow into people in this season and write it down. Ask God for specific actions to take on behalf of another person. God knows specifically what they need. Pray daily for opportunities to put into practice what God shares with you. And ask the Holy Spirit to direct you specifically in every opportunity. You are the farmer. God will give the increase.

One last thing. In Luke 12 Jesus said a seed must die to create a multitude. And a seed unsown will always remain a solitary seed. Sacrificially serving others will produce a harvest and God will be glorified.

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Day 6

This week we are focused on works with God. We want to begin to see what Jesus sees in our everyday walking and waking world. Let God's Spirit help us see God moments and suddenlies He has ordained for us to walk in to serve and love the people around us.

"What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead." James 2:14

This will be the simplest devotional we have this week. Today is about action.

James is a very direct writer and consistently challenges the reader and church to put feet to faith. And he begins this portion of scripture with a question. What good is faith if it is not backed by deeds? Have you ever known someone who said they would do something and consistently did not follow through? It can be frustrating right? Eventually, there is a tendency to no longer trust nor listen to this individual. Why? Because they don't actually back up their words with action.

Now, we can all be inconsistent, so no condemnation. But there is an expectation God has for us to put our faith, what we say we believe, into action in our everyday lives.

How many of you would buy a product that consistently over promised and under delivered? Of course not! Value is created when something works in the way it was advertised Let's be honest, talk is cheap. Moments are created by action. Value is created with follow through.

Our faith is of value to our world as we walk it out tangibly and intentionally. It provides a clear picture of God while providing a tangible expression of His love for people through our obedience. Now, it may look different in the way each of us walks out our faith, but there is an expectation that our faith effects the people we encounter every single day.

Because we are focused on others around us this week, what are you tangibly putting into practice in service to God and for the benefit of another every day?

Paul goes on to write in verse 18: But someone will say, "You have faith; I have deeds. "Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by my deeds. The truth of the matter is, faith can be seen. Faith is belief set in motion. Action is the fruit, the proof, of faith. And our world is desperate to see something real. Be diligent to put feet to faith and action to belief.

It is time to be about it church. Remember, we ask God to help us see the God moments around us and to give us the courage to take action.

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Day 7

This week we are focused on works with God. We want to begin to see what Jesus sees in our everyday walking and waking world. Let God's Spirit help us see God moments and suddenlies He has ordained for us to walk in to serve and love the people around us.

"A few days later, when Jesus again entered Capernaum, the people heard that he had come home. They gathered in such large numbers that there was no room left, not even outside the door, and he preached the word to them. Some men came, bringing to him a paralyzed man, carried by four of them. Since they could not get him to Jesus because of the crowd, they made an opening in the roof above Jesus by digging through it and then lowered the mat the man was lying on." Mark 2:1-4 (NIV)

There is power in numbers, especially when we are mission to serve others. People who are like-minded can accomplish almost anything. Remember the tower of Babel? God said because the people were in agreement, nothing would be impossible to them.

Mark tells us of how Jesus is so surrounded by people wanting to get close to Him, there is no room to gain access to him through normal means. And yet we read how four men found a way. If you can't find a door, tear the roof off and tear the roof off they did, lowering the man into presence of Jesus. The text does not tell us if they are the paralyzed man's friends, acquaintances or relatives. We only know there is a need and they have devised a plan to get this person to Jesus. At any cost.

Throughout the Bible, we see the power of community and group effort. Jesus sent His disciples out initially to do ministry in pairs. Nehemiah was able to accomplish the task of rebuilding a city's walls because a large group of people had the mind and heart to work. Ecclesiastes speaks to the help of a friend and the power of three is a difficult bond to break. Proverbs reminds us iron sharpens iron and one person sharpens another. Acts 2 shows us of the power of a group devoted to Jesus and the growth of the early church. Too often, we see Christians attend church for community but try to walk out their faith and service to others by themselves. And the reality is, if we choose to walk faith alone, there is a tendency to falter and not follow through in difficult circumstances or challenging situations. There is a secret to be learned from the four men in this passage of scripture. Powerful things can happen when people serve together.

It has been said, if you want to fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go with someone. If you want to make a bigger impact, partner with like-minded, faith-filled people. There is a compounding factor of faith, creativity, accountability, boldness and follow through when we engage with others to meet need.

There was nothing these men could do in themselves to make this man walk again. So, they did what they could to get him to Jesus and allowed Jesus to bring the healing. The question is this: if the men were not together, would the miracle have happened? Would one person have been able to bring a paralyzed man to this ordained God moment? Would the roadblocks or difficulties a singular individual would have faced kept this paralyzed man from getting to where Jesus was? Maybe. But where one person may not have been able to meet this particular man's need, four of them together most definitely did.

If we are to be on mission as a church and as individuals, it helps to have people we are on mission with. So, who is your group, your squad, your crew, your people with whom you are actively engaged with to serve others? There are no orphans in the kingdom of God, and neither are there individual heroes. To be in a church means being part of something larger than ourselves. And being on mission means we are dedicated to serving our world with other people. As we close out this week, take the time to write down names of people you are currently on mission with to serve others. If you are not on a team, think about groups or teams who actively serve the needs around us and whether you should join them. And lastly, perhaps there is person you need to invite to serve in our church and community to help them be on mission to serve the world around us and show the love of Jesus. Let's be a people of faith and action and be on mission together.

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