2 BIBLE STUDY





THE FOR CAMPAIGN IS A SPIRITUAL JOURNEY

We hope that through these Bible studies and Devotions, we will understand generosity and its role in our life. This collection is designed to help you lean into God's presence during this season of great hope for what God can do through the people of Mountaintop Church.

As you discern the financial commitment you'll make, it should be made in light of teaching from the Bible and God's provision for your life. Ideally, your response will be joyful, sacrificial, hopeful, and full of thanksgiving for what God has already done in your life.

- Each study is designed to be used in discussion with a group of people, like a Mountaintop small group, but can also be used for independent personal study.
- The devotions are loosely connected with each study and are designed to be used following each one.

As you embark on this study, we pray you will seek meaning, have fun and Lean into God's presence.

Along the way, apply what you experience and be thankful.



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HOW ARE YOU INVESTING YOUR TALENTS?



INTRODUCTION

FOR is a simple three-letter word – a small word with a big punch. Technically a preposition, FOR indicates a purpose, an action, or a goal.

God is FOR You.
We are FOR You.
Let's be FOR Birmingham!
Does this sound familiar?

We say it every Sunday at Mountaintop because we want to be known by what we are FOR, not what we are against. We believe that Jesus came to give his life FOR a needy and broken world. We ask everyone to find ways to be FOR others because following Jesus means loving God and loving our neighbors.

John 15:13 says, "There is no greater love than to lay down one's life FOR one's friends." Jesus modeled laying down his life and invites us to do the same.

During these Bible study sessions and as you read the daily devotions, you will be invited to enter into a journey of the heart – wrestling with how you can be FOR, using your time, talents, and treasures to lay down your life so others might know new life.

During these sessions, you will be asked to consider how you can invest in the future mission of Mountaintop as we pursue a bold three-year initiative to reach unchurched families in our community through next-generation ministries. God might just reveal to you the role you have to play in changing the world by changing our city.

BREAKING THE ICE

ASK:

- 1. Which "FOR" inspires you a little more than the other two? Why?
- · FOR ONE: One more changed life matters to God.
- · FOR FAMILIES: One more changed family can shape a generation.
- · FOR BIRMINGHAM: One more changed city can change the world.
- 2. What would you say is the main key to making a great investment?
 - Knowledge
 - Timing
 - Strategy
 - Cash

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PRAY:

Open the Bible study time with a prayer for guidance.

ENGAGING SCRIPTURE

READ: Matthew 25:14-29

The term "talent" was first used for a unit of weight, then for a unit of coins. The present-day use of the word "talent" as "an ability" comes from this parable. Our talents (or abilities) reside in many areas – our time, experiences, expertise, creativity, natural gifting, and material or financial resources. In light of making a pledge to the FOR Campaign, we will consider all of them in this lesson.

- 1. In real life, who are the characters in this parable? Remember that a parable is a story with fictional characters that reveal a spiritual truth.
- 2. Which of the three servants in this parable can you relate to the most?
 - a. The one who was given five talents because you have been greatly blessed?
 - b. The one who was given two talents because you are thankful for what you have and live a pretty good life?
 - c. The one with one talent because life has had some setbacks you didn't see coming?
 - d.
- 3. If you were to tell someone what this parable is about without reading it to themwhat would you say? What is the main point?
 - a. Use it or lose it.
 - b. Be a good steward of what you have.
 - c. Invest what you have been given wisely.
 - d. Don't bury your treasure.
 - e. All of the above.

4 .	How do you feel when you are given a lot of responsibility?		
	 a. Nervous - I hope I don't mess it up. b. Overwhelmed - I wonder if I can handle everything. c. Proud - I'm happy people trust me and believe in me. d. Confident - I can handle it because I've done it before. e 		
5.	What kind of help do you need to invest your talents wisely?		
	a. Help to overcome anxiety and fear.		
	b. Help to believe my talents can make a difference.		
	c. Help to see past my past.		
	d. More talents.		
	e. An invitation.		
	f		
6.	When was the first time you ever thought about your income or financial resources as a talent to be invested for God?		
	a. I was taught this at a young age by my parents.		
	b. From a church teaching several years ago.		
	c. Recently.		
	d. Right now, with this question.		
	e		
7 .	In verses 21 and 23, what does it mean to "share your master's happiness?"		
8.	Can you tell a story about how you have seen someone else "share God's happiness" specifically by using their material or financial resources? How about in other ways?		

TAKE IT AND USE IT

ASK:

1. What changes would you need to make in order to be more satisfied with how you use your talents?

To have confidence that you are stewarding your talents well?

- a. Find a job more suited to my talents.
- b. Become more generous now instead of later.
- c. Use my talents as a volunteer.
- d. Stop worrying and start risking.
- e. Take a full assessment of my talents.
- f. Commit and follow through.

- 2. Obviously, the FOR Campaign has a big financial component. Our financial resources are one of the talents God expects us to invest. It will take all of us if we are going to achieve the financial goals of the campaign. What is the most strategic thing you can do over the next couple of weeks to be able to confidently make a decision about your financial commitment?
 - a. Pray, Pray, Pray.
 - b. Take an assessment of where I am in my life.
 - c. Ask God what I need for me, then decide about the rest.
 - d. Discuss this decision with those closest to me.
 - e. I'm not 100% sure what is going on yet with this FOR Campaign, so I need to take advantage of all the campaign resources like this group, the prayer guide, all the brochures, and a small fellowship meeting.
- 3. What is one non-financial talent you could begin experimenting with this week? How could this talent be FOR one, FOR families, or FOR BHM?

DEVOTION - THE HARVEST OF FREEDOM

READ: Joshua 1:8 (NIV)

"Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; 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."



When God first gave instructions for success, He said to always keep His Word on their lips. Jesus taught that God's Word is a seed (Luke 8:11), which produces a harvest if used properly. The harvest that God's Word produces in our life is freedom (John 8:31-32). Here are three steps to see a harvest of freedom in your life:

- 1. Plant the seed of the Word by reading it, saying it, praying it, and hearing it.
- 2. Water the seed by reading, speaking, praying, and hearing the Word some more.
- 3. Gather the harvest by speaking the Word (when you believe it, know it inwardly, and allow the Word to transform and grow you to be more like Jesus.)

Most people will try to skip the first two steps, thinking they'll still get results. You cannot reap the harvest without planting the seed and watering it. Sure, we face challenges daily and sometimes have a tendency to run on our reserves...not reading, saying, praying, and hearing the Word...and it shows in the way we walk, talk, and how we treat others.

The challenge is to feed your faith in every area you desire to be strong by speaking God's Word that covers those subjects.

Remember, if you want to harvest a continuous crop of freedom, you must continuously plant the seed of God's Word and seal it in your heart.

Say this: "I will read, speak, and listen to God's Word."

Pray this: "Lord, help me to be intentional about meditating on your Word. Guide my tongue and order my steps so that I may find rest in the freedom of Your Word."

DEVOTION - GOD IS PLEASED WITH FAITH



READ: Hebrews 11:6 (ESV)

"And without faith, it is impossible to please Him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who seek Him."

Faith is often described from an earthly perspective: believe in God and get your needs met. There's nothing wrong with believing God can and will supply your needs, but this is a one-sided view of faith in God from our perspective. Let's consider faith from God's perspective. Would you get any pleasure out of people who doubted you? Indeed, God gets no pleasure out of people doubting His Word either. To doubt what someone says shows disrespect. While in our human nature, we can be wrong, God only speaks the absolute truth. Unfortunately, many people only think of acting on God's Word from their perspective, without considering God's kingdom and greater purpose. Their motivation is completely self-centered, thinking only of what will profit them. Let's decide in 2023 not to act this way!

Do you desire to please God? If you don't desire to please God, you don't know Him. God is so wonderful, great, and good that if you know Him, you cannot help but desire to please Him. But how can a human please God? How can we, in any way, operate on God's level and impress Him? The Bible reveals that God is pleased with our faith.

READ: JOHN 6:28-29 HEBREWS 10:38

Say this: "I will walk by faith in God's Word -- because that pleases God."

Pray This: "God, let me have faith that pleases you. Remove all fear and doubt and refine me to put my trust in you in every aspect of my life."

READ: 2 Corinthians 9:6 (ESV)

"The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully."

Scripture is full of agricultural metaphors. From the dreams of Joseph, through the Psalms, all the way to Jesus' parables, biblical authors use agriculture to communicate a very clear message about a spiritual reality. This passage is no different. Here, Paul is encouraging the believers in Corinth to fulfill their pledge to give financially to their brothers and sisters in other churches. The Corinthians had promised to give and were eager to do so.

Paul pulls from the background of the wisdom literature from the Old Testament. Passages like Proverbs 11:24-25 and Proverbs 3:9-10 support what Paul says here. The amount of "harvest" you receive depends upon the amount of seed you plant. I've often dreamed of having the backyard garden that some of my neighbors and friends have. I've never planted a single seed in my yard. Would it not be silly to wake up, look out the window, and expect a crop of cucumbers and tomatoes? But how often do we take this approach to our walk with the Lord? We want to reap the closeness, joy, maturity, and satisfaction of a deep relationship with Him when we don't make an effort to sow the seeds of engaging scripture, loving radically, or being financially generous.

So, let's take the steps today to reap the harvest we desire. Let's seek to be faithful with all the Lord has given us to steward: our time, our money, our families, and our community. Paul reassures us in verse 10: "He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness." Think today about how you can sow to reap a harvest with eternal impact.

Say This: "I can sow today to reap an eternal harvest."

Pray This: "Lord, you are the Lord of the harvest. Show me how I can sow and where to sow so I can reap the harvest you want me to reap."

HOW ARE YOU CULTIVATING GENEROSITY?



INTRODUCTION

Generosity is good for the soul. Generosity gives life. In fact, even accidental generosity can bring joy to any person. What do you hear when you hear the word generosity? How about the word rich? What does it mean to be rich in this life? Do you see visions of fine leather, expensive drink, and designer clothing, or are you more likely to see images of close relationships, meaningful experiences, and thankfulness? Believe it or not, generosity is not about being less rich; it's about being richer.

In this lesson, we will explore the Commands, Cautions, and Choices of generosity as outlined in 1 Timothy. We hope this lesson will help prepare your heart to pledge to the FOR Campaign with satisfaction and confidence that can only come from God.

BREAKING THE ICE

- 1. What was your first job, and how much did you get paid?
- 2. Compare your first job to your most recent job benefits, pay, responsibility how big is the gap between your first job and most recent job?

PRAY:

Open the Bible Study time with a prayer for guidance.

ENGAGING SCRIPTURE

READ: 1 Timothy 6:17-19

1 Timothy is a letter written from an older Paul to a younger Timothy. Timothy was mentored by Paul and he became a primary partner with Paul, helping lead churches in the newly emerging Christian faith. Paul wrote this letter to Timothy to encourage him and give him wise counsel on leading a church. It's tempting to think that 1 Timothy is a manual about how to structure a church, but it is more than that. It is a letter that confronts a particular crisis point. Timothy was wrestling with people who were proud, arrogant, contentious, and greedy. Paul had essentially fired two elders with these qualities and had put Timothy in charge to lead differently. So, this book of the Bible is not as much about church structure as it is about the character of the people who can change the world for God.

In 1 Timothy 6:17-19, "rich" appears several times. In three verses, Paul uses it as an adjective, a noun, an adverb, and a verb. "Rich," "riches," "richly," and "to be rich" are used so closely together that it is clear that Paul is trying to make an important point about money and generosity. In these verses, we find cautions, commands, and choices. Each of them relates to how we view our stuff, ourselves, our neighbor, and God. So let's dig into this passage and find out why generosity is good for the soul.

CAUTIONS

ASK:

- 1. What does wealth provide to wealthy people? List a few comforting aspects and a few challenging problems:
- 2. Which CAUTION highlighted in verse 17 are you most tempted to ignore? Teach those who are rich in this world . . .
 - a. Pride or arrogance that wealth can bring to a soul.
 - b. Placing trust or hope in wealth above God.
 - c. Leaning on the reliability or certainty of wealth above God.
 - d. Not trusting that God gives us "all we need for our enjoyment."

READ: 1 Timothy 6:6-10

- 1. What is the difference between enjoying money and being a lover of money? How fine is the line between the two?
- 2. What attitudes mark the differences between "godliness with contentment" and "foolish and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin?"

COMMANDS

ASK:

- 1. From verse 18, which "command" do you think is most needed in our world today?
 - Do good.
 - Be rich in good works.
 - Be generous to those in need.
 - Be ready to share with others.
- 2. Which one do you need to work on personally?

CHOICES

- 1. Verse 19 begins with "by doing this." We find many outcomes for generosity in 1 Timothy 6:6-10 and 17-19. The following is a summary. Which outcome of generosity is most attractive to you? Most needed in our world today?
 - Generosity is good for the soul.
 - Generosity turns life into living.
 - Generosity turns the trap of materialism into gratefulness and contentment.
 - Generosity changes the world.
 - Generosity turns our trust from ourselves to God.
 - Generosity invests in eternity.
 - Generosity challenges our pride.
 - Generosity speaks to the goodness of God in our lives.
- 2. Generosity stores treasure for the next life and helps us experience true life today. Generosity is a powerful tool in our lives. What type of treasure will today's generosity give us in the life to come?

TAKE IT AND USE IT

SELF-REFLECTION: No sharing here. What type of giver are you?

1. Do a quick self-assessment.
FIRST TIME: I have never given to God through Mountaintop Church.
OCCASIONAL GIVER: I give to God, but not consistently. Sometimes I give emotionally.
INTENTIONAL GIVER: I plan ahead to give consistently but less than 10% of my income.
TITHER: I faithfully give 10% of my income on a consistent basis.
EXTRAVAGANT GIVER: I give beyond my tithe either consistently or with one-time gifts.
LEGACY GIVER: I no longer ask the question, "God, how much are you asking me to give? I now ask the question, "God, how much are you asking me to keep?"
2. What story does your giving tell about your relationship to God, to wealth, to others? What might you do to change your story or share your story for the benefit of others?
ASK:
1. During the FOR Campaign, everyone at Mountaintop is invited to consider how to

accelerate their financial generosity for three years to be FOR One, FOR Families, and FOR BHM in the ways God is calling at this moment in time. Can anyone in the group share a story of how God speaks to them through this spiritual discernment process? It's OK if no one wants to share, but if God is leading you in a certain place, it might be helpful to someone else in the group to know your journey.

DEVOTION - THE FOUNDATION FOR GIVING

READ: Mark 12:44 (ESV)

"They all gave out of their wealth, but she, out of her poverty, put in everything—all she had to live on."



It's easy to judge a book by its cover in today's society. We scroll through the social media feeds of friends' curated lives and see everyone's best moments. When we post, we do the same thing. The media we consume often presents lifestyles that many of us cannot attain. It's easy to judge the status or worth of others and ourselves by what we see. However, the Lord "sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart." (1 Samuel 16:7)

The setting for this story in Mark is in the temple. Jesus is sitting in the court of the women where the treasury is located. People would come here and deposit their monetary tithes and offerings into one of 13 receptacles depending on the type of gift. Sometimes the priests would examine the offering aloud and direct where it should go. One could also hear the quantity of the offering when it was placed. Both of these things could lead to embarrassment if you presented a small offering or tithe.

After watching wealthy people deposit large sums into the treasury, Jesus and His disciples watched a poor widow deposit a very small sum. Jesus saw past the outward appearance and saw into the heart of the woman. Though the others gave out of abundance, the woman gave out of submission. She gave all that she had left. Jesus saw this as the most significant gift.

For us, we have the same opportunity. What can you give to someone who created the whole universe and "the cattle on a thousand hills" (Psalm 50:10)? In reality, it isn't our money that God wants, it's our hearts. He sees past your circumstances and desires your submission and obedience with what you have. How can you submit to Him today and live generously with what He's given?

Say This: "I can be generous with what I have because I trust the Lord."

Pray This: "Lord, you can see my heart. Please grant me the desire and ability to live generously and honor you."

DEVOTION - GENEROUS AND WILLING TO SHARE

#2

READ: 1 Timothy 6:18 (NLT)

"Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share."

It is so easy to get caught up in a life that is exactly the opposite of generosity - greediness. We are not alone in our journey. The problem of greed started early in human history . . . and is present all through the Bible.

- Eve experienced greed when she desired the knowledge of good and evil.
- Cain wanted the approval of his gift to God, and his jealousy led him to violence.
- Noah's friends pursued the desires of the flesh so earnestly that the whole world became corrupt.
- Potiphar's wife intimately wanted Joseph, and it got Joseph thrown in prison.
- The Hebrew people were greedy for a visible god so they made a golden calf.
- Moses was greedy for water so he disobeyed God.
- Samson wanted Delilah and it took his strength from him.
- Saul was greedy with power so he tried to kill David.
- David wanted Bathsheba and he became a liar and a murderer in greed's wake.
- Solomon obtained everything and it led him to say "everything is meaningless."
- Kings, Prophets, and Priests were led astray by greed over and over.
- Satan tried to tempt Jesus with greed for food, power, and stature.
- Jesus was betrayed by greed for 30 pieces of silver.
- Jesus warned us over and over again against it.

If you feel greedy you are not alone. God's very best for your life is a life in pursuit of generosity. More than a single act, generosity is a mindset, a lifestyle, a plan, and yes . . . it is commanded in Scripture.

Say This: "I can defeat the pull of greed because I choose to be generous."

Pray This: "Lord, give me the ability to see the secret places of greed in my heart and help me intentionally be generous so that I can know your very best for my life and for the lives around me whom I can impact."

DEVOTION - PUTTING OUR HOPE IN GOD

#3

READ: 1 Timothy 6:17 (NLT)

"Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment."

When we are generous with our finances, we are putting our hope in God and not in wealth. When we put our hope in wealth, we become trapped by wealth. The biggest trap that a greedy desire for wealth brings is the "when – then" trap. It works like this.

WHEN I win the lottery, THEN I will be happy.

WHEN I move into a bigger house, THEN my family will prosper.

WHEN I get a better job, get married, and have kids, THEN I will have a purpose.

WHEN I have X amount of money, THEN I can be confident in my future.

WHEN I retire, THEN I will finally have peace in my life.

Write your own: WHEN I	, THEN I will	

Generosity is proof that my hope is in God and not in things. Generosity generates great freedom. Great freedom generates God's best for my life. Generosity is reliable, effective, simple, and easy to use, and it can be tons of fun. Opportunities for generosity are present everywhere . . . at work, at home, at the gym, at church, at play, at restaurants, at the ballgame . . . and when it gets deep down in your heart generosity can change the world.

Say This: "Generosity is reliable, effective, simple, easy, and can be tons of fun. Generosity shows the world that my hope is in God."

Pray This: "Lord, help me to trust in every area of my life, showing how generous I can be with my time, my talents, and my treasure. Show what my extra commitment toward the purposes of the FOR campaign should be."

HOW ARE YOU DOING LIFE THROUGH CHRIST?



INTRODUCTION

The Campaign is about more than a building, more than money. It's about the mission of Mountaintop and how our hearts are ready to be FOR Jesus. We are invited to see the world around us through God's eyes because we have turned from ourselves and toward God.

What are you expecting to happen this coming year? Do you have goals that you've set? A new direction? A new focus? Are you in the same job, same clothes, and same everyday existence? Are you comfortable to the point of being bored, or is your life a little bit upside down? Is there some degree of having your world rocked or seeing tragedy after tragedy or circumstance after circumstance that makes each day seem less bearable than the next? How do we find joy and freedom in the midst of everyday life? How are you living FOR Jesus? Let's look to Scripture and discuss.

As followers of Jesus, we live into a particular reality: The good news is that Jesus Christ died and rose again to pay the penalty of our sins and to give us new life in Him. We are free to live in a right relationship with God and in fellowship with Him. While we once were down and out, now, as believers devoted to Jesus, we are raised with Christ to live a life that glorifies God. In Christ, we can find freedom in giving up what we've been trying to hold on to. We can't make life work on our own so we are called to release our life to God. As Colossians 3:17 guides us, "And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him."



BREAKING THE ICE

ASK:

- 1. How many non-Christian spiritual or religious systems can you name that exist in our world today? Try to name at least a dozen as a group.
- 2. Bonus question: has anybody in the group briefly practiced any of the systems that have been named by the group that might be willing to share their experience?

PRAY:

Ask someone to open the Bible discussion time with a prayer for guidance.

ENGAGING SCRIPTURE

READ: Colossians 3:1-17

In these 17 verses, we are given a framework for where our identity lies and what controls us: actions we take, words we use, and thoughts we keep. Paul challenges us to set the right priority and show we are living by transformation in Christ. We are challenged to live FOR the best things, the right things, the Jesus things.

Paul wrote the letter of Colossians to the people in the church in the city of Colossae. Paul is addressing a developing problem there. Many people in that church community were beginning to combine teachings from many different sources to offer a "fuller" spiritual experience. Jesus was increasingly seen as one of several deities to be respected, but not as the one true Lord and Savior. In shaping how we should think of Jesus, Paul highlights forgiveness, thankfulness, and love as the marks of true followership.

READ: Colossians 3:1-4

ASK:

1. What does it mean to be raised with Christ?

Consider these verses also:

2 Corinthians 5:17 says, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!"

Galatians 2:20 says, "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."

- 2. Why is Paul instructing us that our priority in life must be following Jesus?
- 3. What are a few ways we can be intentional about setting our hearts and minds on things above and not on earthly things? List some ways here:

1) _____

2)_____

3) ____

4) _____

5)

6)_____

4. How do you find freedom from earthly things in knowing that when you choose Jesus, you "will appear with Him in glory?"

READ: Colossians 3:2-14

Paul tells us that instead of feeding our flesh, we are enabled to invest our lives in God's purposes FOR the world. But to do this, we must put to death our old practices, and earthly things in us.

- 5. Does Paul mean that we can simply reject a particular sin and we will never be tempted by it again?
- 6. Compare and contrast verses 5-8 with 12-14. Why do you think Colossians 3 includes the virtues of verses 12-14 after presenting the vices of verses 5-8?
- 7. How does being FOR others because of Jesus lead us to desire to become more like Christ?
- 8. What relationships in your life can change if you implement the virtues in verses 12-14?
- 9. What are practices of the "new self" (v. 12)? Which one do you want to see more fully developed this year?
- 10. What can you do more of that enables the process of renewal in your heart (v. 13-14)? What are you doing that you think might hinder the process of renewal?
- 11. Notice the shift from the individual to the corporate in verse 13. Why do you think this shift occurs?
- 12. Read verses 2, 10, and 15 in succession. Notice the relationship between "things from above" (v.2), the "new self" (v.10), and the "one body" (v.15)? How does the focus shift from me to us? How important is the "us" factor to the FOR Campaign and the journey ahead of Mountaintop?

READ: Colossians 3:15-17

ASK:

- 13. What immediately stands out? How can being thankful despite our circumstances demonstrate the peace of Christ ruling in our hearts?
- 14. How do John 16:33, Acts 10:36, Romans 5:1-2, Ephesians 2:13-17, and Colossians 1:19-20 give us a fuller understanding of the peace of Jesus?
- 15. Have you experienced this peace? Do you have any examples of a specific time or situations where you felt that Jesus gave you peace at a time when you could have been anxious or fearful?

TAKE IT AND USE IT:

READ: Colossians 3:16-17

We all face temptations and there are times when we fall, but we are not called to stay down. We stand back up when we repent before the Lord, hold ourselves accountable to other believers, and focus our heart and mind on living the virtues of Christ.

- 1. What steps can we take inwardly (through devotion and prayer)?
- 2. What steps can we take outwardly (through encouragement, invitation, and service)?
- 3. What can I surrender?
- 4. What actions can I take to find life through Christ?

DEVOTION - TURN YOUR EYES UPON JESUS

WEEK THREE: #1

READ: Psalm 123:1

"I lift up my eyes to you, to you who sit enthroned in heaven."

What has your focus? Work. School. Kids. Loved Ones. Keeping up routines. Really, what is it? Making plans to see the latest episode of your favorite show or watching the latest news? Politics, and war? Or is it quite simply, busyness? In the sea of endless responsibilities, it can be overwhelming, but God calls us to turn our focus on him in the chaos of the world.

READ:

Isaiah 40:26

Psalm 8:3-4

Hebrews 12:2

Romans 3:22

So when doubt, uncertainty, fear, or hopelessness come our way, we remember that none of these can withstand the weight of His Glory and the promise we have in Jesus. No matter our circumstances, we are to shift our perspective to God.

"Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus" is an old hymn written back in 1922, and the chorus says:

"Turn your eyes upon Jesus, Look full in His wonderful face, and the things of earth will grow strangely dim, in the light of His glory and grace." There is something freeing about knowing that our help comes from the Lord, and the challenge is clear: turn your eyes upon Jesus.

Say This: "I will put my faith in the God who set the stars in place and gave us a promise through Jesus Christ. I will stay focused on Him no matter my circumstance."

Pray this: "Lord, let me be reminded daily of your grace and mercy. Keep my eyes upon You in every circumstance."

DEVOTION - SHAKE FREE

#2

READ: Hebrews 12:28 (ESV)

"Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe."

Have you ever seen the process of sifting wheat? After the wheat is harvested, it goes through a process where it is vigorously shaken to remove the inedible portion of the wheat (the chaff) and to leave the edible (the grain). This grain is then taken to be processed and used in whatever the final product is. However, that final product is not possible without the removal of the chaff. This removal comes from the sifting process, which is similar to what this verse addresses.

This verse calls us to be "grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken." The author is speaking to believers that are heirs of God's kingdom. What does it mean that God's kingdom cannot be shaken? The answer is outlined in verse 27 when the author indicates that "things that have been made" are the things that can be shaken. This means that what cannot be shaken, God's kingdom, is eternal. We've received an imperishable kingdom while living in a perishing world.

What does this mean for us? We should know that the only things worth holding on to tightly are the things that are eternal. What are you striving after? What are you anxious about? What are you investing in? If the answer to any of these things doesn't have an eternal component, then our focus is too short-term. Let's focus our eyes on the eternal kingdom and the Everlasting King.

Say This: "I have received a kingdom that cannot be shaken!"

Pray This: "Lord, you are my eternal King, and I submit to you. Please give me the wisdom to let go of what is passing away and to take hold of things you have for me."

DEVOTION - EXPERIENCING TRUE LIFE

READ: 1 Timothy 6: 17-19

"In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life."...

I opened it. I had second thoughts. It was years later, and my house was still getting her mail, even though she had moved to Canada. So I opened it, and I was stunned. A credit limit of \$15,000 was reached. Last payment- \$400. Fees and interest- \$250. Quick math. At this rate, it would take eight years to pay the debt. The payments would total \$40,000. \$15,000 to pay back the debt. \$25,000 to the credit card company! Talk about some expensive shopping trips.

How do we humans get into these predicaments? One thing is for sure; math never tells the full story. Our heart always leads the way. There is this place where our heart cries, "more," and "I want," and "I deserve." This world loudly calls us toward misplaced trust. "I want" and "I deserve" never bring true life. In fact, like the lady whose mail I opened, misplaced trust is likely to bring just the opposite.

Our heart needs a switch that both shields it from misplaced trust and drives it toward the "true life." This heart switch is generosity. The Bible tells us that giving well is the path toward true life. But how? Paul shows us at the end of his letter to Timothy.

Take a minute in prayer and reflection with the questions below. Each one is related to Paul's vision for generosity in Timothy's life. Where do you need a heart switch today?

- 1. How much do you take pride in wealth? (v.17)
- 2. How have you trusted your life to money, believing it reliable? (v.17)
- 3. What portion of your money do you use to do good? (v.18)
- 4. How are you rich in good works and generous to those in need? (v.18)
- 5. How might you be ready to share with others through the FOR Campaign? (v.18)

Say This: "By doing this, I will be storing up treasure as a good foundation for the future so that I can experience true life."

Pray This: "Lord, help me be generous with all of my resources (time, relationships, skills, money), and show me the path to true life."

HOW ARE YOU BECOMING PART OF THE TEAM?

WEEK FOUR:

INTRODUCTION

The FOR Campaign is about being unified in mission and purpose like never before. It is so exciting to think about how God will use this three-year adventure to bless people for decades to come. We are on this journey together.

It is an incredible time to be a follower of Jesus. Today we have access to so many resources that generations before us could never have dreamed of and most of them are free! We can listen to gifted speakers and preachers from all over the globe. We carry the entire Bible and additional resources in our pockets. We have access to more information than at any other time in human history. While we use these resources for our own spiritual growth, it's easy to overlook the corporate side of our life in Christ. Jesus intended for his followers to both do life together and be on mission together.

Let's take a look at how the Bible says we all can participate in the journey together.

BREAKING THE ICE

ASK:

1. Share about a time when you were on a team that had great unity and you accomplished something significant that you will forever be thankful for.

PRAY:

Ask someone to open the Bible discussion time with a prayer for guidance.



ENGAGING SCRIPTURE

READ: Acts 2:41-47

Verse 41 discusses 3,000 people that were saved in a single day. This multitude became a single unified group from their various tribes and nations. In verse 42, the Greek word translated as fellowship is "koinonia." More broadly, this can mean "participation" or "community."

These early followers of Christ in Acts 2 were already gathered in Jerusalem to observe the festival of Pentecost. They worshiped in the temple and offered sacrifices to God according to the instructions of the Old Testament. Later in the New Testament, Peter relates the community of believers in Christ to a new temple.

ASK:

1. What happened in the verses preceding verse 41 that brought this multitude together?

READ: 1 Peter 2:4-7.

Verse 5 states one of the purposes of our koinōnia in this "spiritual house" is to offer "spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ." Since Jesus Christ came to offer His life as a sacrifice for our sins, there is no longer a need for the ritual animal sacrifices of the temple. So, the "spiritual sacrifices" Peter references must be something else.

- 1. What, or who, is the basis or foundation that holds all of the stones together?
- 2. How does this relate to the "koinonia" in Acts 2:42?

READ: Romans 12:1

It's clear through what we've read from Paul (Romans 12:1) and Peter (1 Peter 2:4-7) that our response to our salvation and the grace that was given to us through Christ is to offer up ourselves to Him.

ASK:

- 1. What have we found out about a "spiritual sacrifice"?
- 2. What are some ways that we can offer ourselves up to Jesus?
- 3. Is there a place where God is working on your heart right now?

READ: Hebrews 13:15-16

There are components to this sacrificial submission to the Lord that are individual and others that are corporate. The New Testament is not the only place to find this teaching. The Old Testament is full of communities called to contribute to the greater whole of the kingdom through sacrificial living. One example of this is the tithe system practiced in Israel.

- 1. The word "share" here is also koinōnia. What are the two sacrifices mentioned here?
- 2. How does Hebrews 13 tell us God sees such sacrifices?

READ: Malachi 3:10-12

ASK:

- 1. Did you know this is the only time God says to "test" Him? What does the Lord promise to those that do?
- 2. How does this promise reflect the "koinōnia" we studied earlier? (For additional reference, read Proverbs 3:9-10 & 2 Corinthians 9:6-11)

READ AGAIN: Acts 2:45-46

ASK:

- 1. What are the examples of community and spiritual sacrifices here?
- 2. What is the outcome that is presented in verse 47?

TAKE IT AND USE IT:

- 1. What are some examples of koinōnia opportunities at Mountaintop?
 Can you tell me about the one you are involved with now?
- 2. When does community become inwardly focused and lose its vitality?
- 3. How do you think true community could affect your desire to be FOR One? FOR Families? FOR BHM?
- 4. One of the principles of the FOR Campaign is "not equal gifts, but equal sacrifice." How does this principle relate to idea of koinonia?
- 5. What could happen through Mountaintop FOR the community around us if everyone at Mountaintop chooses to live sacrificially for the next three years?

DEVOTION - FAITHFUL LIVING

READ: Matthew 25:21 (ESV)

"His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.'



The Parable of the Talents is a popular teaching from Jesus's ministry. The servants all receive a different amount of talent (a sum of money) before the master goes on a journey. The master is entrusting his property to his servants. When he returns after a long time, he calls the servants to see what good they have done with what they were given. The servants are rewarded based on what they did with the talents given to them. The servants who invested what they received were placed in charge of even more. The servant who did nothing with his talent had it taken away. It's easy to focus on this last servant, but let's review the obedient servants to see what we can learn from them.

First, these servants received the master's property. These talents were not from their own labors but were solely the property of the master. Second, the servants understood the expectation to grow what they were given to bring a return back to their master.

Lastly, these servants were faithful and were given greater responsibility once their master returned. Like these servants, we have received what we have from the Lord. The Lord expects us to use what we have been given to live with an eternal mindset and to advance His kingdom. He promises much greater things to us on His return than we have now.

How are you living faithfully for the Lord? Are you acknowledging Him as the source and true owner of all that you have? Take note of where you are doing well. Are you giving your time, your money, and your devotion to Him? Pray that the Lord will reveal to you how you can invest in His kingdom.

Say This: "The Lord has given to me so that I can invest for His kingdom."

Pray This: "Lord, you have given me everything. Please show me how I can invest what you have given to further Your kingdom."



DEVOTION - CAST YOUR BREAD

READ: Ecclesiastes 5:12 (ESV)

"Sweet is the sleep of a laborer, whether he eats little or much, but the full stomach of the rich will not let him sleep."



Ecclesiastes is a book in the Old Testament in the genre of "wisdom literature." The goal of wisdom literature like Ecclesiastes or Proverbs is to communicate true principles of how to conduct your life in a righteous or wise, way. The book was written from the perspective of a king of Israel who had vast resources. This author wrote the book to "seek and to search out all that is done under heaven" (1:13). His goal was to understand the purpose behind all the things that people work for on earth. He provides his thesis in 1:14 - "all is vanity and a striving after wind."

The word is translated "vanity" or "meaningless," depending on which English version of the Bible you have. The Hebrew word here means "vapor." The author sets out to show you how much of what we seek is like trying to take hold of smoke: it just vanishes. As we get to chapter 5, we see this further illustrated. The laborer sleeps peacefully regardless of his daily provision. The wealthy man has a stomach so full that he cannot sleep. This metaphor speaks a truth we all observe: the more possessions and wealth we take on, the more anxiety and worry we take on as well. What's the point of all of this worry? Ultimately, it is a "striving after wind."

What are we to do, then? Scripture calls us to be good stewards of all that the Lord has given us. How can we focus what we have on something more than just "vapor"? The author of Ecclesiastes gives us some insight in 11:1. "Cast your bread upon the waters, for you will find it after many days."

The "bread" here is seed for grain cast on wet ground. After days, it will return to you in the harvest. This is followed in verse 2 with "give a portion to seven, or even to eight." The point here is to invest in people through generosity. If what we pursue on earth is only our own goals, we produce anxiety. Let's focus our time and energy on things we know are eternal. Think today about the people you encounter and the Kingdom you serve. How can you wisely invest what the Lord has given into something that matters?

Say This: "The Lord has given me things to steward and the strength to serve Him."

Pray This: "Lord, you are the Author of my purpose. Please show me how to steward what you have given me to accomplish your purpose for me."

DEVOTION - DISCIPLES AND CHURCH

#3

READ: Matthew 16:13-17

"When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?" They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets." "But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?" Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God. "Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven."

Disciples and church go together! You could state the opposite. Freelancing and false teachers go together. False teachers in scripture were almost always separated from the church, while disciples were almost always part of it. Disciples were focused on making disciples, while false teachers focused on making a following and a fortune.

So, what is church? "Church" only appears three times in the Gospels. One of the places "church" appears is in Matthew 16:13-17. Here Jesus says to Peter, "Upon this rock, I will build my church, and all the powers of hell will not conquer it." This rock is Peter's confession that Jesus is Lord. The "church," then, is built upon individual people who choose of their own free will to follow Jesus as "the Messiah, the Son of the living God."

It shouldn't be lost on us that the two other references to the church in the Gospels are about church conflict (Matthew 18). Church people are not perfect, and they have problems. But, even amid human weaknesses, Jesus says that the gates of hell will not conquer the "church." This church will prevail because Jesus is the defining factor, not humans. Peter confessed faith in Jesus, not himself or someone else.

Interesting historical fact: A group of people with any particular civic purpose could have been called a "church" in New Testament times. It is striking that the word translated to "church" was often used in Greek culture to describe citizens who gathered for the purpose of discussing the affairs of the state (politics). If we are not careful, that's all the modern church will be. Jesus didn't come to rescue Rome or reform Ceasar. Jesus came to be the Savior of all people. His invitation was simple, "Follow Me."

CON'T NEXT PAGE

"Church" for the first Christians literally meant, "a group called out of whatever world they lived in to follow Jesus." They were called out of Rome, Greece, Egypt, Cyprus, Jerusalem, wherever . . . to pledge primary allegiance to the person and cause of Jesus Christ.

Simply, followers follow together and invite others to join them. This is church.

Three questions:

- 1. In what ways are you actively following Jesus? List at least five ways:
- 2. What regular meetings help you follow Jesus? List as many as you can:
- 3. Who do you partner with as you follow Jesus? List at least five names:

Your "church" exists where the answers to these three questions intersect. These are your people. This is your church. The gates of hell will not prevail against it. Not because of you but because of Jesus.

Say This: "Disciples and church go together! We are a team. We are better together because together we can be FOR One, FOR Families, and FOR Birmingham in a way that we can't be alone."

Pray This: "Lord, show me the way I follow Jesus, what meetings (or teams) I need to be part of on a regular basis, and who I can partner with in the journey. Help me "go to church" in such a way that my faith as a disciple of Jesus can grow."







