

REDISCOVER CHURCH

Daily Devotions

for the Church Online Conference

7-11 February 2022

This devotional is adapted from

Mark Dever, *What is a Healthy Church?*
(Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2007)



7 February 2022

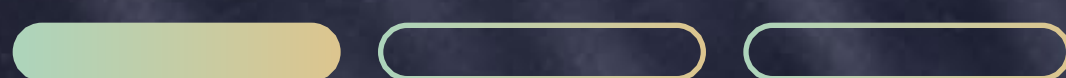
MONDAY



“For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility.... His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility.... Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God’s people and also members of his household.”

EPHESIANS 2:14-16, 19 (NIV)

Many Christians tend to view their Christianity as a personal relationship with God and not much else. They generally know that this “personal relationship” has some implications for how they should live. But I’m concerned that many Christians don’t realize how this most important relationship with God necessitates a number of secondary personal relationships—the relationships that Christ establishes between us and his body, the Church. God doesn’t mean for these to be relationships that we pick and choose at our whim among the many Christians “out there.” He means to establish us in relationship with an actual flesh-and-blood, step-on-your-toes body of people.



7 February 2022

MONDAY



A Christian is someone who, first and foremost, has been forgiven of his sin and been reconciled to God the Father through Jesus Christ. This happens when a person repents of his sins and puts his faith in the perfect, substitutionary death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

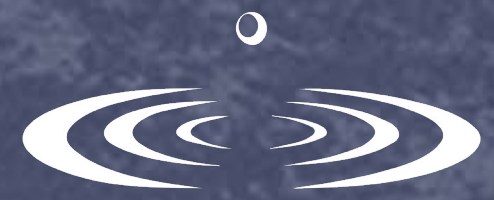
Yet that's not all! Second, a Christian is someone who, by virtue of his reconciliation with God, has been reconciled to God's people. If you're an orphan, you don't adopt parents; they adopt you. If your adoptive parents are named Smith, you now attend the Smith family dinners with the parents and all the children. You share a bedroom at night with the Smith siblings. When the teacher at school calls out attendance and says, "Smith?" you raise your hand like your older brother did before you and younger sister will do after you. And you do this not because you decided to play the role of "Smith," but because someone went to the orphanage and said, "You will be a Smith." On that day, you became the child of someone and the sibling of others.

Only your name's not Smith. It's *Christian*, named after the one through whom you were adopted, Christ (Eph. 1:5). Now you're part of the whole family of God. "The one who makes men holy and those who are made holy are of the same family" (Heb. 2:11).



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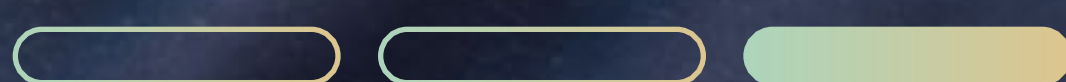
MONDAY



In short, it's impossible to answer the question what is a Christian? without ending up in a conversation about the church; at least, in the Bible it is.

Prayer Points

- Praise God that you are not a spiritual orphan, but in Christ you are adopted into his family with many spiritual brothers and sisters that we did not choose but God chose for us in this local church.
- Pray for Pastor Steve Lee, his family, and his ministry, and that God would speak through him as he delivers God's Word to us at our Church Online Conference.



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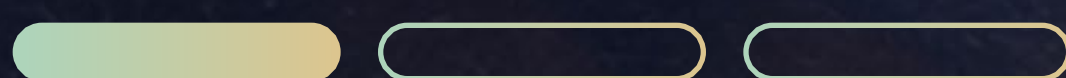
TUESDAY



“Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching. If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God.”

HEBREWS 10:23-27 (NIV)

When a person becomes a Christian, he doesn't just join a local church because it's a good habit for growing in spiritual maturity. He joins a local church because it's the expression of what Christ has *made him*—a member of the body of Christ. Being united to Christ means being united to every Christian. But that universal union must be given a living, breathing existence in a local church.



8 February 2022

TUESDAY



Sometimes theologians refer to a distinction between the universal church (all Christians everywhere throughout history) and the local church (those people who meet down the street from you to hear the Word preached and to practice baptism and the Lord's Supper). Other than a few references to the universal church (such as Matt. 16:18 and the bulk of Ephesians), most references to the church in the New Testament are to local churches, as when Paul writes, "To the church of God in Corinth" or "To the churches in Galatia."

Now what follows is a little intense, but it's important. The relationships between our *membership in the universal church* and our *membership in the local church* is a lot like the relationship between *the righteousness God gives us through faith* and *the actual practice of righteousness in our daily lives*. When we become Christians by faith, God declares us righteous. Yet we are still called to actively be righteous. A person who happily goes on living in unrighteousness calls into question whether he ever possessed Christ's righteousness in the first place (see Rom. 6:1-18; 8:5-14; James 2:14-15). So, too, it is with those who refuse to commit themselves to a local church. Committing to a local body is the natural outcome—it confirms what Christ has done. If you have no interest in actually committing yourself to an actual group of gospel-believing, Bible-teaching Christians, you might question whether you belong to the body of Christ at all!



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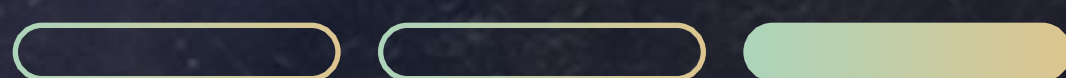
TUESDAY



Our state before God, if authentic, will translate into our daily decisions. Even if the process is slow and full of missteps. God really does change his people. Isn't that good news? So please, friend, don't grow complacent through some vague idea that you possess the righteousness of Christ if you're not pursuing a life of righteousness. Likewise, please do not be deceived by a vague conception of the universal church to which you belong if you're not pursuing that life together with an actual church.

Prayer Points

- Examine and pray regarding your actual practice of righteousness in your daily life and your regular presence and relationships with other brothers and sisters in the local church. What next steps might God be challenging you to take?
- Pray for hearts that are seeking and longing for Christ as our churches prepare for the Online Conference and that we won't be distracted (even by "good things") as we focus our minds on Christ during the conference.



9 February 2022

WEDNESDAY

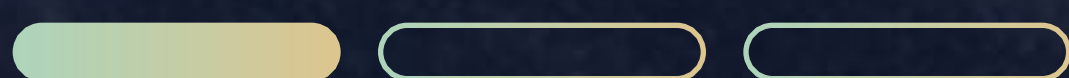


“We love because he first loved us. Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen. And he has given us this command: Anyone who loves God must also love their brother and sister.”

1 JOHN 4:19-21 (NIV)

As we gather to worship God and exercise love and good deeds toward one another, we demonstrate in real life, you might say, the fact that God has reconciled us to himself and to one another. We demonstrate to the world that we have been changed, not primarily because we memorize Bibleverses, pray before meals, tithe a portion of our income, and listen to Christian radio stations, but because we increasingly show a willingness to put up with, to forgive, and even to love a bunch of fellow sinners.

The church gives a visual presentation of the gospel when we forgive one another as Christ has forgiven us, when we commit to one another as Christ has committed to us, and when we lay down our lives for one another as Christ laid down his life for us.



9 February 2022

WEDNESDAY



Together we can display the gospel of Jesus Christ in a way we just can't by ourselves.

If your goal is to love all Christians, let me suggest working toward it by first committing to a concrete group of *real* Christians with all their foibles and follies. Commit to them through thick and thin for eighty years. Then come back and we'll talk about your progress in loving all Christians everywhere.

Indeed, we care for the church because it's the very body of our Savior. Have you noticed the words that Jesus used with the Christian-persecuting Saul—soon to be called Paul—when he confronted Saul on the road to Damascus? “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute *me*?” (Acts 9:4). Jesus identifies so closely with his church that he refers to it as himself! Christian, do you identify yourself with those whom your Savior identifies himself? Does your heart share the passions of his heart?

God will ask each member of the body, “Did you rejoice with the other members of the body when they rejoiced? Did you mourn with those who mourned? Did you treat the weaker parts as indispensable, and did you treat the parts that most think less honorable with special honor? Did you give double honor to those that led and taught you?” (see 1 Cor. 12:22-26 and 1 Tim. 5:17).



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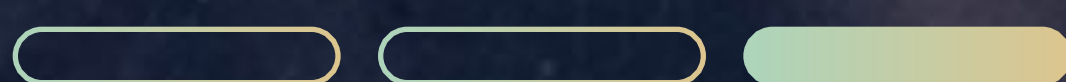
WEDNESDAY



Christian, are you ready for the day on which God will call you to account for how you have loved and served the church family, including your church leaders? Do you know what God says the church should be?

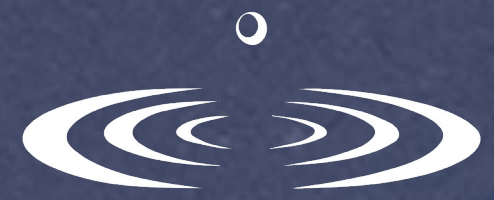
Prayer Points

- Confess and repent for how you have been lacking love for some people in our church, and resolve to forgive, reconcile, love, and commit to fellow members in Christ's body.
- Pray for healthy discipleship relationships in our church and that we would personally help bridge the gap from the gospel-revealing community that is preached and that is experienced in our church.



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THURSDAY

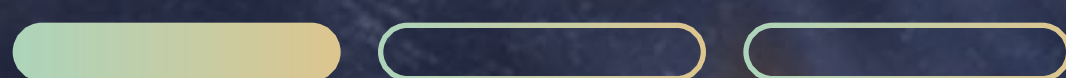


“Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.”

EPHESIANS 4:2-3 (NIV)

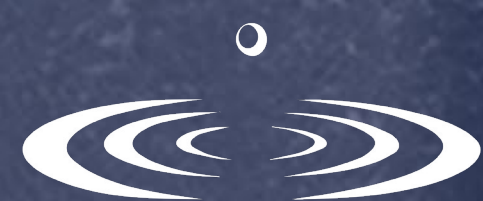
Remembering that the church is a people should help us recognize what's important and what's not important. For example, I have a temptation to let something like the style of music dictate how I feel about a church. Yet what does it say about my love for Christ and for Christ's people if I decide to leave a church because of the style of its music? At the very least, we could say that I've forgotten that the church, fundamentally, is a people and not a place.

At the same time, the Bible teaches that Christians should very much care about what happens at a church—what it *does*.



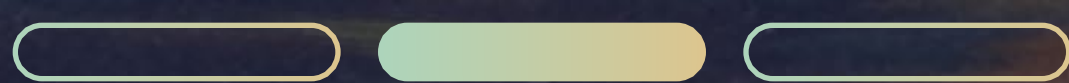
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THURSDAY



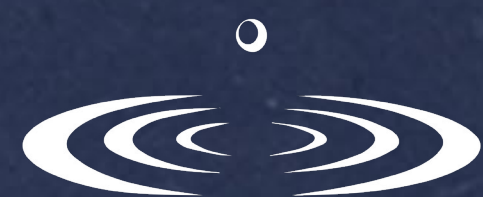
How do we balance these two things—caring about a people but also caring about what they do? If this were a book about raising Christian families, we would talk about *doing* certain things: eating dinner together, reading Scripture together, laughing together, praying for one another, and so on. Yet throughout the discussion, hopefully we would all remember that parents make mistakes and that kids will be kids. The family is not just an institution; it's a group of people.

So it is with a church. Does a particular church fail to meet your expectations in terms of what it *does*? If so, remember that this is a group of people who are still growing in grace. Love them. Serve them. Be patient with them. Again, think of a family. Whenever your parents, siblings, or children fail to meet your expectations, do you suddenly throw them out of the family? I hope you forgive and are patient with them. You might even stop to consider whether it's your expectations that should be adjusted! By this same token, we should ask ourselves whether we know how to love and persevere with church members who have different opinions, who fail to meet expectations, or even who sin against us. (Don't you and I have sin that ever needs to be forgiven?)



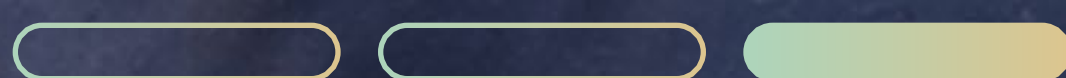
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THURSDAY



Prayer Points

- Do you see any aspects of our church we could grow in to be a more biblical church? Pray to the Lord regarding these aspects.
- Pray for a spirit of love and perseverance as we strive to maintain unity in our church body, despite the hindrances due to the ongoing pandemic.



11 February 2022

FRIDAY



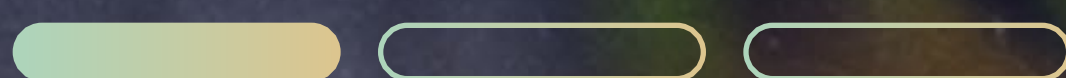
“Just as a nursing mother cares for her children, so we cared for you. Because we loved you so much, we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well.... For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory”

1 THESSALONIANS 2:7B-8, 11-12 (NIV)

The church is a people, not a statistic. John Brown, a pastor in the nineteenth century, wrote the following to one of his students who had just been ordained over a small congregation:

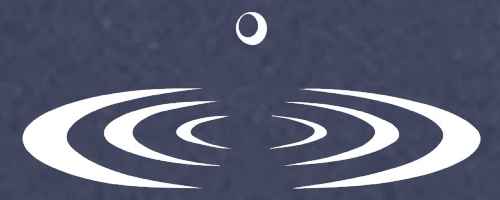
I know the vanity of your heart, and that you will feel mortified that your congregation is very small, in comparison with those of your brethren around you; but assure yourself on the word of an old man, that when you come to give an account of them to the Lord Christ, at his judgment-seat, you will think you have had enough.

As I considered the congregation over which God had given me charge, I felt the weightiness of this day of accounting before God. Did I want the church I pastored to become big? Popular and much discussed? A church that in some way looked impressive?



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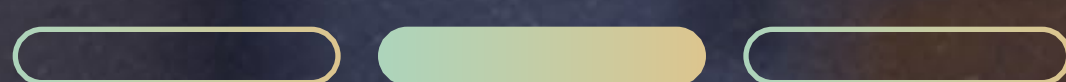
FRIDAY



Was I motivated in any way to just “put up with” or “tolerate” the group of people in front of me, to bide my time and wait for opportunities to make the church into what I thought it should be? Not that having desires for a church’s future is bad, but were my desires leading me to be indifferent, even annoyed, with the saints surrounding me in the present?

Or would I remember what was infinitely at stake for the several scores of souls already sitting in front of me on Sunday mornings? Would I love and serve these few, even if their unbiblical committees, and old-fashioned traditions, and not-my-favorite music selections stood in the way of my (I think legitimate) hopes for the church? And I know it’s not only pastors who fall into “tolerating” the people around them, biding their time until the church becomes what they envision it can be.

I pray that you, Christian, whether an elder or an infant in the faith, would increasingly recognize your responsibility to love, serve, encourage, and hold accountable the rest of your church family. When it comes to your flesh-and-blood siblings, I trust that you already recognize where Cain went wrong when he dismissively said to the Lord, “Am I my brother’s keeper?” But even more I hope that you recognize, if you haven’t already, your higher responsibility to the brothers and sisters of your church family.



11 February 2022

FRIDAY



A crowd was sitting around [Jesus], and they told him, “Your mother and brothers are outside looking for you.”

“Who are my mother and my brothers?” he asked. Then he looked at those seated in a circle

around him and said, “Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does God’s will is my brother and sister and mother.” (Mark 3:32-35 NIV)

Prayer Points

- Commit to live the remaining days of this year for the glory of Jesus Christ and pray personally for faith and faithfulness in the Lord no matter what may come.
- Pray that we would rediscover church as our spiritual family where we increasingly recognize our responsibility to love, serve, encourage, and hold accountable one another, so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ.

