



21 DAYS OF PRAYER
& CELEBRATION

CONNECTION

AUGUST 7 – 27, 2022

"INSTEAD, SPEAKING THE TRUTH IN LOVE, WE WILL GROW TO BECOME IN EVERY RESPECT THE MATURE BODY OF HIM WHO IS THE HEAD, THAT IS, CHRIST. FROM HIM THE WHOLE BODY, JOINED AND HELD TOGETHER BY EVERY SUPPORTING LIGAMENT, GROWS, AND BUILDS ITSELF UP IN LOVE, AS EACH PART DOES ITS WORK."

EPHESIANS 4:15-16

OUR MISSION IS TO...

CONNECT ALL PEOPLE TO THE LIFE-GIVING MESSAGE OF JESUS AS WE EXPERIENCE GOD, FIND FREEDOM, DISCOVER PURPOSE, AND MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN OUR WORLD.

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Text message: receive a link to each day's prayer via text messaging. Send **21days** to **704-703-0041**, and each day the link will be sent to your phone, and you can read each day's message of the link on your phone.

Praying Community

We are a praying community, and we believe that when we pray, miracles will happen, and God moves. Please join our CtK community to pray for our church, our community, our nation, and one another. Having full anticipation for all that God can and will do, members from our congregation have prayed and worked throughout the spring and summer to plan, write, and share devotions, prayers, and celebration resources.

As a praying community we come together to ask God to help us seek "Connection" in our lives, family, community, and in the world. As individuals, families, and communities we pray for our relationship with God to flourish throughout every aspect of our lives. Together let us each day set aside time to read and pray as a church family to seek to be His hands and feet.

Connection

The theme for August 21 Days of Prayer is Connection:

Ephesians 4:15-16 NIV Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows, and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

Over the last several years people have found it harder and harder to connect: with each other, the church, Jesus, family, community, the list can go on. We have all been there at the loss of connection as pandemics, sicknesses, masks, vaccines, racial struggles, politics have divided us and separated us. We have suffered the worse because of it. This August we want to focus on CONNECTION, reconnecting to those things we have lost or stepped away from. The time has never been better than no to reconnect with Jesus Christ and the community that we are called to be a part of.

Our key verse says we are called to do this in love! To reach out to each other, to encourage people to reconnect. We are to grow together into maturity putting

aside our differences and fears to remember that we connect to a body that is headed by Christ himself. We are the body of Christ and when one part of our body is missing, we do not function, we do not work as we should together. When we join in the name of Christ with Him at the head, we the church body, we as individuals, families, and communities will flourish because we gain our strength from Him who is our head. This prepares us then to go out into the world in the love of Christ and to build up others.

As a Christian we are called to be connected. As our verse says, our connections are like a body, our ligaments, our very bodies represent the connectedness that we are to have with God but also with each other. When we live in community we become more and more like Christ, working, and living together. We share burdens and joys. In a world where social media and phones are supposed to "help" us be more connected studies show that these drive us apart. So, as we go through this booklet lets seek connection with the Trinity (God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit) as they are one in body, we need to be that way with each other.

What are your goals for being more connected with God?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

What are your goals with being more connected with family?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

What are your goals with being more connected with friends/community?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Celebration

In this season we will not be fasting as a church, though you are encouraged to periodically fast to seek God's guidance and to draw near to Him. We are encouraging you to live in Celebration. Celebration is recognizing that we as people of God are to actively seek and live connected lives with Him and each other. When we live connected with God, we are celebrating what God has done in our lives through Jesus Christ and His empowering us by the Holy Spirit. We celebrate by returning to God what He has first done for us. As we seek and live out this connection, we must go out and connect with other people's lives, to show the love of Christ. We must bring the love of Christ wherever we go in the world. Our team has gathered dozens of ways to live in celebration in the world. You can do some individually, as a group, with your family or even with your community group, etc.... You may even come up with your own ways to be in celebration in the world! 2 Corinthians 5:20 calls us to be ambassadors of the risen Christ and we do this every day as we encounter others.

Using the list below, write down the ways you are living in celebration over these 21 Days of Prayer and Celebration, don't be afraid to talk about it. Talk with your family members, your community group members, your neighbors, and friends. Another good idea is to write it down in a journal. Doing so allows you to share with yourself what it feels like to be connected to God and to live in celebration.

As you look to begin your journey, our prayers and blessings are with you, and may you find connection to the One who has sent us all. May you grow deeper in the love of being sent by our Lord, may you make connection an ongoing lifestyle through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Possible Ways to Be Connected

I am living in God's Connection and celebrating Him, by the following ways:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.

- 9.
- 10.
- 11.
- 12.
- 13.
- 14.
- 15.

We would love to hear about your experience and journey through pictures and written experiences so that we can celebrate and walk with you! Feel free to email your experiences to Pastor Bill at bill@ctkchrLaotte.org.

Ways to Celebrate During Our 21 Days and Beyond:

1. Be a door holder today. Everywhere you go, hold the door open for the people coming behind you.
2. Share the coffee love. Buy a cup of coffee for the person in line behind you.
3. Look for someone lonely or sad. Not everyone is having a great day. Offer a smile and ask how you can bless them on the spot.
4. Pull up a chair, sit with someone who does not have the desire/motivation/ability/health you do, make it happen today.
5. Hand out flowers
6. What job in town goes unnoticed? Show up with treats for them!
7. Grab a trash bag and clean up the street or block where you live.
8. Write and deliver a handwritten note to your neighbor, for an extra amount of care show up with a treat.
9. Send a meal gift card to someone who is sick, to a young family, to someone who needs a break.
10. Invite one or two or a few college students, young professionals, or international students over for dinner or brunch this weekend.
11. Call a friend to go on a prayer walk
12. Call Charlotte rescue mission and go serve food
13. Invite a neighbor/s over for dinner or lunch and get to know them
14. Volunteer to serve at the church food pantry
15. Pick a friend and go for a walk/hike and thank God for his nature and glory
16. Take store bought snacks to the police or fire department
17. Invite someone over who is a different ethnic group and have a cookout or dinner
18. Deliver care packages to your neighbors

19. Offer to mow the lawn, do some light gardening for someone who is older or needs some extra help.
20. Write a note to your child's teacher thanking them for the hard work this last year or as school begins send your child's new teacher a note encouraging them.
21. Go to a church worship service that is mainly a different ethnic group to experience different ways to worship
22. Seek out the elderly in your church, take them out to coffee to hear their story
23. Invite an older woman to a younger woman's or mom's small group with the focus to learn from each other
24. Throw the ball or Frisbee in the evening as a family or friends
25. Invite another family with you to go to the park
26. Offer to babysit a younger couple's child so they can have a date night with free babysitting
27. Play a sport with a younger child in the neighborhood, they look up to older students
28. Start a car drive at your church/school/other group
29. Write encouraging messages on your driveway or sidewalk with chalk. Do the same for your neighbors.
30. Hang a sign in front of your home supporting healthcare workers, minority groups, or first responders.
31. Reach out to your neighbors when you go to the grocery store and offer to pick up essential items.
32. Make sure your elderly neighbors or friends can safely get their prescriptions from the pharmacy.
33. Take time to read and reflect on systemic racism and your role in the social justice movement
34. Surprise a neighbor or friend with fruit from the farm stand
35. Organize a book or puzzle swap with friends and neighbors
36. Surprise a neighbor or friend with their favorite coffee drink from a local coffee shop
37. If you have children, encourage them to send notes and artwork to friends, family, and neighbors.
38. Write notes and make artwork to be distributed at a local nursing home
39. Intentionally seek out books written by black, Hispanic, Asian, or other minority authors for yourselves and your children
40. Make yourself available to your neighbors to help them collect mail when they go out of town
41. Offer to wash a neighbor's car or sweep their porch
42. Write letters of encouragement to members of the class of 2020
43. Write a note of encouragement to a community group leader, volunteer, pastor, staff member at the church.
44. Write a note to a person who has influenced you in your life. It could be a coach, teacher, neighbor, the man/woman down the street.
45. Find a nonprofit in town to serve with. Some we have served with are Samaritan's Feet, Beds of Kids, and Charlotte Men's Shelter. Their mission is to serve in the Charlotte area, go online and check them out.

What other ideas do you have?

“Praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints...” **Ephesians 6:18**

**Use this page for Prayer Journaling, as desired,
during this 21 day journey.**



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**DAILY PRAYERS,
DEVOTIONALS,
& SCRIPTURE**

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John 15:12-13 NIV

My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends.

As I read this passage and began to pray about what it means to love each other as Jesus has loved us and the great love of laying down one's life for one's friends, I think of the powerful friendships I have known; people who have sacrificed their time, talent and treasures to echo Jesus' love in my life. Without hesitation they've followed this command and laid down the wants and needs of their own lives to show God's love to me.

I had a great need for this love when I became a new mom. I began to isolate myself as I struggled to manage the sleep deprivation, feeding schedule and the stress and anxiety of caring for my precious newborn. But God was with me and answered my prayers! I was introduced to the MOPs (Moms of Preschoolers) group at church and immediately found connection. I found other moms who were struggling like me and could relate to and rationalize all of my experiences, but I also found mothers who were farther along in their journey and could love on us as they had been loved when they were brand new moms.

They showed God's love to us, as it had been shown to them. They laid down their time to give hope to us. Now as a mother (slightly) farther along in my journey, I know the importance of being part of a community where we love each other as God has loved us and I pray others can feel God's love through me.

Our God is loving! He wants us to be connected with Him and with each other. God wants us to be surrounded with the support and encouragement. He desires you to have a joyful purposeful life!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, we thank you for your Word, we thank you for your truth, and we thank you for your never-failing love. Help us remember to lay down our lives for one another is not necessarily one grand act, but acts done daily that glorify you, Lord. Help us to live like you and for you and guide our hearts to love each other as you have love us, Lord. We trust you. We love you and we praise you!

Amen.

Romans 8:26-27 NIV

In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God's people accordance with the will of God.

The passage describes the works of the Holy Spirit with little to no words in its move to restore the connection with the Father. It is like 3G Network, The Father, The Son and The Holy Spirit. They work seamlessly throughout each believer. The Main Frame lies in Heaven and intercessor "Jesus" answers to the Father as our High Priest. The only interruption to this constant flow is sin and rejecting HIS existence, power and glory. Again, words are not necessary as God knows our heart; it is susceptible to us. This network is powered on love, worship to Him, prayer, relationship, and wholehearted devotion towards expanding his kingdom.

Take time to meditate and reflect on this analogy. What does it say to your Heart? Do you believe your prayers easily flow in/out of you? Do barriers currently exist in your prayer life or connection with God? Whom do you plan to call for help? God is already listening.

Prayer: Dear Lord, Thank You for the Holy Spirit. Please show me ways to improve and increase my prayer life. I wish to grow a stronger relationship with you. It is essential to live and demonstrate a loving life in Christ. The Bible calls you the Great, I AM. The First and Last, Abraham called you the Everlasting! I know I can do all things through you who strengthen me.

Amen.

John 4:20-21, 23 NIV

Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem.” “Woman,” Jesus replied, “believe me, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem... ...a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks.”

Most people know this story of the Samaritan woman at the well, although few actually know what a Samaritan is. The Samaritans were a group of Israelites that, like the Jews, descended from the Hebrew people. Also, like the Jews, they observed the Law of God that is found in the Torah, the first five books of our Old Testament. In fact, they kept God’s Law so well that the word Samaritan comes from the Hebrew *Shamerim*, meaning keepers [of the Torah].

At first glance, the Samaritans look pretty much like normal Jews. That’s because they were, except for a few disagreements. The most significant of which was this: the Samaritans maintained that the proper place to worship God was in Shechem, while the Jews believed it was Jerusalem. So, who’s right?

In my interpretation of the Gospel according to John, Jesus maintained that the proper way to worship God isn’t found in any particular location—on any mountain, in any church. Today, as you ponder the importance of connection, consider this message of liberation. Look around, and I guarantee you’ll see plenty of Shechems, plenty of Jerusalems. People today are no less willing to die on their mountains than they were in Jesus’ time. But the “proper” way to worship God isn’t in the lean-to churches of Intibucá or the Catholic monasteries of Tibet. It isn’t at Christ the King or St. Mark’s Episcopal, as a Calvinist or an Arminianist. It is neither by separating ourselves from the world nor insisting that it adopt our own beliefs.

The “proper” way to worship God is to do what Jesus did for the Samaritan at the well (John 4:1-42), for the defendant at the Mount of Olives (John 8:1-11), for the Romans who crucified him (Luke 23:34), and for the disabled man at the pool (John 5:1-13). That is, recognize the humanity of every person you encounter; defend unwaveringly every human’s right to a good life; practice forgiveness and understanding; and do something good before we each must slip away from the crowd.

Prayer: God, I pray that we learn to appreciate the value of each member of the human race. I pray that we arrive at the understanding that to connect with a person is not to change them, but rather to value their identity, to fight for them, to make love something real and practiced. Amen.

James 5:16 NIV

Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.

We see throughout the bible that every human sins. Romans 3:23 says it plainly: For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. So, knowing that we all sin, we can apply James 5:16 directly to our lives. This verse gives simple instructions on confession and prayer, thus resulting in healing.

First, it says that we are to confess our sins to each other. Confessing to others is easier said than done. But why? Why is confessing our sins so hard? I believe it is this: part shame, part pride. The shame is the embarrassment, the self-centeredness, the "what would they think of me if they knew how sinful my heart is?", the mortifying feeling that we want to avoid when confessing our sin. Then we have pride. Pride is viewed as a rebellion against God. It presumes that we have the excellence and glory that only God Himself possesses. Many times, I have allowed shame and pride get in the way of confession. I have found that prayer beforehand for the Spirit to move in my heart and allow me the courage to do what the Lord has called me to do has been very helpful.

Then it says to pray for each other. This is a powerful gift. When we pray for another, it draws us closer in relationships, while also drawing us closer to God. This selfless act is something we see Jesus doing time and time again during His life.

We have confessed our sins to one another, we have prayed for each other, and now we are washed clean. Now, we are righteous. We are rid of the barrier of sin that blocks the relationship between us and our Father.

Prayer: Gracious Father, thank you for your Word. Thank you for showing us Your love for us and for others. Thank you for the gift of relationship. We ask that You move in our hearts today. Give us the strength to confess to one another the sin that separates us from you. Give us the encouragement to pray for each other. Draw us closer to each other as we draw closer to you. Lord, we love you and we praise you.

In your Son's holy name, Amen.

Mark 12:28-31 NIV

One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?" "The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this: 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these."

Several years ago, I was sitting at a Panther's football game. I knew the person right beside me, but everyone else around me were total strangers. They were people from all walks of life. It was an exciting game where the Panthers trailed early but made an exciting comeback for the win.

One of the things I remember most fondly about this day was how, as the home team started their successful comeback, we all became instant friends. We were high-fiving each other after catches, hugging one another after touchdowns, and as one big happy family, celebrating when the game ended in victory. We were many but we were one! And our common denominator, the attraction that brought us all together and the bond that kept us that way, was the football team. For a few minutes that afternoon, we were all connected!

In our scripture lesson for today Jesus not only simplifies God's Law, but He does so in a specific order. First, love the Lord. Second, love your neighbor. Jesus was intentional in the order of these commands.

If we love God first, above all things, then He will be the common denominator for our relationships with others. This relationship with our Father (up) should bring us together with all people (out), and keep us together. Because we love Him, then it should follow that we love our neighbors (all people) as ourselves. When we commit to love God with all our heart, we see everyone else in a new light. We no longer see others as various skin colors or different socio-economic classes, but we see all as children of God, our brothers and sisters, all made and loved equally by the same Creator.

If we can rally together as one around a football team, think of the powerful connection we can have when we acknowledge God as the Father of us all. That is a game changer that makes us all winners!

Prayer: Father God, You bless us in so many ways and we thank You for that. You have given each of us the blessing of being one of Your children. Lord, help us to acknowledge and celebrate that connection each day by loving You, and everyone-everyone!-as we love ourselves. We pray this in the name of Your beloved Son Jesus. Amen.

John 15:5 NIV

"I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.

Christ used the figure of the vine to illustrate the necessity of His disciples abiding in Him, and taught that they will bear fruit for Him only as they abide in Him.

What other meanings does the word abide have?...to remain, to dwell, to spend.

This makes me think about the importance for us to remain and spend time with God and the importance this has, so we can bear fruit. What fruit? Gal. 5:22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. He promises that we will bear much fruit and I love that because, it is not me that needs to work on producing fruit but instead I need to spend time with God, so He will produce fruit on me. And this fruit will be an expression, as a result of my time with Him and will bless others in our community of believers. Others that are not yet part of it, but will be reached because of our testimony.

I thank God for his reminder on how much I need His presence in my life and especially now throughout these 21 days of prayer and reconnecting. It got easier to stay isolated but I need my brothers and sisters to live in community and definitely I need Him in my life.

Prayer: Dear God, I come to you asking to put in me the desire to abide in your presence. I ask that through the Holy Spirit, you will move me to want more of you because separated from you, I can do nothing. Help me stay connected through the body (the branches) so I may be supported in those times I feel weak. Also, so I may be there when others need me too.

In Jesus name, Amen!

Romans 12:16 NIV

Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.

Romans 12:16 is a really good verse when we address the idea of connection. This verse very bluntly and simply addresses us on how we should be with others in our community. God tells us not to look down on any of his children because of how they are. He tells us to not have pride in our hearts so that we can live, and even learn from those who we may think are of lower social position. We should have respect for everyone. No matter their background, habits, ethnicity, or social status.

It is so easy, especially now a days, to look at someone and immediately begin to judge and criticize how a person is living. With things like social media that are basically asking for people to have an opinion on another's life, it really creates a mindset to compare your life with others. To give an example, it's really easy to pull up to a red light and see a man with a cardboard sign, and say "how pathetic" or "get a job". I have been guilty of it many times myself. I think this is what God is referring to in this passage. That just because God has blessed us to be more fortunate than someone in that position, that doesn't mean that we should look down on those who are struggling. We should never consider ourselves "too good" to affiliate with those of lower social standings. God wants us to love all of his children, and to do whatever we can to bring up our brothers and sisters in Christ. Just like the verse says, we need to live in harmony with everyone. We should never have so much pride that we believe we're too good to have to deal with those in a tough spot. Only God can judge us.

Prayer: Dear God, please help me to find love in my heart so that I may not be so conceited. Humble me so that I may look at others who are in need of you, and know that could just as easily be myself. Help me to lift others up and never tear them down. Bless those who are lost, and help those who are in need of you Lord. Use me to be light for those in the darkness.

In Jesus name I pray, Amen.

I Corinthians 12:18-20 NIV

But in fact God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. If they were all one part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, but one body.

Chapter 12 of I Corinthians talks about how the body of Christ is one body. As members of this body, we have all been given different gifts to use within the body. But it takes all of us to come together with one mind, one body, and with one soul, with likeminded minds of Christ to build the kingdom. With this being said, I have the gift of interceding for the church, of serving, greeting and praying for the church. Others will have different gifts, but we are all important to the body. God wants his people to understand the importance of becoming one body with different members and giftedness in this body. We are not to think of ourselves more highly than others. It's his grace given to each one of us.

However, I am reminded by God that he gave us these different gifts so that He would be glorified by using these gifts within the body. I am grateful that he chose me to be a part of his body. I want to be pleasing to my father.

He created each one of us with a plan and only God knows the plan he has for us! Obey the word of God and know that we are all needed in the body of Christ. It's for his glory. Amen

Prayer: Heavenly Father, I am asking you to help us see that you love us, and we are all one in your eyes. You have given all of us different gifts and these gifts belong to you. Forgive us if we thought it was about us only. Help us to unite with one another and to have a mind of Christ so that we can build this kingdom together. May we decrease so that you can increase in us.

In Jesus name, Amen.

Colossians 3:12-13 NIV

Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.

These past two years of pandemic, quarantine, and "stay-at-home" orders didn't do much in the area of connection for this world. It seems we as a people have forgotten how to connect with others. We spent so much time behind computer screens and closed doors, that now while we are "allowed" to go out and interact with others...it seems like a foreign and unknown thing to us.

Just this past weekend, there was a speaker coming to our area and I really wanted to go and hear her speak. I bought the tickets, invited some friends, scheduled it on my calendar...but then the day came and I almost felt anxiety about being in community with hundreds of people I didn't know. I felt overwhelmed. I felt worried. It was the oddest thing, especially since people describe me as the most extroverted extrovert they have ever met! It was a strange feeling for me. I wasn't quite sure how to process how I was feeling. All I did know was that I NEEDED TO GO! Every fiber of my being told me, don't back out!

In those moments, I remembered the scripture I had been given for 21 Days of Prayer...so I reflected on Colossians 3:12-13 a bit that day and remembered...I am chosen and loved by God, He has a purpose for me. He gives me everything I need to encounter His people with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. He reminded me through these verses that being in community with people isn't hard and it isn't a lost art. It is a calling on each of us.

He reminded me that connecting with people and displaying His characteristics is how I can share Him with others. And to do that, I have to get out there and connect!

So, I did. I sucked it up. And I am so glad I did. The speaker was amazing. I learned a lot from her in her 45 minute talk. I met new friends. I bumped into old friends I hadn't seen in over a decade. Had a wonderful time of connecting with my husband and friends. It was amazing. And all the while, I had this message on my heart...wear (clothe myself) in compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. And forgive others as I have already been forgiven.

I'm excited that the world is coming out from behind the closed doors and screens. I am excited for face-to-face connections with people as God designed it. I am excited for the growth and knowledge we experience through connection with people and connection with Jesus. We just need to remember

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Michelle Yorick

to dress ourselves daily as He does...with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience...OH, and don't forget forgiveness!

So get out there today and every day and connect!

Prayer: Gracious Heavenly Father, I thank you for your gift of connection. I thank you for the people you will bring into our paths each day and I thank you for loving us so much that you trust us to treat your children with these characteristics. Please guide us in our encounters. Guide our words and our actions so that the people we come across see more of you and less of us. We love you and we praise you.

Amen.

Hebrews 10:24-25 NIV

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.

To spur one another means to encourage each other. Has someone ever needed your shoulder to cry on? Or maybe needed a word of encouragement before a big test, project, meeting or just for life in general? Perhaps someone needed a helping hand to move furniture or couldn't afford to get their groceries. No matter how big or small the gesture or deed is, we must always encourage each other and care for one another.

Sometimes it can be tempting to turn down meeting with a friend or a family member. It always seems like someone wants to get coffee or lunch when the time just isn't right for you. Life is too busy at the moment or work is bogging you down, but we should always consider gathering with each other when the opportunity arises. God works through us each and every day in many unique ways transforming and changing us and we should be sure to encourage and gather with one another through it all.

As we continue on each day approaching the day that Jesus returns, negativity and evilness becomes more subtle day in and day out. It becomes more and more difficult every day to decipher what is good and what is bad, or to see what is truth and what is not or what is right and what is wrong. False concepts and deceitful lies that deny the powerful Word of God is present within our society more now than ever. We need to gather together and be with each other throughout these times and share the Good News with each other and share the love that Jesus has for us. We should love one another like Jesus loves us. There is no greater love than the love that God has for us and we must always spur one another toward love and good deeds and never miss the opportunities that allow us to gather with each other and care for one another.

Prayer: Father, thank you for the opportunity we receive every day to encourage others through love and good deeds. Help me to not neglect meeting together with other believers and paying attention to the fact that the Day is drawing near. We pray that we can be accountable with each other and that we can continue to love one another like you love us God.

In your precious Sons name, Amen.

1 Corinthians 12:27-28 NIV

Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. And God has placed in the church first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, of helping, of guidance, and of different kinds of tongues.

Wow, what a body! Paul was very extensive in his list of roles in the body of Christ that work together to make a body work. There were some easily identified ones such as teachers and prophets. But there were also some lesser recognized ones such as helping and guidance. When I think on Ephesians 4:15-16, verse 16 calls out the importance of the supporting ligaments of the body. This connective tissue is so crucial, and I look at helping and guidance as a major part of this "tissue". The enemy however tries to make us believe that many of us don't fall in this category, instead thinking we are just bystanders.

It is more obvious when one has been placed in the church as a prophet or apostle or teacher and thus harder to deny. But being a helper or healer or guide is not as obvious. It is easy for one to diminish their place in the body when they do "simple tasks" or have a "small" area of service. But Paul is very clear that you are a part of the body of Christ and that God has placed you there. And it is in these areas that connect us like ligaments. Therefore, the body is no longer a group of organs that are thrown together but now one organism.

When we acknowledge and accept our roles, there is no denying the supernatural impact that we have. It is part of what made the church of Acts grow so quickly. It might be what drew you to Christ the King. When we realize our position, it naturally gravitates us to community with one another. That strengthens and grows us. And with that maturity, we go out into the world and make more disciples.

Regardless of whether you perceive your placement in the body of Christ as big or small, you are a vital part of this organism. It is now, more than ever, that we must step up to the calling that God has placed on us to keep us connected as one to achieve our commission.

Prayer: Oh Lord, my God. Give me less of me and more of you. Show me where I belong in your church. Make my gifts known. Help me not to measure worth with my human eyes, but with your heavenly ruler. Remind me that you know what is best. Lord, connect this church with your all powerful and gentle arms. Let the world see what true connection and community look like and desire to be a part.

Amen.

1 John 1:7 NIV

But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.

I remember as a little girl in Sunday school singing "This little light of mine, I'm going to let it shine". As children full of joy and wonder, it feels easy to shine our lights. We love our parents and family so much. It almost seems like second nature to love Jesus just as intensely.

As we get older, we crave belonging and connection early, starting at school, then work and even church. I remember my parents being intentional in making connections at church after and before service. Of course, it felt super awkward; like trial and error some were instantaneous, others required true vulnerability and the power of prayer.

As I reflect on this scripture, I am comforted by knowing that one thing always remains: we are all sons and daughters of God and no matter where we come from or where our paths are going, we all share a passion in getting close to Jesus's heart, often seeking forgiveness for our sins in hopes of a chance at daily redemption. Even if this was the 100,000th time in our life.

That's the beauty of this verse. It's short, sweet and to the point:

1. Walk in the light = Obey the word and let your God given light shine. When we walk in the light, we maintain a God connection. But when we choose to step away from it, our fellowship with God will be interrupted.
2. Have fellowship = Make friends with people that know the word of God which in turn can uplift and support you in good and bad times.
3. Blood of Jesus purifies us = Sin is the cause of a broken relationship with God. We pray for forgiveness with true repentance, and we are purified.

Prayer: Jesus, I praise you because you loved me first. Please forgive me of my sins and thank you that with your blood you cleanse me every day. It is your grace and mercy that allows me to walk in your heavenly light. Therefore, help me be a beacon of your light, love and understanding. Help me be a better brother/sister in Christ for my family, neighbors, friends, church congregation and anyone that you send across my path. Grant me the discernment to hear your voice and be guided by your love and light in obedience to your perfect will. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

1 Corinthians 12:12-14 NIV

Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many.

Many things make us unique from others. Some distinctions make us feel proud and valued. Sally is such a good artist! Johnny can really sing! However, other distinctions are used to categorize and control. Where one lives or the color of one's skin far too often determine social standing and opportunity.

I remember a childhood TV show with an educational song, "Which of these things is not like the others?" Various pictures flashed up on the TV screen and you were asked to call out the one that was different. As I remember, the images were harmless categories like birds and fish and such. However, the practice of placing objects into categories is deeply rooted. Mankind seems determined to create and use short-cuts and cheat-sheets to determine who is important and who can be ignored. Fortunately, God provides a better way through Christ that does not ignore us as individuals nor does His way lock us into harmful social constructs!

If you have ever seen a beautiful tapestry and then turned it over to inspect the back, you know that what is beautiful on one side is often messy on the other. God knew that mankind would sin, and He knew that positive differences would become hopelessly intertwined with humans creating and abusing differences for selfish purposes. The passage above demonstrates how He brings together what mankind tried to separate. Within the context of the Body, value is given to those parts that are often ignored and marginalized. Distinctness is not lost but reimagined into something beautiful. What Satan tried to destroy through division, God redeemed and reconnected for His kingdom. We each find wholeness and connection through God's work to redeem what was broken. Each is valuable and has a special purpose within the Body of Christ, not despite our differences, but because of our differences. Wow, only God can do that!

Prayer: Dear Lord, I praise you for transforming what was hopelessly broken into a picture of your power. Thank you for bringing us together in Christ, each unique and special in your eyes. Show me today how you have uniquely prepared me to be an important part of the church. Help me to see others as you see them and give me opportunity to value those often overlooked.

Amen.

John 1:14 NIV

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

When thinking about connecting to people, in our lives, Christ gives the greatest example of connecting in this verse. There was a gap between humanity and heaven. A gap so large, that we could never close it on our own. When He (The Word) became flesh and dwelt among us, His intent and purpose was to close this gap. Before Him, connecting to God involved blood sacrifices on altars, going to a priest, and following laws laid out in the Old Testament. God knew the only way to bridge that gap was to send Jesus to us, to dwell among us and to die for us. Jesus becoming flesh and paying the ultimate price for our freedom with his life, was the greatest connection ever known. Jesus lived as a human, had friends and family, and developed relationships. He connected with people in His life in such a way that Christianity spread through the entire world! His example of community with His disciples and the people He connected with while on earth, is a perfect model of how we are to connect with people in our lives. Christ was full of grace and truth, not to keep to Himself, but to share with us. We in turn are to share this with others. Encountering Christ should be life changing for us. Shouldn't that also mean when we encounter others, those moments should also be life changing?

I have made two friends in the last few months, simply by being "present in the moment". While I was mountain biking, I noticed a lady looking at directions on her phone. I asked if she was good with the trail, and she said she was a little turned around. I took her on a tour of my favorite route. We exchanged numbers and have ridden together since then, with plans for more adventures. Another time, I was waiting for an oil change. I planned to sit in the lobby, put headphones in to look occupied and write this devotional. Then I realized I was planning to write a devotional on connection, by disconnecting! So, I did not put the headphones in, and instead I made another friend with someone who was new to the area. We exchanged numbers and have connected again since that encounter. I think the times we seek to connect to others, like Christ demonstrated for us, are the times we are honoring His example with our lives.

Prayer: Father, may we always seek to live in grace and truth. Help us to dwell among the people we interact with daily and seek to connect our lives to others, as you sought to connect with us, by sending Jesus to us.

Be the ultimate connection of grace and truth, Amen.

Romans 5:6-8 NIV

You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. 8 But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

I am a sinner saved by God's grace. Psalm 51:5 says, "Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me". My Lord and my Savior Jesus Christ came into my life at the right time. He looked beyond all my faults and saw my needs. He rescued me. It blows my mind thinking about how Jesus died for me. I know how I am and I know how I was. It is hard to comprehend the love He has for me. "While we were still sinners, Christ died for us". Therefore, I let my light shine everywhere I go. The light is Jesus Christ that is in me.

It is so important that we stay connected to Jesus Christ, so that we can stay connected to each other. Here at CtK, it is no big I and little you. We are all one in Christ Jesus. God loves us all the same. We are strong when we are connected to one another. The fingers are weak when they are separated, but when the fingers come together and make a fist, they are strong. We have power when we come together as believers. There is nothing we cannot do with the power of God on our side.

We here at CtK are family. We come together on Sundays and throughout the week. We come to worship and praise God. We come to build one another up, to learn, to love and to help one another. We can only do this if we stay connected. Our walk with Jesus is not to be alone, but with one another, hand in hand and arm in arm. When we walk with Jesus, Jesus is walking with us. My brothers and my sisters let's journey together in Jesus' Name!

Prayer: Dear Lord Jesus, We thank you for your love, your mercies, your grace and for dying for us. Make us one in spirit and in Your truth. Let us always acknowledge You and let us not lean on our own understanding. Let us continue to look toward You in good times and bad times. You are our very help in time of trouble. We love you and we magnify your Name. We ask it all in Jesus' Name.

Amen.

Matthew 6:21 NIV

For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

In this passage, Jesus is talking to the disciples about matters of the heart. He's instructing them to connect their inward beliefs with their outward actions. In verses 19 through 21, He's instructing them (and us) to place our highest value on the things that matter most, and He's talking about more than just monetary things. He's talking to us about **anything** we value that takes our time and attention.

The word treasure can either mean "a collection of valuable objects that has been hidden away", or it describes the "actions we take regarding what we consider valuable". When we treasure something, we deliberately care for it because it gives us pleasure and we consider it special.

Caring for a treasure takes our time and attention. We return to it, admire it, watch over it, and protect it from damage. Most importantly, we think about it often because we imagine what this treasure will do for us now and in the future.

What does that mean for us today? Jesus is telling us not to spend our time and attention on things that only have value in **this** world. He wants us to spend our time and attention on things that have eternal value in **His** world.

What are some of the things that I will leave behind when I go to be with Him - my job, my possessions, my success, my hobbies, my pleasures, my friends, or my family? Compare these to what I will take with me to heaven - every moment I spend with Him, every act of service I do in His name, every verse of scripture I hide in my heart, every prayer I ever utter, every person I lead to Christ, and every moment of fellowship I spend with another believer. Think about it...what do we want to give our time and attention to?

We can have treasures that have incredible value in our future life with God in heaven. Anything that does not have value in His world might just be some junk in our lives we can leave behind.

Prayer: Lord, help us to value You more than anything else in this world. Change us on the inside and show us the incredible value of living for your Kingdom and loving what you love.

Amen.

Colossians 1:17 NIV

He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.

God is the connection for all of us!

Sometimes I may have a day or even a whole week when I am feeling alone. (Don't we all?) I'm very busy with a full calendar and surrounded by people all day, but still feeling lonely. In my heart, I know God is with me and I can talk to Him anytime I want but for me it's not the same as hearing another person's voice. Then my head starts to get the better of me, letting the enemy creep in and start poking at me, making me feel worse.

But then...a stranger walks in, someone I have never met. They proceed to tell me that I am special in God's eyes, created by Him for something great and to continue to let my light shine. In that moment I know God is talking to me, out loud not in my head, reassuring me that I am not alone. He is giving me uplifting hope when I need it the most.

God works through all of us, giving us hope and support, in the way that is just right for our needs. Some do hear God in their head, others hear Him through worship or sermons. I hear God through kind strangers. We are all connected, touching each other's lives, often without even realizing it.

Prayer: Dear Lord, thank you for taking care of me and talking to me out loud when I need it most. You never fail me and I am so grateful for those little miracles!!

Amen.

Galatians 6:2 NIV

Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.

Everybody knows the world needs changing. I don't know anyone who thinks our culture is moving in a good direction. I do know the solution though. The answer comes in knowing Jesus Christ, believing that we, Christians, are capable of accomplishing the change needed, and joining together to fulfill the law of Christ, loving one another. I can walk alongside you and encourage you, and I can ask you to do the same for me, because that's part of carrying each other's burdens. That's what Christians have been doing for two thousand years!

The early Christians were living and loving like nobody else. I didn't just make up this solution. I try not to re-create the wheel, when someone's already created it for me. You can find it yourself, in the Bible, God's Word. The first Christians dealt with very similar situations, but the scenarios they faced in transforming the culture and changing the world were even worse than those we face today. What'd they do? They lived differently. They lived and loved and worked differently than everyone else around them. They watched out for each other, even despite individual differences, as opposed to everyone fending for themselves. They lived in such a way that, today, we might say it's too good to be true or there's got to be a catch.

Christians today can inspire every person we touch with simple acts of generosity, kindness, patience, thoughtfulness, and selflessness. There is nothing more attractive than somebody actually living the teachings of Jesus Christ. It is amazingly attractive to all men and women, always has been, always will be. This fulfills the law of Christ ~ love one another.

The world needs changing! The first Christians changed the world. They had something the people of their time needed and wanted. When someone became a Christian during those early years, they became part of an active community that provided both spiritual and practical benefits and protections. They redefined their lives by allowing the teachings of Jesus to rearrange their priorities and they did it together, as communities. So, both as individuals and as communities, they were living life in a very attractive way. Whose burdens are you carrying today? Are you allowing the teachings of Jesus to rearrange your priorities?

Prayer: Dear Jesus, help me to recognize and carry the burdens of my brothers and sisters in need today and so fulfill the law of Christ. I want the world to know I am a Christian by your love expressed through me.

Amen.

Revelation 3:20 NIV

Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me.

This verse is told by John thru a vision and is directed at the church of Laodicea. The church is Christian, but Christ Himself has been locked out. Rather than turn His back on them, He knocks, seeking someone to acknowledge the church's need and open the door. If they would repent, Jesus would come in and take His rightful place in the church.

The lukewarm deeds of the Laodiceans were not in keeping with true salvation. Lukewarm deeds, those done without joy, without love, and without the fire of the Spirit, do harm to the people watching or receiving. The lukewarm are those who claim to know God but live as though He doesn't exist. They may go to church but their inner state is one of self-righteous complacency.

Jesus seeking admittance to the church! It's disquieting to think of Jesus standing outside of the church and knocking, but that's the position He was in. The Laodicean church had shut the door on the Head of the church; they were smug in their prosperity, but Jesus was left standing in the cold. He was an outsider to the hearts of the entire congregation.

I have spoken often of me putting Jesus in my back pocket while I lived the life I want. With Jesus in my back pocket, I can live and do as I wish knowing I will be forgiven. However, this also reminds me of Jesus telling us in Matthew 7:21 "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven." This is another disquieting statement. Here we may be rationalizing that we are right with Jesus when in reality Jesus is still in our back pocket.

God has placed me in a ministry that I never could have imagined. I have seen severely disabled children ride horses. I have comforted a family when their son suffered seizures. I have taken older gentlemen with brain trauma for an afternoon to give family and caretakers a break. I hold a Stepping Stones class at CtK to give families an hour of worry-free time with God. (shameless plug we could use help at 11:00 a.m.) Halfway thru, about 5 years, I started realizing that God was smiling on me and giving me more responsibility.

Open the door! Jesus is knocking for you. Show Jesus your deeds are done WITH joy, WITH love, and WITH the fire of the Spirit! Keep Jesus out of your back pocket and in front of you leading the way.

Prayer: Father, how wonderful you are. We look to you for guidance and love ALL of the time. Jesus we are truly blessed and loved to know that you care enough for us to knock and wait for us to answer. Help us to hear your knock, Lord. Help us to reach for the door knob and answer with faith, humility and servitude. Amen.

Galatians 4:7

So you are no longer a slave, but God's child; and since you are his child, God has made you also an heir.

How are you connected to Jesus?

This is an important question, possibly one of the most important of your life. Often it seems we think of him as far off, or not able to have a relationship, or that he is oppressive - "don't do this" or "do this". In the early part of our being in relationship with Jesus, we may need to feel this way - that he is telling us what to do. A lot of us coming out of trauma, addiction, struggle may need more structure or guidance. Even if we don't have those experiences, we often may feel that Christianity is a bunch of rules - we are the bottom and Jesus lords it over us.

We can't be connected to Jesus long term like this, thinking of ourselves as a "slave" to be told what to do and when to do it, not having any agency ourselves. This passage reminds us that to be connected to Jesus is to realize that we are his children. When we are baptized, we enter a special relationship where he captures us and sets us free. Free from sin, shame, guilt, addictions - whatever is holding us back, whatever is separating us from being connected to God at a deeper level. When we are his children, this frees us from our feelings of slavery. We can have a relationship built on love and not guilt or oppression - this becomes a lifelong walk in love instead of slavery.

We are now heirs! Jesus has given us all authority, power, and knowledge to go out into the world, to be connected to him as a father is connected to his children and gives them all he has when he leaves the world. We have been given authority, power, and the love to not be equal with Jesus but to take over here on earth for him to spread his work. If you see yourself connected to Jesus and feel as a slave, you haven't grown into a real relationship with him. But when you see yourself as a child and heir of the Heavenly King, you live out your relationship out of love - you accept that love and are able to impact the people and world around you because you have power and authority that has been given to you by your father.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for rescuing me from my sin and shame. Change me to see me as a child and heir of the Heavenly King. Lord Jesus, help me to grow deeper in connectedness to you, to see my sonship/daughtership in my relationship to you. Help me to see the freedom that I have in you. Lord, send me out in the world as your child seeking to bring your message to those around me. Amen.

Ephesians 2:12-13 NIV

Remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

What kind of life are you living? How do people see you? What would people ask you?

Though Paul and Silas were arrested, beaten, and imprisoned for doing good, they were filled with joy and sang praises to God. It seemed as if nothing would make them stop praising God. What did the prisoners see? Did it make the prisoners want to change their lives?

It would have been easy for Paul and Silas to escape, thinking God provided another miraculous jailbreak. But to them, the lives of others were more important than their own personal freedom and comfort. Would Paul and Silas have acted in the same manner before meeting Jesus? The jailer saw the prison doors open, but the prisoners remained, just hanging out with Paul. What did the jailer see? How did it make the jailer feel? The jailer was so impressed by Paul and Silas, by the love they showed to him, and from their ability to take joy even in misery, that he instantly wanted to change to the kind of life that Paul and Silas have.

This passage has always been a favorite of mine as it deals personally with how we are to act in this world and what it takes to be a child of God. That night was a night of repentance and renovation. The jailer looked after Paul and Silas's wounds and truly sought God. The result was a new and better life complete with God. That night the jailer and his household found salvation through grace that is only found by faith in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

I recently went through a period of renovation. It was a time where my life felt flat, knowing Jesus was there but not fully experiencing Him. I needed some time to stop and reflect and let the Master Architect re-engineer and take control of my life. One detail I see in Paul and his ministry is that Jesus was always in his thoughts. He was always praying and always worshipping, in good and bad times. This is very hard for me with all the distractions of this world. It is not easy to stop, reflect and turn away from the old to a new and better life.

Prayer: Father Almighty, show us the way to you. Father, show us what it means to have Jesus dwelling within us. Father, show us what needs to be changed and give us the strength to receive your will. Lord, we love everything about you. Guide us to act out a joyous Christian life so we may stand out to others and have them ask us how to be saved. Amen.

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