

CONNECT



PRAYER + FASTING

WHERE YOUR JOURNEY BEGINS



CONNECT

21

JANUARY 10TH - JANUARY 30TH

PRAYER + FASTING

WHERE YOUR JOURNEY BEGINS

Connect Twenty-One

From Pastors George and Carol Houston

Dear Reader,

The beginning of a new year is such an exciting time. Typically people are setting goals for the year and are looking to make life changes. We believe January is the best time to set aside 21 days to seek God for wisdom and direction for the year. God is always speaking. The question is, are we listening? We call this time **Connect 21**.

How do we set ourselves up to hear more clearly from God so that we have a foundation of wisdom to carry us through the year? During Connect 21, we seek to quiet the flesh as we fast. Then, we shift the time and resources we would have spent eating to pray and honor God. We do so with prayerful determination to manifest His presence and power in our lives.

Prayer is necessary to keep faith and never lose heart. Your testimony may come during Connect 21. It may come later in 2022 or even next year. But, real spiritual breakthroughs are achieved with focused, specific, consistent prayer. Are you willing to come together in prayer, to allow the Holy Spirit to move and have His way in our lives?

How to use this guide. This book provides prayer strategies, situational prayers, and useful tips to help you achieve spiritual success during this time of committed prayer and fasting. If every success is first a prayer success, why not

give yourself a skilled start? Take the time to learn the beauty of prayer and study the guidelines in advance. Allow the Holy Spirit to give you a plan for fasting. Lastly, do not forget to use the journal and outline your personal prayer targets before and during Connect 21.

God is searching for open hearts to fill and opportunities to show Himself strong on behalf of those who pursue Him. We believe the greater the participation, the greater the manifestation. Please join us and commit to Connect 21 as we turn our focus from ourselves and toward God and others.

We eagerly await what the Lord will do for us, in us, and through us during these very special 21 days. Prayer changes everything!

Table of Contents

TABLE OF CONTENTS

• Connect 21	3
• Table of Contents	5
• Prayer as a Lifestyle	6
• Why Fast?	7
• Prayer Models	
○ A.C.T.S. Prayer Model	9
○ The Apostle Paul's Prayer Model	16
○ Additional Prayer Strategies	19
• Devotionals	
○ Week 1	30
○ Week 2	48
○ Week 3	69
• Personal Prayer	
○ Prayer Targets	90
○ Prayer Journal	98
• Thank You	101

All the scriptures used in this book are reference the New King James Version (NKJV) of the Bible, unless otherwise notated.

Prayer as a Lifestyle

Prayer is most effective when it is not just something we sometimes do, but a lifestyle we cultivate. As we pursue a prayer lifestyle, we can look at the example Jesus gave during His life on earth.

Here are three things that scripture tells us Jesus did for His time in prayer.

*Now in the morning, having risen a long while before daylight, He went out and departed to a solitary place; and there He prayed. **Mark 1:35 NKJV***

A CERTAIN TIME

Jesus got up very early in the morning to spend time with His Heavenly Father. For prayer to work, we should do the same. Make a daily appointment with God and keep it.

A CERTAIN PLACE

Jesus had a prayer place. Your prayer place needs to be an undistracted environment where you can pray out loud and perhaps have some worship music playing in the background.

A CERTAIN PLAN

Go into your prayer time with a plan. If it changes, that is fine. When Jesus taught His disciples how to pray, He gave His disciples a prayer outline.

The prayer models outlined later in this book can help you practice different ways to pray, which can help you find deeper purpose and connect to God through your prayer time. Select a prayer model or topic, and as you pray, focus on the process the model reveals, giving yourself time to pray intentionally. The goal is for prayer to become more natural, effective, and enjoyable.

While prayer does take commitment and requires discipline to develop into a daily habit, we also want to remember that it is a privilege to come to God in prayer.

Why Fast?

We are encouraging our church family to consider fasting corporately for 21 days during Connect 21. The fast is part of this season of high-intensity prayer as a church family.

You may also choose to fast at other times during the year for your spiritual development. It is typical to fast a single meal, a whole day, or three days or more. The timing of your fast or what you choose to fast is not as important as your focus on God as you fast.

The purpose of fasting is to draw closer to God. Biblical fasting always has to do with eliminating distractions - such as eating three times a day - for a greater spiritual purpose. It causes us to shift our focus from the outside-in to the inside-out. It also enables us to celebrate the goodness and mercy of God and prepares our hearts for all the good things God desires to bring into our lives.

Your fast should be challenging to turn your attention to God in moments of hunger, but you must know your body and your limits. The most important part of the fast is to seek God in prayer and follow the Holy Spirit as He leads you, not simply deny yourself food.

PARTIAL FAST

This fast is sometimes called the "Jewish Fast" and involves abstaining from eating any type of food during certain periods of the day.

COMPLETE FAST

In a complete fast, you drink only liquids, typically water with light juices as an option.

CONNECT 21 FAST

At Linked UP North, we encourage a combination of the **Partial** and **Complete** fasts by fasting for at least six (6) hours each day for the entire duration of the 21 day fast.

Depending on your schedule, please choose a time that works best for you by drinking only liquids, typically water with light juices as an option.

Suggested periods of the day are:

6:00 AM - 12:00 PM

12:00 PM - 6:00 PM

6:00 PM - 12:00 AM

12:00 AM - 6:00 AM*

**For night shift workers*

HOW TO FAST SAFELY

As you begin your fast, be assured when done properly, fasting will not only prove to be a spiritual blessing but a physical blessing as well.

If necessary, consult your doctor before you begin your fast. But, be aware that many doctors have not been trained in this area, and so their understanding is limited. If you are taking prescription medication, talk to your doctor before changing your regimen. Prudence and caution are in order.

Prayer Models

A.C.T.S. Prayer Model

The A.C.T.S. prayer model is an excellent and effective way to focus our hearts on who God is and what He has done for us before we turn our hearts to ask Him for His continued blessings.

Prayer is simply talking to God, and He is not concerned with how many words we use when we pray or if we can eloquently quote scripture. Use the A.C.T.S. acronym to enrich your conversation with God.

- | | |
|----------------------|---|
| A doration | Focus directly on God, honoring Him for Who He is in our lives. |
| C onfidence | Find out what His Will is for your life and pray the Word of God confidently, believing all His promises. |
| T hanksgiving | Thank Him in advance for what you believed Him for in prayer. |
| S upplication | Pray for the specific needs of others and yourself. |

Read the scriptures associated with each acronym and let the verses inspire your thoughts to become His thoughts (Isaiah 55:8-11). Praying scripture allows us to use God's Word to gain more confidence and enjoyment in our prayer time.

A DORATION

During this time, focus directly on God, adoring Him for Who He is. His names, His character, His roles, etc. Worship and praise God with your heart, mind, and voice.

*Therefore David blessed the Lord before all the assembly; and David said: "Blessed are You, Lord God of Israel, our Father, forever and ever.¹¹Yours, O Lord, is the greatness, The power and the glory, The victory and the majesty; For all that is in heaven and in earth is Yours; Yours is the kingdom, O Lord, And You are exalted as head over all.¹²Both riches and honor come from You, And You reign over all. In Your hand is power and might; In Your hand it is to make great And to give strength to all. ¹³"Now therefore, our God, We thank You And praise Your glorious name. **1 Chronicles 29:10-13***

*O Lord, our Lord, How excellent is Your name in all the earth, Who have set Your glory above the heavens! ²Out of the mouth of babes and nursing infants You have ordained strength, Because of Your enemies, That You may silence the enemy and the avenger. ³When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, The moon and the stars, which You have ordained, ⁴What is man that You are mindful of him, And the son of man that You visit him? ⁵For You have made him a little lower than the angels, And You have crowned him with glory and honor. ⁶You have made him to have dominion over the works of Your hands; You have put all things under his feet, ⁷All sheep and oxen— Even the beasts of the field, ⁸The birds of the air, And the fish of the sea That pass through the paths of the seas. ⁹O Lord, our Lord, How excellent is Your name in all the earth! **Psalm 8:1-9***

The heavens declare the glory of God; And the firmament shows His handiwork. ²Day unto day utters speech, And night unto night reveals knowledge. ³There is no speech nor language Where their voice is not heard. ⁴Their line has gone out through all the earth, And their words to the

end of the world. In them He has set a tabernacle for the sun, ⁵Which is like a bridegroom coming out of his chamber, And rejoices like a strong man to run its race. ⁶Its rising is from one end of heaven, And its circuit to the other end; And there is nothing hidden from its heat. ⁷The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul; The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple; ⁸The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; The commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes; ⁹The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever; The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether. ¹⁰More to be desired are they than gold, Yea, than much fine gold; Sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb. ¹¹Moreover by them Your servant is warned, And in keeping them there is great reward.

*Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart Be acceptable in Your sight, O Lord, my strength and my Redeemer **Psalm 19:1-11,14***

O God, You are my God; Early will I seek You; My soul thirsts for You; My flesh longs for You In a dry and thirsty land Where there is no water. ²So I have looked for You in the sanctuary, To see Your power and Your glory. ³Because Your lovingkindness is better than life, My lips shall praise You. ⁴Thus I will bless You while I live; I will lift up my hands in Your name.

Psalm 63:1-4

Make a joyful shout to the Lord, all you lands! ²Serve the Lord with gladness; Come before His presence with singing. ³Know that the Lord, He is God; It is He who has made us, and not we ourselves; We are His people and the sheep of His pasture. ⁴Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, And into His courts with praise. Be thankful to Him, and bless His name. ⁵For the Lord is good; His mercy is everlasting, And His truth endures to all generations

Psalm 100:1-5

*Praise the Lord! Praise God in His sanctuary; Praise Him in His mighty firmament! ²Praise Him for His mighty acts; Praise Him according to His excellent greatness! ³Praise Him with the sound of the trumpet; Praise Him with the lute and harp! ⁴Praise Him with the timbrel and dance; Praise Him with stringed instruments and flutes! ⁵Praise Him with loud cymbals; Praise Him with clashing cymbals! ⁶Let everything that has breath praise the Lord. Praise the Lord! **Psalm 150:1-6***

CONFIDENCE

You should always pray confidently. All of us who live for Jesus Christ have the Holy Spirit living inside of us. If we believe this, then how could we not be confident about coming boldly before the Lord? God's Word instructs us to do so in the following scriptures.

*Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. ¹⁵And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him. **1 John 5:14-15***

*Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. ¹⁵For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. ¹⁶Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need. **Hebrews 4:14-16***

*Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. **Hebrews 10:23***

*But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. **Hebrews 11:6***

Every time you pray, you should be confident that God will listen and answer your prayers according to His good Will, which is His Word. If He gave you eternal life through His Son, you know He will answer your prayers.

THANKSGIVING

Thanksgiving is a time for prayers of thanks for what God has done. Thank Him for salvation, the many blessings in your life, protection, provision, open doors, opportunities, and anything He has done for you.

*Oh, give thanks to the LORD, for He is good! For His mercy endures forever. **1 Chronicles 16:34***

*Rejoice always, ¹⁷pray without ceasing, ¹⁸in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. **1 Thessalonians 5:16-18***

*Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; ⁷and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. **Philippians 4:6-7***

SUPPLICATION

Supplication is a specific prayer request which can be oral or written. This is the time to ask God for His divine help to meet needs, solve problems, work in another believer's life, etc.

*Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints; **Ephesians 6:18***

*Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; **Philippians 4:6***

*Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, ² for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence. ³ For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, ⁴ who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. **1 Timothy 2:1-4***

As God blesses you and answers your prayers, now it is your time to act. Be willing to obey God as He may lead you to share your time, resources, or your testimony with others.

*Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common. **Acts 4:32***

Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy. ¹⁸Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give,

*willing to share, ¹⁹storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life. **1 Timothy 6:17-19***

*And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death. **Revelation 12:11***

PRAYER MODELS

A.C.T.S PRAYER MODEL

Adoration | Confidence | Thanksgiving | Supplication

THE APOSTLE PAUL'S PRAYER MODEL

PRAYING FOR

Authority Figures | All Believers |
The Lost | The Body of Christ

1 Timothy 2:1-2 NKJV

"Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence."

The Apostle Paul's Prayer Model

The Word of God is one of the most valuable tools we have for building a dynamic daily prayer life. Scripture brings power, truth, and encouragement to our prayer time. We can make a difference when we spend time praying for others. Pray for those with whom you interact and connect. In 1 Timothy 2:1-2, the Apostle Paul encourages us toward the following prayer points.

Pray for those in authority

*Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, ²for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence. **1 Timothy 2:1-2***

Pray for those in natural authority

- President
- Vice President
- United States Senate
- United States Congress
- United States Supreme Court
- U.S. Government Departments
- Presidential Advisors
- All U.S. Military Branches
- Governor
- Lieutenant Governor
- State Senators
- Senate Representatives
- State Courts
- State & County Board of Education
- State Elected Officials
- Mayors
- City Council Members
- County and Municipal Courts

Pray for those in spiritual authority

- **Linked UP North Overseers:**
 - Pastors Joel & Patricia Gregory
- **Linked UP North Pastors:**
 - Pastors George & Carol Houston
- The Dream Team and Connect Groups
- More wisdom and greater discernment to lead God's people

Supplication for other believers

- Answered prayers
- Manifestation of breakthroughs and miracles
- Great wealth for God's people
- Obedience with our finances as it relates to tithes and offerings
- Spiritual growth and development
- Strong marriages and families
- Successful singles
- Thriving jobs, careers, businesses
- Spiritual growth as individuals complete their NEXT STEPS classes

Interceding for the lost

- Win souls for the Kingdom
*The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, And he who wins souls is wise. **Proverbs 11:30***
- Clear soul-winning strategy
*Where there is no revelation, the people cast off restraint; But happy is he who keeps the law. **Proverbs 29:18***
- Pray for more laborers
*Then He said to His disciples, "The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. ³⁸Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest." **Matthew 9:37-38***
- Pray to reach the lost
*The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. **2 Peter 3:9***

Pray for the Gifts and Offices in the body of Christ

And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracle, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues. 1 Corinthians 12:28

Pray for Linked UP North's Dream Team and Connect Groups

- God will send the right people with the right heart to fill all Dream Team needs within our church
- Holy Spirit will empower each Dream Team member and leader to Love God, Love People, Pursue Excellence, and Choose Joy
- Dream Team members and their families are abundantly blessed for their commitment to our ministry
- God will raise up new Connect Group leaders
- God will expand the influence of Connect Group leaders within their neighborhood and community
- The life of each Connect Group leader and that they will be greatly blessed because of their sacrifice and obedience to God

Pray for the vision of Linked UP North

- Our purpose of reaching people with the message of Jesus Christ by:
 - connecting lost people to God
 - connecting hurting people to family
 - connect believers to their God-given purpose
 - connecting and making a difference in the community
- Continued favor with city and county officials in Woodstock and the surrounding area.
- Continued favor with Principle Todd and River Ridge High School
- Pray for new and effective ways for Linked UP North to serve the community
- Resources to purchase property / land to house the vision

Additional Prayer Strategies

Prayer is not only communion with God; it is confrontation with the enemy. These prayer strategies can strengthen us and ultimately help us to triumph in our spiritual battles.

THE ARMOR OF GOD

Ephesians 6:11-18

Knowing that we are in a spiritual battle, God provides spiritual armor and equips us to take a stand when conflict comes our way.

*Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. ¹²For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. ¹³Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. ¹⁴Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, ¹⁵and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; ¹⁶above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. ¹⁷And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God; ¹⁸praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints— **Ephesians 6:11-18***

Acknowledge that you are in a spiritual battle. Then, claim the protection God has given you by praying through the different pieces of spiritual armor described above in Ephesians 6.

PRAYER

Thank You, Lord, for my salvation. I receive it in a new and fresh way from You, and I declare that nothing can separate me from the love of Christ and the place I have in Your Kingdom. I wear Your righteousness today against all condemnation and corruption.

Cover me with Your holiness and purity and defend me from all assaults against my heart. Lord, I put on the belt of truth. I choose a lifestyle of honesty and integrity. Expose the lies I have believed and show me the truths I need today. I choose to live for the gospel in every moment. Show me where You are working and lead me to it. Give me strength to walk daily with You. I believe that You are powerful against every lie and assault of the enemy. You have good in store for me. Nothing is coming today that can overcome me because You are with me. Holy Spirit, show me the truths of the Word of God that I will need to counter the traps of the enemy. Bring those Scriptures to mind today. Finally, Holy Spirit, I agree to walk in step with You in everything as my spirit communes with You in prayer throughout the day."

THE WEAPONS OF WARFARE

2 Corinthians 10:4-5

When we are aware of spiritual warfare, we can be active in praying through it. God has given us victory and power through the death, burial, and resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

*For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, ⁵casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ **2 Corinthians 10:4-5***

You can take authority over anything that comes against the truth of the Word of God and command it to bow in the Name of Jesus. Take a bold stand, praying specifically and confidently by God's power and His Spirit.

PRAYER

"Father, Your Word says that no weapon formed against me shall prosper (Isaiah 54:17). Therefore, I declare that no weapon formed against me prospers this day or any day to come, in Jesus' name. Your Word says that trouble will not arise a second time (Nahum 1:9). Therefore, I declare that Satan cannot make trouble for me again, in this manner, as he did in the past, in Jesus' name. I declare all these prayers accomplished and brought to pass by trusting you through faith and expectation, in the name of Jesus.

I stand on Your Word. The enemy is driven out from before me, above me, around me, and below me; from my home, workplace, church and its ministries, children, and loved ones; from my works and labors, land, and my presence. I declare that he is not able to stand against me, and his works are taken captive and destroyed. No weapon formed against me will prosper, for the Spirit of the Lord shall raise a standard against them. I declare all of these things accomplished by Your Word. Jesus, my Lord, I give You thanksgiving, praise, glory, honor, and worship for Your righteousness and holiness given to me by Your Word on my behalf."

PROTECTION PRAYERS

Corinthians 6:14-7:1, 10:3-5; Romans 12:1-2

We often worry about our safety and protection. When we feel this way, we can immediately come to God in prayer, pouring out our heart to Him, and casting

down anything that is contrary to the knowledge of God, and bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.

Share your thoughts and concerns with God. Ask Him for His supernatural protection. He says He will command His angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways (Psalm 91:11). Claim this promise and lay everything down before Him trusting His good plans and His power to protect you and those you love.

PRAYER

“Heavenly Father, I bow in worship and praise before You. I cover myself with the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ as my protection. I surrender myself completely and unreservedly in every area of my life to You. I submit myself only to the true and living God and refuse any involvement of the enemy in my life. I choose to be transformed by the renewing of my mind. I pull down every thought that exalts itself against the knowledge of Christ. I pray and thank you for a sound mind, the mind of Christ.

Today and every day, I ask for protection over my spouse, my children, our immediate family members, relatives, friends, acquaintances, and myself. I also ask today for protection during all of our travels, for our provision, finances, possessions, health, safety, and welfare. I put all of these things under the covering of Your precious blood and declare that Satan cannot touch them on this day or any day to come.”

PRAYER OF REPENTANCE

2 Corinthians 7:10, Romans 2:4, Romans 12:1-2

After we are saved and born again, God has forgiven us and cleansed us from all sin and unrighteousness. After salvation, when we miss the mark, what God desires is our repentance. Repentance means to think differently and change

our behavior. This process is about discovering what God’s Word says about the area in which you need growth, renewing your mind, and then obeying the Word of God so that the behavior can change.

*For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death. **2 Corinthians 7:10***

PRAYER

“Lord Jesus, I believe that You are the Son of God. You are the Messiah, come in the flesh to destroy the works of the devil. You died on the cross for my sins and rose again the third day from the dead. Because I have faith in the finished works of Jesus Christ, I receive Your forgiveness and I thank you for cleansing me from all sin. Sin no longer has dominion over me. Thank You for redeeming me, cleansing me, justifying me, and sanctifying me in Your blood.”

RECONCILIATION PRAYER

Matthew 6:14-15; Leviticus 19:18

Forgiveness and reconciliation can feel challenging, but God makes it clear in the Bible that He freely forgives us, and we are expected to do the same for others.

*For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. ¹⁵But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses. **Matthew 6:14-15***

Come before the Lord with humility, honesty, and sincerity. Share the areas in your life where you need to forgive others. Even if you are not able to settle a situation with that person, you can settle it with the Lord by forgiving them. As

you choose to forgive those who have hurt or offended you, you can also praise and thank God for forgiving you when you did not deserve it.

PRAYER

“Lord, I have a confession to make. I have not loved, but have resented certain people and have unforgiveness in my heart. I call upon You, Lord, to help me forgive them. I do now forgive (name them). I also forgive and accept myself in the name of Jesus Christ.”

PRIDE PRAYER

1 Peter 5:5-7, Proverbs 11:2, 16:18, 26:12

The Bible tells us that pride comes before the fall. Pride can be a very real issue in our lives, but we have the power to overcome it through Jesus.

When pride comes, then comes shame; But with the humble is wisdom.

Proverbs 11:2

Practicing humility requires overcoming pride in our lives. Just as you acknowledge other sins when necessary, acknowledge your pride to God. Submit it to Him, asking Him to help you walk in humility, free of pride, and self-absorption. If you feel like pride is an issue that continues to surface in your life, humble yourself before God and make Him the authority over your actions and attitude. One of the best ways to humble ourselves is to combine prayer with fasting.

PRAYER

“Father, I come to You in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. I know pride is an abomination to You. I renounce anything that would cause me to have pride in

my heart in dealing with other people. I renounce these and turn away from them. I humble myself before You and come to You as a little child.”

HEALING PRAYER

1 Peter 2:24; Psalm 103:2-5; Luke 1:37

Our God is a God of miracles. Just as we read about in the Bible, we still see Him perform miraculous healing today. He is our Healer, and we can confidently approach Him, asking for healing for ourselves or someone we know.

*Bless the Lord, O my soul, And forget not all His benefits: ³Who forgives all your iniquities, Who heals all your diseases, ⁴Who redeems your life from destruction, Who crowns you with lovingkindness and tender mercies, ⁵Who satisfies your mouth with good things, So that your youth is renewed like the eagle's. **Psalm 103:2-5***

In faith, receive your healing from God. Proclaim His power and goodness, believing and trusting Him to take care of you and those you are praying to be healed.

PRAYER

“Father, in the Name of Jesus, I come before You for healing (name yourself or someone you are praying to experience healing). My hope is in You as our Healer. I believe You are able to do this. Your name is Jehovah Rapha, the God who heals, and I believe every knee will bow to You, including the name of (name disease or disorder). Thank You, Jesus, for dying on the cross so that we can receive healing. You say that You forgive our sins and heal our diseases, and I praise You for this. Thank You that the Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead lives in us. I stand in faith, believing for healing for (yourself or someone you are

praying for). Nothing is impossible for You, God! Give us peace and direction as You work in our lives. In Jesus' Name, Amen."

MARRIAGE PRAYER

Ephesians 5:25-30

God created marriage, and His design for it is good. In marriage, just as in any human relationship, we must put in effort to love well. We cannot do this successfully in our own power. We need God, who is love Himself, to give us His Holy Spirit and to guide us in our marriage. Marriage is a picture of Jesus Christ and His bride, the Church. As Christian husbands and wives, we have the high honor to represent the love and commitment Christ has for the Church through our love and commitment to each other.

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, ²⁶that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, ²⁷that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish. ²⁸So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. ²⁹ For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as the Lord does the church. ³⁰For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones.

Ephesians 5:25-30

Thank God for your marriage. Start by asking Him to help you be the best spouse you can be. Ask Him to help you love well and to see your spouse as He sees them.

Then, pray for your marriage, asking God to use your marriage to impact the world for Him. Ask Him for protection physically, spiritually, and emotionally.

Pray for unity in your marriage and wisdom from Him about how to live your lives as one. Bring to Him anything in your marriage that concerns you and trust Him to work on your behalf.

PRAYER

"Thank You, God, for loving us and for creating marriage to be an illustration of Your love for us here on earth. Help me, God, to love my spouse (call them by name) the way You love me. Help me to listen to my spouse, give honor, and put my spouse before myself. Protect us physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. We ask You to build greater unity between us, make us stronger as a couple, more devoted to one another and to You. Use us, God, build us up to be an example of how Godly marriage can look. Use us together to do more than we could ever do apart. We ask for greater influence and more impact on the people around us. We ask you to work through us in the lives of our friends, family, and even those far away. Fill us with Your Holy Spirit and move through us to bring those far from You closer so that they can have an encounter with the Living God, who seeks and saves the lost, and who sets us free and gives us purpose.

We choose as a couple to love You first, God. We put our relationship with You before anything and everything else. We confess our need for You. Thank You for bringing us together. We choose to love one another today and every day. Thank You for our marriage. We ask You to bless our marriage, build it, and be present in it always."

RACIAL RECONCILIATION PRAYER

Ephesians 4:3-6; Mark 12:28-31; Psalm 139:23-24

God created every person in His image on purpose and for a purpose. We are all unique and have value in the eyes of God. As Christians, we love who God loves and seek to serve others, so it is essential for us to see the value that each person brings to the world. We need to do our part to foster reconciliation, advocate for equality, and work to ensure that every person is treated with dignity, respect, and honor.

As followers of Jesus, we have been commanded to do everything we can to promote peace. We are all one in Christ, called to serve Him and others with a spirit of unity.

*Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. ⁴There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; ⁵one Lord, one faith, one baptism; ⁶one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all. **Ephesians 4:3-6***

Recognize the presence of racism in our world and bring it before God today. Thank Him for creating every person in His image, on purpose, for a purpose. Ask Him to help you embrace your unique design and the uniqueness of others. Pray for eyes to see the ways inequality is at work in the world around you, and pray for boldness to uphold peace, love, and unity in the face of injustice. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you recall any ways you have not promoted equality and Unity (thoughts, words, actions, etc.) or people towards whom you have not shown the love of Christ. Ask for forgiveness, and trust God to help you grow and become an advocate for reconciliation.

PRAYER

“Father, I recognize that You created every person in Your image and that You have a great purpose for each of us. I ask You to help me see every person as You see them. Help me to love others with the unconditional love of Jesus and to make every effort to promote peace, unity, and equality for all people. Forgive me for the times that I have not valued others or spoken up for what is right. Give me boldness to confront inequity when I see it and to honor others in my thoughts, words, and actions. Help me to love my neighbor as myself and to be an ambassador for reconciliation, as You have called me to be. I ask You to break the spirit of racism and division off of our nation, in Jesus’ Name. Thank You for making us one by the blood of Jesus and the power of Your Spirit.”

PRAYER STRATEGIES

PRAYING THROUGH THE SCRIPTURES

This prayer strategy can strengthen us and ultimately help us to know God's Word and triumph in our spiritual battles.

- The Armor of God**
- Prayers of Protection**
- Prayers of Repentance**
- Prayers of Reconciliation**
- Prayers of Healing**
- Prayers for Pride**
- Prayers for Marriages**
- Prayers for Racial Reconciliation**

DEVOTIONALS

GOD & FAMILY

WEEK ONE

CONNECT TWENTY-ONE

Day 1 | Monday, January 10, 2022

How Is Your Connection to God?

Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation. 2 Corinthians 5:18 NKJV

It is not what you know; it is who you know. Do you have connections? In our world today, everything is about being connected. We are getting the 5G mobile connection technology on our phones now, making it easier than ever to connect to various platforms on multiple devices. But technological advances will not stop there. We will have 6G and 7G mobile connections soon.

Today, we do not have to wait on technology and can have a "G7," a God-given, connection right now that connects us to miracles, signs, and wonders. First, this is a glorious connection, like going from dial-up internet to high-speed internet. We want a connection that is not just with a human but with God.

Second, we want a generational connection. Christianity is always just one generation away from either covering the world or going extinct. It simply depends on how connected the faith of one the generation is to the next.

Third and fourth, we have a glad and grateful connection. Just think about it: you are connected to God! No matter what is happening in your life right now, being connected to God is something to be glad and grateful about having.

Fifth, this is a growing connection. Healthy things grow. We cannot be content with where we are with God or in our effectiveness in reaching the lost. We must be committed to continuously expanding the kingdom of God and growing our spirituality.

Sixth, as excited as we may get about growth, we never outgrow a gracious connection. We should always be known for being gracious, giving God all the glory for everything He has given us.

Seventh, this connection must be generous. I know many of you have this connection today, but do not let your hearts grow cold in giving. Generosity cannot be learned by osmosis. If you want your kids to be generous, you will have to intentionally teach them how to be givers.

Reflect

What can you do today that demonstrates your connection to God? Allow that action step to become a new habit by doing it on a routine basis. Then, watch how your life begins to produce fruit consistent with someone connected to God daily.

Prayer

Father God, thank You for calling me into a wonderful connection with You! There is so much to this connection with You that I will need help to live it. Continue to help me live out every aspect of being connected to You in Jesus' Name.

I Am.

And God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." And He said, "Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.' Exodus 3:14 NKJV

There is no better name for God to prove His presence to us, that He is not some has-been or would-be or once-was God. He is I AM.

That gift of presence revealed to Moses left him with a choice. The I AM presence of God was about to become entirely reliant upon whether Moses would believe it or not. Through a burning bush or a newborn babe, God's presence will either be fully realized or entirely missed based on our belief and acceptance of His presence.

Moses easily could have turned away and not drawn near. Maybe you find yourself faced with that same decision: Will you draw near and accept that God wants to reveal Himself to you in a new way, or will you continue to deny Him access?

Since the dawn of creation, God's Holy presence has been clearly seen through His Holy Word. Through the Word of God speaking to Moses through a bush, God's presence was revealed to him. His presence and direction for our lives are most clearly found in the pages of His Word.

You might feel that this concept is overemphasized - that this is merely a hopeful, exaggerated wish that God's presence shows up in His Word. Nonsense! Hebrews 4:12 NKJV tells us, "For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division

His Presence

And let them be ready for the third day. For on the third day the LORD will come down upon Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people. ¹²You shall set bounds for the people all around, saying, 'Take heed to yourselves that you do not go up to the mountain or touch its base. Whoever touches the mountain shall surely be put to death.' **Exodus 19:11-12 NKJV**

Have you ever honestly thought about how good we have it in this New Testament age? If not, then you need to thoughtfully consider our verses today.

These verses stand out as a remarkable contrast between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant. In the Old Covenant, it was believed that not just anyone could enter into the presence of God. Only the high priest could go past the giant curtain that separated the rest of the temple from the Holy of Holies, where God's presence was written to be found. Furthermore, the high priest could go on behalf of the people only once a year.

In this passage, God is saying, "You must keep your distance, and anybody who gets too close is dead on the spot." It is an ominous warning of the dire consequences of getting too close to God in the age of the Old Covenant.

If that was the Old Covenant, what deal do we get in the New Covenant? Family, listen. You have got to be praising the Lord for this. Today, He says the opposite to you. He says, "Draw near to me! The access and availability for you to be in My presence has now been paid for and atoned through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ."

"Run into my arms," Jesus says. Cry out, "Abba, Daddy." You know, our God never changes. Even when He spoke to Israel, telling them to keep away, His heart was one of a Heavenly Father. He desires a close, intimate fellowship in raising His kids, in developing and maturing us. But still, in God's Old Covenant relationship with Israel, they could only get so close. The rest would have to live vicariously through someone like Moses going up and meeting with God on their behalf.

And yet, for us, God welcomes us into His presence. In fact, He even makes His presence live in us through the Holy Spirit. We have access to God that Israel couldn't even imagine having. The only question is, how often do we take advantage of it? How often do we camp out and enjoy the presence of the Lord?

Reflect

Ask the Lord to make His presence known to you today, and when He does, take the time to rest in it. Reflect on how He makes His presence known. Determine if He is giving you guidance, wisdom, peace, comfort, or something else.

Prayer

Father God, You are such an incredibly awesome and powerful God! Thank You for giving me access to Your presence today and showing me how to truly live in the fullness of this amazing gift that You have given me in Jesus' Name.

Teach Me, God!

One day, as Jesus was in prayer, one of his disciples came over to him as he finished and said, "Would you teach us a model prayer that we can pray, just like John did for his disciples?" Luke 11:1 TPT

"You are leading preservice prayer this weekend." Those were the words given to me by the Senior Assistant Pastor of our previous church. Wait, what?! I felt the weight of the world on my shoulders. How could I pray in front of this entire congregation?

I was the youngest member of the ministerial staff. I had recently graduated from Rhema Bible College. Yes, I had prayed many times privately and even publicly in our Connect Group, but never in front of several hundred people. I felt I wasn't ready. My mind was racing with thoughts of inadequacies.

Then, Holy Spirit reminded me of His Words, "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you." (John 15:7 KJV). That is it. All I had to do was pray the Word of God that I knew, and everything would be alright. I could not aim to impress anyone with what I asked for in prayer because God is not responsible for fulfilling my personal requests unless it lined up with His Word. I prayed, and the rest is history.

Since then, I have seen God do many miracles, signs, and wonders not because I prayed for them for myself. Instead, I have prayed for them in the lives of others, and God, in turn, gives me the hidden desires of my heart. In prayer, I have made mere mentions of having or doing something beyond my own ability, and God

has manifested those things. There was no "ask" or "in Jesus' Name" or even any "Dear Heavenly Father" when it came to personal fulfillment. But, I believe that God responded to my prayers for others and then manifested those hidden treasures for me! He loves us that much!

When we do not make our Christian journey about ourselves but about others, God is pleased and wants to spur us on to continue considering others. Step one in considering others is to pray for them. This selfless expression of love glorifies God and advances His Kingdom!

Reflect

Consider praying for others just as much or more than you pray for yourself. Petition God on behalf of others who have nothing to do with your personal prayers. Look for Him to manifest answered prayers regarding your individual situation.

Prayer

Dear Heavenly Father, as I spend time in prayer, fill me with the desire to pray for others as I pray for myself. May I be selfless in my prayers and align them with your Word. I thank you in advance for hearing me and answering me when I pray. I know that You love me enough to know the deep desires of my heart. I declare that I will recognize You when You move in my life, and I give You the praise and glory due to your name, in Jesus' name!

Trust God's Love for You

How precious also are Your thoughts to me, O God! How great is the sum of them! ¹⁸If I should count them, they would be more in number than the sand; When I awake, I am still with You. Psalms 139:17-18 NKJV

When we experience challenging situations, we may be tempted to doubt God's love for us—especially if we believe that only smooth sails and happiness are the believer's lot. However, nothing could be further from the truth. The absence of pain or trouble is not an indicator of God's love for us.

Take a moment to imagine that you are on your favorite beach. Take your index finger and thrust it in the sand. Carefully pull your index finger out of the sand. Open your eyes and start counting. How many grains of sand did you count? Exactly! You could not accurately count the grains of sand on one finger. How could you possibly count the grains of sands on all the beaches in the world?

The purpose of the sand illustration is to demonstrate that God loves us more than we can imagine. Today's passage reminds us that His thoughts toward us are good; they are innumerable like grains of sand. They are infinitely good! Even when terrible things happen in our lives, it does not change the way God loves us. David wrote in Psalm 36:7 NIV, "How priceless is your unfailing love, O God!" David and the other psalmists were so keenly aware of God's love that they wrote about it 70 times in the book of Psalms!

Do you believe that God loves you unconditionally, that His love is everlasting and unfailing? He loves you just as much today as He did yesterday. His love for you is not dependent on how many things you do right or well. We have all

made poor choices for a child of God, gone places, or said things that were not reflective of a child of God. Nevertheless, we are His children, and He loves us.

God "agapes" you. Agape is a love that knows no limits or boundaries in how far, wide, high, and deep it will go to show that love. If necessary, agape love sacrifices itself for the sake of that object or person it so deeply cherishes. Thus, agape is the highest form of love – a self-sacrificial type of love that moves the lover to action for the sake of the beloved. God demonstrated the most incredible love possible when Jesus died on the cross for you. Do not ever forget that!

So, the next time anyone tries to tell you that you are too fat, too skinny, too tall, too short, not educated enough, not spiritual enough, inferior, or undeserving – quiet the noise. Do not even deliberate over these things about yourself. You are fearfully and wonderfully made. We may fail, but God's love for us will never fail. Trust God's love for you.

Reflect

Talk with your family or friends. Describe a moment when God's unfailing love for you left you feeling overwhelmed and speechless. How did that moment and expression of God's love for you change your walk with God and your relationship with others?

Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank You that before the foundation of the earth, You saw me and loved me. I am in awe of Your love. Teach me how to love You and myself. Then empowered by the confidence of Your love and favor, strengthen and guide me to walk as a continual demonstration of that love to others for the glory of Your name. In the name of Jesus, I pray.

In His Presence

*Immediately He made His disciples get into the boat and go before Him to the other side, to Bethsaida, while He sent the multitude away. ⁴⁶And when He had sent them away, He departed to the mountain to pray. **Mark 6:45-46 NKJV***

Many believers often succumb to worry, fear, and anxiety as they take stock of the staggering issues facing the world today. Psalm 55:22 NKJV states, "Cast your burden on the Lord, and He shall sustain thee: He shall never permit the righteous to be moved." According to this verse, the way to remain in peace is to spend concentrated time in the presence of the Lord.

Setting time aside to get quiet and seek God to hear His voice can be a challenge for busy people. With all the tasks related to work, school, family, and recreation, spending time with God is often put on the back burner. In today's passage of scripture, we see that even Jesus Himself withdrew from the hustle and bustle of His daily schedule for consecrated times of prayer.

Jesus had just fed 5,000 people and had one of the largest meetings of His ministry, which had built a growing excitement among His followers. Everyone was talking about the miracle of producing supernatural food. You have been there. Maybe you just pulled off a major conference, garnered a multi-million dollar contract, aced your finals, reached 60,000 followers on Instagram, or some other exclusive accomplishment. We might be tempted to revel in our moments of success but look at what Jesus did! He told the disciples to get on a ship and sail away. Then He sent away the crowds and headed for solitude, going to the mountains to pray. Jesus needed to get to a place where He could have uninterrupted time to pray to the Father.

PURPOSE

WEEK TWO

CONNECT TWENTY-ONE

Day 8 | Monday, January 17, 2022

Pursuit of Purpose

But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God. Acts 20:24 KJV

In this verse, the Apostle Paul makes it clear that he understands his life's purpose, and he accepts whatever may need to take place to fulfill it. He had determined that nothing was more important than spreading the gospel, not even saving his own life. The Holy Spirit revealed to Paul hard times, trouble, hardships, or even imprisonment would come his way if he went to Jerusalem.

Many of us have had to maneuver through challenges similar to Paul's: COVID, challenging days, colleagues getting on our last nerve, not enough communication, too much communication, and many have even thought, "Somebody, free me from these children!"

When pursuing our purpose, we must be Spirit-filled and God-led to triumph over our challenges. There may be people who can mentor us, give advice, and most certainly pray for us, but no one can show us the details of our path, like the One who created us. There are three important components to pursuing purpose: your life, your course, and your ministry.

Your Life: Be determined to walk and flow in your purpose. Life can be viewed as a balance sheet, a cumulative sum of assets compared to liabilities. The anointing God places on us are divine assets. On the other hand, liabilities are weights that collectively impede pursuing our purpose. These stumbling blocks

can be a result of trying to do it our own way. We could have been introduced to the school of hard knocks by our own doing or life itself.

We should not allow setbacks, setups, or accolades to move us. We should be like Paul – single-minded about our purpose, which is tied to our gifting. Strive to be resolute, determined, decisive, Spirit-filled, and God-led. Do not let outside influences move you. Give weight to the inside, the hidden man of the heart! It all means very little if the influence does not contribute to your purpose.

Your Course: Running your course will involve elements of risk! You must see yourself as a runner for Jesus. Do not jump the gun; do not get ahead of purpose. Do not start before the Lord sounds the signal. Do not get disqualified by moving too soon! And, above all, do not compare yourself to others.

During some seasons, you will run a relay. Wait for the baton to be handed to you. Wait for the door to be opened. In some cases, wait for the door to be closed. If you drop the baton at the hand-off point, you will miss the Holy Spirit. Your lane has been designed for you. You have been equipped to run in your lane and your lane only. No one else can run your race. Stay in it; do not run out of your lane. If you do, you run the risk of losing your way, stepping into someone else’s lane, or getting so far off track that you lose valuable time trying to find your way back.

Your Ministry: Your ministry was “received of the Lord.” You are a steward. As stewards, we own little to nothing, but we possess so much! God expects us to be faithful, just like He is faithful. He would not ask us to be something that He is not. The Bible states that stewards must be found faithful (1 Corinthians 4:2 NKJV). God does not make mistakes. It is your faithfulness in worship, in praise, in service, and obedience to His direction that will enable you to testify of the grace of the gospel.

Our Dream Team, a group of volunteers that serve in front of and behind the scenes to fulfill the vision of Linked UP North, freely use the assets of the Church, but they do not own anything. Yet they are all entrusted to make decisions that impact Linked UP’s bottom line – to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ. This is an example where nothing is owned, but all is possessed. God expects you to be a great steward over what He has graced you with to accomplish His purpose.

Know that every interaction you have, every road you choose, every computer key you touch, every chair you straighten, every phone call you field, every cup of water you give, every embrace you receive, every hand you lend...all involves Jesus. All of it is ministry!

Reflect

Did you jump the gun? Miss the baton? Step out of your lane? There is one mission we all share! And that is to be motivated to please an audience of one! Consult with God to make sure that your vision aligns with His vision for your life, your course, and your ministry.

Prayer

Father, I will run the course You have set before me. Help me to see where I have gotten off track. Be the lamp unto my feet and the illumination unto my path. Help me not to miss You to the left or to the right. Show me how to run my race in ways that bring pleasure to You! In the name of Jesus, Amen.

Availability and Accessibility

At Joppa there was a certain disciple named Tabitha, which is translated Dorcas. This woman was full of good works and charitable deeds which she did. ³⁷But it happened in those days that she became sick and died. When they had washed her, they laid her in an upper room. ⁴⁰But Peter put them all out, and knelt down and prayed. And turning to the body he said, "Tabitha, arise." And she opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter, she sat up. ⁴²And it became known throughout all Joppa, and many believed on the Lord.

Acts 9:36-37,40,42 NKJV

Do you serve others with a heart that expects nothing in return? Would others make remarks about the work you do for Christ or the work you do for yourself?

Tabitha was a seamstress who had a generous heart. She always performed good and charitable deeds. One of those deeds was sewing clothes for the less fortunate, and her reputation in the region was known for doing just that. Some of us would see sewing as something basic and unimportant. Tabitha and her work must have been important to Jesus because she is the only woman be called a disciple in the Bible.

She was maximizing the gift given to her by serving others. Imagine the beauty of living in a world where we all maximized our giftings with the unselfish intent of serving others? There is no higher service! Jesus came to serve! He served humankind by giving His life.

What are you passionate about? What are you good at? What lights your fire? Are you channeling that gifting for Jesus or sitting it on the shelf? Do not marginalize God's craftsmanship by ever saying you are not good at anything! That would be belittling the Master. You are great at something!

Purpose and Calling

For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. **Romans 11:29 NKJV**

Everyone has a calling but for different purposes. Whenever we hear the word “calling,” we often associate it with a spiritual vocation, like a pastor, prophet, or evangelist. God loves diversity, especially as it relates to purpose and calling. He called David to be a king, while He called Esther as a queen to stand up for the Jews and defend their cause. Samson, Peter, and Nehemiah were also called by God, but each had different responsibilities.

Your gifts, passion, strength, and anointing are all connected to your calling and effective in the area in which God has called you to function. We need to work within the confines of the gifts He has given us. We do not need to compete with anyone else. Allow God to use what He gifted in you.

Did you know that the gifts, your skills, God established in you are permanent? Reread today’s scripture. If something is irrevocable, it means that thing cannot be changed or reversed. Often, skills lie dormant and become redundant when we do not exercise them.

You may be asking yourself, “How can I know my calling to exercise my gifts?” Well, there are only a few occasions in the Bible where God directly spoke to people about their calling: Moses and the burning bush, Saul on the road to Damascus, and a few others. Yet, there are still ways to know your calling.

Sometimes, a person’s calling is born out of a burning passion for change, and once they take a step towards it, God will back them up. Nehemiah was

passionate about the temple and knew its safety depended on rebuilding Jerusalem’s wall. He prayed and fasted for four months before deciding to return to Jerusalem to do so. God did not speak to him directly, but the second chapter of the Book of Nehemiah tells us that God put it in Nehemiah’s heart. Once Nehemiah makes up his mind, God backs him up by giving him the resources, strength, finances, and people needed.

Also, callings are sometimes born out of “positional responsibility” or expectations after assuming an office. The third chapter of Esther details Haman’s plan to destroy the Jews. However, when Esther became the queen, she took the risk and responsibility to stand up for the Jews, and by doing so, God backed her up.

If God has spoken to you directly about your calling, do not passively wait for Him; your gifts, personalities, talents, strengths, and passion always indicate what He has called you to do. Heeding our calling too late in life limits the length of our relevance to the people, environment, or generation in which God has sent us. Listen to the Holy Spirit and heed your call to live the life God intended for you.

Reflect

Do you sense that you are operating in your purpose and calling? If not, pray and seek God, follow the wisdom from this devotion, and begin to pursue your natural inclinations and passions, which align with God’s will.

Prayer

Father God, help to recognize my gifts and give me the courage to pursue my calling. I ask for wisdom to pursue my passions in a way that always brings You glory in Jesus’ Name.

Relationships and Your Calling

He who walks with wise men will be wise, But the companion of fools will be destroyed. Proverbs 13:20 NKJV

Sometimes in life, we do not rise to our gifts and potential; we unfortunately only rise to the level of our relationships and systems. Our gifts, potential, and brilliance are not enough to fulfill God's call on our lives. However, we need people and the right relationships. Take David, for example. He was a man after God's own heart, but he would not have ascended to the throne without the help of Jonathan.

Relationships are critical to living the life God intends for us. It is said, "If you want to go fast in life, go alone, but if you want to go far, go with people." But we cannot just go with any people. We must go with the right kind of people. God's model for creation is interdependency. Who has what you need? Who knows what you need to know? Who has succeeded in the area of your calling? How can you leverage their experience to your advantage?

Build strong relationships around people with a similar calling as yours. At the age of 12, Jesus was already sitting in the temple with the Rabbi, learning and asking questions. Our associations often give us a preview of our destiny. Samson could have accomplished much more for God. He could have killed more Philistines in the war before his premature death, but the relationships he kept were not aligned with furthering his purpose.

Moses had a call to set the Israelites free from the land of bondage, but he had a stuttering problem (Exodus 4:10 NKJV). However, his lack of eloquent speech

Stay Vertical

¹¹And David said to Abishai and all his servants, "See how my son who came from my own body seeks my life. How much more now may this Benjamite? Let him alone, and let him curse; for so the LORD has ordered him. ¹²It may be that the LORD will look on my affliction, and that the LORD will repay me with good for his cursing this day." 2 Samuel 16:11-12 NKJV

As David's enemies were increasing and he was fleeing the city from his son, who was seeking to take his throne, a man named Shimei began heaving rocks and cursing him as he passed by. Cursing the king was against the law, so David had every right to cut off the man's head-as his generals encouraged him to do.

Here we see the difference between Saul and David in their response to those wanting to harm them. Chapters 19 - 24 of 1 Samuel detail how Saul's jealousy motivated him to kill David. This is the defining difference between a leader who seeks to lead through a vertical dimension with God and a leader with a horizontal fix-it mode. God knew David as a man after His own heart. Yet, David was a murderer, adulterer, and had failed in many areas of his life. But one thing separated this leader from all the rest: He had a heart that sought to please God and be in His will. When David blew it, he repented.

What is the purpose God desires to accomplish with the estranged relationship you may have with someone? Has He brought this issue forward to find out what is in your heart? Will you seek revenge and try to solve the problem yourself? Or will you find the grace to allow God to carry out vengeance in His time if it is needed? We must learn this freedom of staying vertical with God and avoiding the trap of fixing things in our own energies. Seeking revenge is not our responsibility. We must examine our hearts in these matters. If pure, then the

issue is for character building. It is the only way God builds the deepest level of character in believers.

Many of us have strained relationships with family members, friends, or others we have wronged or who have wronged us. Perhaps we recognize the need for reconciliation but are not sure how to do it. Healthy relationships are always by grace. We cannot control how others respond to us. We can only show grace and enjoy the grace shown to us by controlling how we respond. 1 John 4:20 NKJV asks the believer, "How can you love a God you have not seen and hate your brother whom you have seen?"

Pastor and author A.W. Tozer tells us, "It is doubtful whether God can bless a man greatly until he has hurt him deeply." God can use storms of conflict in relationships at times to accomplish deeper work in our character. We cannot love our enemies in our own strength. This is graduate-level grace. Are you willing to enter this school? Are you ready to take the test? If you pass, you can expect to be elevated to a new level in the kingdom. For He brings us through these tests as preparation for greater use in the kingdom.

Reflect

Spend some time praying in the Holy Spirit. Ask God to reveal to you anyone you have a strained relationship with and pray for that person. If you are led, take steps to make amends with or apologize to the person.

Prayer

Father God, I repent for the offense I have harbored in my heart toward people. I allowed offense to build a prison around my heart and to keep me from making spiritual progress. Today, I choose to let the offense go. I forgive my offenders, and I extend the same grace to them that I want others to give me. I now receive freedom as I choose to walk away from the offenses that have held me in bondage for so long! In Jesus' name, I pray.

Community Is God's Idea

Two are better than one, Because they have a good reward for their labor.

¹⁰For if they fall, one will lift up his companion. But woe to him who is alone when he falls, For he has no one to help him up. ¹¹Again, if two lie down together, they will keep warm; But how can one be warm alone?

¹²Though one may be overpowered by another, two can withstand him. And a threefold cord is not quickly broken." Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 NKJV

¹¹Therefore comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing. 1 Thessalonians 5:11 NKJV

Connecting with others is a crucial aspect of experiencing life as God intended it to be lived. But the kind of connection we need is more than casual. Contemporary culture is the master of casual, non-committed relationships. The overabundance of dating apps available today reminds us of this reality. But casual relationships are not usually affirming or supportive. Neither do they tend to be encouraging or challenging. As a result, casual connections are not life-giving. They cannot provide what Jesus envisioned for us when He died on the cross. They cannot provide the level of harmony with one another that makes the world take notice. Only the church in the context of a community can display that kind of connection. And only the Holy Spirit working through the body of Christ can make that kind of difference within a community.

God has called the church to create environments where authentic community can occur. The church community should build transformative fellowships where people can experience connection with God and each other. The church should develop unique, satisfying, and compelling communities that create a hunger and thirst within the watching world.

Whether in a Connect Group or serving the community, we are more challenged to grow and become better versions of ourselves when closely connected to others. The fourth chapter of Ecclesiastes reminds us, if we have others with us and fall, they are there to help us up.

If you are a Connect Group Leader or an attendee, please know that you are giving meaning to your life and the lives of others. We cannot build Linked UP North or the community He planted us in without your help.

Reflect

What areas do you need to consider in your life to help make God's dream for creating community a reality? There is no better time than the present to get started. Decide to do one of those things this week.

Prayer

Father God, I am thankful for this opportunity to help make Your dreams of community and fellowship a reality. With Your grace, I commit to doing my part to see this come to pass in Jesus' Name.

A Diverse Community

And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. ⁴³Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. ⁴⁴Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, ⁴⁵and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need. ⁴⁶So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, ⁴⁷praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved." Acts 2:42-47 NKJV

One of the chief challenges to community and greatest opportunities for community is diversity. If everyone in a community sees things the same way or has the same background and values, fostering community is relatively simple. Probably shallower, but certainly easier. However, if people are vastly different, this poses significant challenges and difficulties in building a community.

Take a moment to think about the early church. It was most certainly a diverse community in one church. There could be Jews and Gentiles (who had no respect for each other and very dissimilar values), slaves and free people (who had such differing statuses and experiences in life), men and women (who had distinctive roles in society), all worshipping and sharing and eating together. Get your head around that. It would have been much easier to form separate sub-communities, but Paul would not have been a part of that.

Read: 1 Corinthians 12:12-20 NKJV

Ask yourself a few questions and write down your answers.

1. What is God saying to me?

2. Which verse is most significant?

3. What would I like to discuss or explore further? What do I need to do?

4. Why would God want us to build community with people who are different from us?

Judging from the letters that make up much of the New Testament, this issue of diversity among Christians was probably the number one challenge for the early church. People who would not normally mix in society did in the church. How did they accomplish this?

First, they recognized that what they had in common was greater than their differences. They were the one body. They were all connected with Christ. They all had God's Spirit in them. Jews and Gentiles. Slaves and free people. Men and women. There were no second-class citizens in this community. Their culture was contrary to the unity they experienced in the church. But the church listened to God, not culture. We will come across people in our communities who see things very differently. Do not be surprised. That is the church. Keep looking past these differences to know that we have Jesus in common. They are our brothers and sisters. We are one body.

Second, they saw that diversity was a good thing, a God thing. As Paul explains, you do not want your body parts to all look and function the same. That would be most unhelpful. Numerous eyes all over your body might help you see well, but you would have no hearing or smell. Christians with different perspectives and values are not a threat or problem; they are a help. Embrace those who are different from you and listen and learn from them. Maybe you “see” well, but you need some help with “hearing.” As our society splinters over politics, values, and worldviews, the body of Christ displays unity and community.

Reflect

Think of someone quite different from you. Write down one thing that you can learn from this person and thank God for them.

Prayer

Father God, I acknowledge that not everyone sees things my way, which frustrates me at times. I usually prefer to be with people who think and behave like me. I feel safest with that group. I ask you to help push me out of my comfort zone to grow together with others, and my experiences will be richer, deeper, and more spirit-filled in Jesus’ name.

Let’s Go!

And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: ²⁵Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.

Hebrews 10:24-25 KJV

“If you missed Saturday morning prayer, you missed it!” exclaimed the minister in his excitement on Sunday morning. Our church gathers Saturdays at 9:00 AM for corporate prayer. This is a time when we come together to pray for each other, current events, and our community as a collective body. We typically end by praying for church services on Sunday. It is always an impactful time. However, the attendance is much lower than Sunday services. Of course, there are plenty of reasons why some cannot make it to Saturday morning prayer. After all, it is the one day to sleep in, get things done, and run errands, right?!

God tells us that we are “considering” one another when we gather together, whether for prayer, church, serving, or even Connect Groups. We encourage one another to love and do good deeds. Saints, do you realize that you may be carrying someone else’s answer, miracle, or instruction? Better yet, someone else may be carrying your answer or miracle! When we gather together, there is a tangible presence and energy that encourages us to obey, believe, and even act! And as the times get darker, we are to gather even more. We must continue to connect as the Body of Christ. Any single team member can work out, do drills, or practice on their own. Still, excellence, correct execution, and confidence are built when practices, rehearsals, or collaborations are done together in a shared space – as a team. At some point, there must be a gathering for excellent execution.

How Joseph Served His Community

Now when they [his brothers] saw him afar off, even before he came near them, they conspired against him to kill him. ¹⁹Then they said to one another, "Look, this dreamer is coming! ²⁰Come therefore, let us now kill him and cast him into some pit; and we shall say, 'Some wild beast has devoured him.' We shall see what will become of his dreams!" **Genesis 37:18-20 NKJV**

Take the time to read the entire chapter 37 of Genesis. This is only a snippet of the life of Joseph. Imagine someone in the distant corner of your life, plotting your downfall or even death because you are full of dreams and have imagination. If you knew this ahead of time, it could possibly deter you from trying to do good to others, regardless of who it is.

Such is the life of Joseph. His own brothers conspired to kill him. At the end of this chapter, we see that Joseph had been beaten, bound, and was heading to a land he did not know. Joseph, the beloved son of Jacob, was now a slave. Could this new terrifying life have any upside for Joseph? You may have been through some trying times in life that may have caused you to wonder whether any good could come out of the situation, the hurt, the pain, or the loss.

Jacob's favoritism for Joseph made him the target of his brothers' hatred, so they sold him into slavery at 17 years old. Relocated to a foreign country and cut off from his family, it was natural for Joseph to think God had abandoned him. Instead, he immersed himself in his work and built relationships with the people around him. He had numerous difficulties in Egypt, but he persevered.

Joseph took the time to learn the culture of his new home, which allowed the people there to accept him. Because he was a hard worker, the people

respected him. However, the Lord was with Joseph, so he succeeded in everything (Genesis 39:2 NKJV). Eventually, Joseph earned the favor of Pharaoh, the King of Egypt, who put him in charge of the entire land. Joseph was second in command, only behind the king himself. Not bad for an Israelite kid who had been sold into slavery.

Pharaoh gave Joseph a wife who bore Joseph two sons: Manasseh, "God has made me forget all my troubles and everyone in my father's family," and Ephraim, "God has made me fruitful in this land of my grief" (Genesis 41:52 NKJV).

Joseph's leadership role came because he kept his heart right, and God graced him with the ability to interpret dreams. His gifted ability caused him to be released from prison to interpret Pharaoh's dream, and ultimately Joseph saves the people from starving.

God is in the details. Joseph's life in many ways played out precisely the way God intended for it, hardships and all. Joseph reconciled with his brothers and brought their families to live in Egypt during the famine. This all happened because Joseph submitted himself to God's plan and embraced the new life, culture, and community to which God called him.

God is never the source of evil towards us, but He can take that evil and use it for good. In fact, Joseph says to his brothers in Genesis 50:20 CEV, "You tried to harm me, but God made it turn out for the best so that he could save all these people..." We could learn myriad lessons from Joseph's life. Perhaps one is to be mindful of when and with whom we share our dreams. More importantly, we can learn to love and serve those around us. Even if we find ourselves in a foreign land, among unfamiliarity and difficulty, good can come out of the situation when we choose to serve our community while trusting and following God.

Encourage Somebody Back to Church

And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, ²⁵not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.

Hebrews 10:24-25 NKJV

Today's world is much different from ten years ago and is still very much the same. Social media existed a decade ago and added to an already distracted lifestyle. Ten years later, more media platforms are accessible and increase the distraction. People took classes online ten years ago, and now that has become more of the norm and not just because of the current pandemic. In the first century, some believers were skipping church, and some believers skip church today.

Yes, you have heard it said, "Church is just a building" or, "The church is inside of me." But the scripture goes deeper than that. Going to church was an act of believers assembling or getting together in the same place to break bread, fellowship, and study the Word of God together. Some churches have only met virtually in today's climate, yet some believers still do not log on.

People often stay away from other believers and churches when they feel hopeless or discouraged. Perhaps they feel awkward that their faith is not working as they think it should. Maybe they are struggling with problems they should have conquered long ago. Maybe they are in a season of life where it seems that more bad than good is happening in their lives, and they do not want anyone to know, so they disappear from the physical church. Have you noticed

that Christians tend to isolate themselves from those who can encourage them when they are going through the most?

Hebrews 10:25 maintains it is essential that we meet because we need "exhorting" from one another. We need someone to strongly encourage us or urge us onward to make a correct decision. The Bible tells us in Matthew 5:45 that it rains on the "just and the unjust." Trials are not specific to gender, race, age, or socioeconomic status. When challenges come our way, we should run to the church rather than stay away.

Have you ever been in this place? Do you know of someone who has forsaken the assembling of himself with other believers in the church? What did you do about it? Did you reach out to them? I want to encourage you today to be like Jesus and look for that lost and discouraged sheep. Find a way to encourage him. If you are that person feeling "down and out," share that with someone you trust spiritually and let that person pray for you.

Reflect

Take the time to think. Have you missed someone at church, on your Dream Team, or in your Connect Group? If so, make time today to find that person and speak words of encouragement to get them back in fellowship with other believers.

Prayer

Father, I thank You for my Linked UP North family and the encouragement I receive from my Connect Group, Dream Team, or other church members. When discouragement or trials wage war against my mind and emotions, help me stay connected and run to fellowship instead of staying away. I declare that I will stay connected to my church family. I will do my part in helping connected because we are stronger and better together in Jesus' name.

Prayer Targets

God has put us on the earth at this specific time for a reason. He says in Acts 17:26 that He determined when and where we would live. Knowing this, we can look at those around us at this specific time in history and take personal responsibility to pray.

Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, ²for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence. ³For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, ⁴who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

1 Timothy 2:1-4

Pray for those in authority and those under your authority. Pray for those in your family and your circle of influence (anyone you are connected to).

Write down the names of specific people and pray for them.

MY GOVERNMENT

President _____
National Leaders _____
State Leaders _____
City Leaders _____

MY FAMILY

Spouse _____
Children _____
Parents _____
Extended Family _____

MY CHURCH

Pastors _____
Overseers _____
Dream Team Lead _____
Connect Group Leaders _____
Connect Group Members _____

MY LIFE

Employer _____
Colleagues _____
Employees _____
Teachers/Professors _____

MY FAMILY

Spouse _____
Children _____
Parents _____
Siblings _____
Extended Family _____

THOSE I INFLUENCE

Close friends _____

THOSE WHO NEED GOD

God desires everyone to know Him. He says in His Word that He would leave the ninety-nine to go after the one who does not know Him. As followers of Christ, we are called to partner with Him, praying for those who do not know Him to come to know Him.

1. PRAY THE FATHER WOULD DRAW THEM TO JESUS

God draws people to Him. It is not something we can make happen out of our own efforts, so we need to be faithful in praying that the Father would draw those He’s placed on our hearts to Jesus.

*No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day. **John 6:44***

Think about the people you know who are far from God. Let your heart be open to God and anyone He may bring to your mind. It may help to write down their names in the space above as you focus on praying for them.

PRAYER

“Father, I pray for the people around me (list specific names), that You would supernaturally draw their hearts to You. Send Your Holy Spirit to them and give them the desire to give their lives to You. Help them to recognize their longing for more in life as a spiritual thirst only You can quench. Open their ears to hear Your voice.”

2. PRAY GOD WILL FREE THEIR MINDS FROM BONDAGE

The truth can be right in front of some people, and they still cannot see it because something is in the way blocking their view of God.

*Whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them. **2 Corinthians 4:4***

We can pray against whatever is in their way so that they can see the light of God. We can pray that they would see the truth without any obstacles or distractions interfering.

PRAYER

“Father, in the name of Jesus, I pray that all unbelievers would be able to see clearly, to recognize who You are, and to give their hearts to You. Remove all hindrances the enemy would use to distract them from Your truth. Open their eyes, Lord, that they might see Jesus.”

3. PRAY THAT THEY MAY HAVE A PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

Many people think Christianity is just another religion. They only see God through the lens of the organization and the institution of the church. They may even feel frustrated, angry, or betrayed by people in churches they have encountered or by religious legalists and their hypocrisy. But God did not

come to build an organization. He came to have a relationship with His children.

*For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father." **Romans 8:15***

God wants His beloved sons and daughters to come home. Praying for people to have personal encounters with the living God makes a huge difference.

PRAYER

"Father, I pray that people will understand how much You love them. Loose the Spirit of adoption for the people around me so that they come into a meaningful relationship with You. Stir in their hearts a longing to come home, to hear Your voice, and to see You welcoming them with open arms. Let them know You are always running to meet them and hold them close."

4. PRAY OTHER BELIEVERS WILL CROSS THEIR PATHS AND ENTER INTO POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS WITH THEM

This is twofold: we can pray for other Christians to influence the people around them positively, and we can also look for opportunities to influence others positively ourselves. God's plan to reach people is worked through those who already know and love Him. Jesus asked us to pray for people to go into the world to be salt and light. He came to bring the good news of the gospel to all people, and His desire is that everyone would know and love Him.

*Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest." **Matthew 9:38***

As His "spiritual farmers," we should be attuned to opportunities to plant spiritual seeds in the lives of the people we encounter each day. We may have no idea who has already been praying for them, and the culminating impact our kind word, compassionate act, or loving attitude can have to draw someone to Christ.

PRAYER

"Father, I pray for the lost around me to meet believers who will influence them in a positive way. Lord, let my life shine in such a way that people want to know the God I serve. Allow others to see my genuine love and concern for them in all that I say and do. Let me be Your hands and feet to serve them and let them know just how much You love them."

5. PRAY THE SPIRIT OF WISDOM AND REVELATION ON THEM SO THEY MAY KNOW GOD BETTER

It is that "eureka" moment, that "aha!" when it finally clicks. The most important moment to have this kind of revelation is when the lights come on spiritually. People need to see their own sin, see what Jesus did on the cross, and see the hope that comes from giving their life to God.

That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him.

Ephesians 1:17

People need wisdom, not just knowledge, of spiritual things, and insight into how spiritual realities directly impact them. We can pray for this kind of supernatural revelation that only comes from God.

PRAYER

"Father, I pray for the people around me to experience the Spirit of wisdom and revelation. I pray that they would truly understand their spiritual condition

and see all that Jesus did for them through His death, burial, and resurrection. Help them to have the information and experiences needed to come to You, so they can understand all You have for them."

MY NEEDS

Write down your needs that you want to focus on during Connect 21.

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Request Prayer

We would love to pray for your needs. We have intercessors who connect their faith with yours as we believe that God answers every prayer. You can request prayer by emailing us at

wecare@linkedupchurchnorth.com

Each Saturday at 9:00 AM, we have a prayer service where we pray over all requests. You may also submit a prayer request card in person at any of our services.

Prayer Services

- Saturday Prayer Service 9:00 AM – 10:00 AM
- Sunday Pre-Service Prayer 9:50 AM

Worship Services

- Sunday Worship Experience 10:00 AM

NEXT STEPS 1 Connect to God

Connect to God

Learn habits to develop spiritual maturity and stay passionately in love with God. Also, learn more about Water Baptism and becoming filled with the Baptism of the Holy Spirit.

NEXT STEPS 2 Connect to Family

Connect to Family

Learn habits to develop spiritual maturity and stay passionately in love with God. Also, learn more about Water Baptism and becoming filled with the Baptism of the Holy Spirit.

NEXT STEPS 3 Connect to Purpose

Dive into the details of your personality, discover your gifts, and see how your design reveals your purpose in life.

NEXT STEPS 4 Connect Community

Connect to the opportunities available at Linked UP North on our Dream Team and within your community to live out your purpose and serve others by using your God-given gifts.

Be encouraged to keep praying and developing your prayer life. Know that God is better than good, and He enjoys His time with you. You can trust Him with your prayers, your fears, your desires, and anything else you struggle with.

We believe that 2022 will be a great year for you and your family and for our church! Thanks for joining us!

 @linkedupNORTH

 linkedupNORTH.com

 facebook.com/linkedupNORTH