

AUGUST 2021

PRAYER GUIDE

Marks of a Healthy Church

HOW TO USE THIS PRAYER GUIDE

These devotions with prayer prompts are intended to assist our church family as we seek Christ personally in our daily time with Him and corporately during our monthly family prayer service. It is vital that we pursue the Lord in prayer with a humble heart and depend on His guidance and leadership.

DEFINED BY THE WORD

DEVOTED TO PRAYER

DEPENDANT ON THE SPIRIT

ALL PREVIOUS PRAYER GUIDES ARE LOCATED ON OUR WEBSITE

WWW.RICHLANDCREEK.COM

Day 1

Fall Semester at The Creek

***Key Scripture:** Ephesians 4:11-16 - And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.*

With the first three days of our prayer guide we wish to draw attention to our fall semester equipping classes. Richland Creek seeks to glorify God by “presenting everyone mature in Christ” (Colossians 1:28 - Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ.). Therefore, everything we do must encourage and equip members to “grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ” (Ephesians 4:15). To that end, we invite you to return to the Creek this fall and participate in your own growth and development for the glory of God.

Our Fall semester starts **Wednesday, August 25th** and will include something for everyone, babies through adults! All classes will meet from 6:30-7:45pm. More information will be posted on our website in the coming weeks at www.richlandcreek.com.

Prayer Prompts:

- Father, thank you for our church and the ability to meet together as one body.
- We pray that our congregation will greatly desire to participate in our classes this fall, as they seek to grow in their knowledge of You.

Day 2

Fall Semester: Adult Equipping Classes

The following classes will be offered for adults beginning August 25th:

- » Separate men and women **discipleship classes**. These classes teach the fundamental disciplines of spiritual growth and disciple-making. We focus on the eight goal areas that every Christian should be engaged in if they are truly submitted to the lordship of Jesus Christ along with additional subjects that are vital to our Christian growth.
- » Separate men and women **"Identity In Christ" classes**. What is identity? Where do we get our identity? What effect does idolatry have on identity? These crucial questions will be addressed along with other topics such as the image of God, cultural influences, identity theft and how to protect our identity in Christ.
- » Combined men and women topical classes. Each class will be two weeks long. Topics will include: Sufficiency of Scripture, Spiritual Gifts, Demonic possession and oppression of Christians, God's Sovereignty, Biblical counseling and Identity in Christ.

For more information on the classes above visit:

richlandcreek.com/connect/discipleship/ or email

Claudine Snyder - claudine@richlandcreek.com.

The above classes end on Nov. 10th; however, on Nov. 17th, we will have a panel discussion on a variety of key topics facing the church today.

All are welcome in any of these classes.

Prayer Prompts:

- Father, thank you for the spiritual gift of teaching.
- We pray for those who will teach our adult classes this fall semester- that they themselves will look more like Jesus by the end of the semester.
- We also pray for the adults who will attend- that they will be filled with the knowledge of You as we seek to encourage and equip.

Day 3

Fall Semester: Creek Kids, Students, & Special Needs

Creek Kids desires to see children grow in their love for God and their love for others. Because of this, a new program has been developed. *Discovery Pointe* is a curriculum created by the Creek Kids Leadership team and select parents. Its goal is to not only teach children important truths found in God's Word, but lead the teachers deeper into their understanding. Each month children will memorize a Bible verse and learn about a missionary partnership Richland Creek has, all in a fun and safe environment.

For questions contact:

Mike Dowd, Children's Pastor mikedowd@richlandcreek.com

Heather Tomberlin, Nursery Director heather@richlandcreek.com

Kimberly Brown, Preschool Director kimberly@richlandcreek.com

Our Special Needs Ministry desires to see all of our students and families participate in the body of Christ. This fall we will begin a new curriculum leading us through the discipleship goals we have identified as a church to Love God and Love Others. Classes (elementary, youth and adult) will be held on Wednesday nights from 6:30-7:45pm.

For questions contact:

Eleanor Waterman, Special Needs Director eleanor@richlandcreek.com

Tonya Guerrino, Special Needs Assistant tonya@richlandcreek.com

Student Ministry is kicking off the fall semester on Wednesday, August 25th with a night of prayer and worship. The following week we will begin our study in the book of Judges. Our D-groups (discipleship groups) will be walking through the Grand Narrative of Scripture.

For questions contact:

Stephen Moye, Student Pastor stephenmoye@richlandcreek.com

Caleb Acuña, Middle School Director calebacuna@richlandcreek.com

Isaac Mateus, High School Assistant Director isaac@richlandcreek.com

Christy Crowder, Student Ministry Assistant christy@richlandcreek.com

Prayer Prompts:

- Father, thank you for our children, student and special needs ministries.
- We thank you for our faithful servants who work so tirelessly each week. We pray You will be glorified in all that we say and do.

Day 4

What is a Healthy Church?

Key Scripture: Ephesians 1:22-23 - And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

For the remainder of our prayer guide, we are going to focus on marks of a healthy church. What is the church supposed to be? Should we expect anything from the place where we worship every week? What are the characteristics of a healthy church? What role do we, the members, play in cultivating a healthy church? These are profoundly important questions. So important we wish to spend an entire month looking at this topic and praying for our church.

Before we embark on a month-long journey about what a healthy church is we need to start with a simple definition of church. A church is a community gathered around Jesus by His Word. It is the body of Christ of whom He is the head (Ephesians 1:22-23). This body claims Christ as their Lord and Savior. A healthy church will encompass numerous characteristics, ensuring the body is protected, grows, thrives, reflects and reaches outward to the lost.

Over the next twenty-seven days we will look at what many have called “marks” of a healthy church. We will look at eleven different marks as well as the ordinances of baptism and communion.

Questions to Consider:

What would you say are marks of a healthy church?

Have you considered what role you have in the church?

Prayer Prompt:

- Father, we pray for Richland Creek Community Church. We pray for health and unity as we seek to glorify you, God.

Day 5

Mark One: Expository Preaching - Word Centered

Key Scripture: *2 Timothy 4:1-2 - I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and His kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching.*

One of the great passages describing the preaching of God's word is 2 Timothy 4. Here Paul gives instruction to the preacher and the hearer. Today we will spend a few moments praying for those who preach the word.

Notice the weighty words Paul uses to charge Timothy in verse one. This verse reveals the audience, the judge, and the results of preaching. He reminds Timothy that his audience is not just the people in front of him but also our great and holy God. As the Word is preached, God will judge people for their response. And finally, the preached Word will only fully be realized when Christ returns.

Paul then charges Timothy to a very specific and simple task. Preach the word. He is not called to preach stories, cultural observations, or helpful life tips. He is called to proclaim the truth of the Bible. This is called expository preaching. The task of the preacher is to expose the meaning of that text and apply it to the church. Therefore, the points made by the preacher are the points made by the original authors of scripture. Why is this important to the Church?

Questions to Consider:

Do you consider the preaching of a sermon to be a weighty matter?

Where does the authority of the preacher come from?

Prayer Prompts:

- Pray for Pastor Mike Powers and the other pastors that will be preaching the word.
- Pray the Lord will give understanding of his word and the ability to apply to the church.
- Pray the Lord will use His word to reprove, rebuke, and exhort.
- Pray the Lord would give the preacher complete patience.

Day 6

Mark One: Expository Preaching - The Listener

Key Scripture: 2 Timothy 4:3-4 - For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.

While the preacher is responsible to explain the Bible, the listener is also responsible for how they respond. Many people see their role in a church service as passive but the Lord intends for his people to be active not just in singing and praying but in the preached word.

These verses are given in the negative as warning against those who listen wrongly. By looking at the opposite of these verses the church can learn how respond to the preached Word in an obedient manner. Not only should believers endure sound doctrine but they should expect it from the pulpit. There should be a desire to hear clear Biblical truths that come directly from Scripture even when they are not in line with the popular culture.

Christians should also expect to hear truth that convicts their hearts. While preaching should be encouraging to a believer, it should also bring conviction to sin. Therefore, a sermon will not suit one's sinful passions but instead call for repentance. God's people listen to God's Word with open ears expecting to have their hearts and lives transformed more into the image of Christ.

Questions to Consider:

Do you listen to a sermon as if God is speaking to you through his Word?

When you hear a difficult truth about your sin do you turn away from that teaching or do you repent?

Prayer Prompts:

- Pray for those who gather on Sundays for worship at Richland Creek Community Church.
- Pray the Lord would draw people to sound doctrine and truth as the Word is preached.
- Pray the preaching of the Word would guard people from wandering into myths.

Day 7

Mark Two: Biblical Theology and Faithful Teaching

Key Scripture: *Nehemiah 8:8 - They read from the book, from the Law of God, clearly, and they gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading.*

Knowing biblical theology means understanding not just the individual pieces of the Bible – the books, chapters, and verses – but how each of those parts fit together to make the whole, and then how the whole affects our understanding of each of the parts. Biblical theology is a crucial mark of a healthy church because biblical theology draws us together into a deeper relationship with God.

Let me illustrate with an example from the book of Nehemiah, a story referenced in our key Scripture today (read Nehemiah 8:1-12 for the whole story). When Ezra and the scribes of Israel wished to see the people commit to obedience, they took three essential steps: They gathered the people together, read the Word of God, and clearly explained what it meant. That third step – explaining what it means – is where biblical theology comes in. You see, we're always tempted to read into the Bible what we want it to say. But biblical theology keeps our church centered on the God who reveals Himself to us as He is. This is the God of the laws, the poems, the letters, the prophecies, the stories – the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

When we are guided by vigorous biblical theology in the pulpit, in our groups and classes, and across all of our age-graded ministries, we will be a Bible-shaped church that practices repentance and nurtures faith. When we understand how to read and obey the whole Bible, we will grow more fully in our love for God and each other.

Questions to Consider:

In what ways might knowing the whole story of the Bible keep us from manipulating or misusing the individual pieces of the Bible?

Prayer Prompts:

- Thank the Lord for giving Richland Creek a vision for robust biblical theology in our preaching, teaching, and counseling ministries.
- Pray that despite temptations toward our own glory, that the preaching, teaching, and counseling ministries would interpret and apply the Bible rightly.
- Pray Psalm 119:33 – Teach me, O Lord, the way of your statutes; and I will keep it to the end.

Day 8

Mark Two: Biblical Theology and Faithful Mission

Key Scripture: Romans 10:14 - How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching?

Knowing biblical theology means understanding who God is according to His complete revelation of Himself in the Scripture. As we prayed yesterday, biblical theology is built as a church studies together how the story of the whole Bible affects each individual part – book, chapter, and verse – of the Bible.

Today, we will pray through how we respond as we practice a rigorous biblical theology. Without fail, a church built on healthy biblical theology will be a church on mission. Why? Because the Bible reveals a God who is on mission.

From the earliest pages of Scripture, we read of a God who is seeking to redeem. He rescues Noah from the flood, claims Israel as His people, sends prophets to a wayward nation, and ultimately sends His only Son to save lost humanity. From His Son's earliest followers, He forms a church, establishes disciples, and lays out a program for worldwide focus. Brothers and sisters, we are a part of that program!

When we live out the commands of the Bible by serving our neighbors, giving away our resources, going on mission trips, and sharing the gospel with the lost, we are participating in the ongoing mission of God to redeem the world. The God of the Bible desires to be known and has chosen this church – and her members – to be His mouthpiece.

When we are guided by robust biblical theology, we will be a missional people with a missional purpose.

Questions to Consider:

How might knowing the whole story of the Bible help us focus on reaching others for the sake of the gospel?

Prayer Prompts:

- Thank the Lord for giving Richland Creek a vision for robust biblical theology in our mission and evangelism efforts. Pray that despite temptations to focus on our own desires, we would seek to deny ourselves as we engage in missions and evangelism.
- Pray Psalm 51:12–13 – Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit. Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you.

Day 9

Mark Three: The Gospel- What is the Gospel?

Scripture Reading: Romans 3:21-26

Key Scripture: *Romans 3:23-24 - For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.*

"The Gospel" is the name given to the message that we as God's church proclaim to the world. We are centered on it. It defines who we are both individually and corporately. It is a message of hope and reconciliation. The gospel is all of these things because it is a declaration of God's work on our behalf.

God is at work making for Himself a people to declare His glory. These people (in the Old Testament called the Israelites and in the New Testament called the Church) unite together around this one truth: that God Almighty in His power has saved us from sin and death and transferred us into His kingdom, producing in us everlasting life.

Our sin was unfathomably deep and placed us under the deserving condemnation of God. But in His love He sent His only Son, Jesus, to be our substitute. In His life, death, and resurrection on our behalf, He redeemed us from the power of sin and death. Through faith in Jesus' finished work, we can be saved from condemnation and reconciled to God. This is the message that we proclaim, and the hope in which we stand.

Questions to Consider:

Have you considered how the entirety of God's story is necessary for someone to place their faith in Christ? Have you received the truth of the Gospel and found new life in Christ?

Prayer Prompts:

- Spend some time praising God for the new life He has given to you through His Son.
- Pray that the pastors and staff of Richland Creek would continue to center themselves and the church on the gospel.
- Pray for friends, coworkers, and relatives who need to hear the gospel, and pray that the Lord would make you ready to share with them.

Day 10

Mark Three: The Gospel- Why do we Preach the Gospel?

Scripture Reading: Colossians 1:3-14

Key Scripture: *Colossians 1:6 - In the same way, the gospel is bearing fruit and growing throughout the whole world—just as it has been doing among you since the day you heard it and truly understood God’s grace.*

As we mentioned yesterday, the gospel is the message we proclaim to announce hope and reconciliation to the world and ourselves. But what is our motivation for preaching the gospel, both from the pulpit and individually in our daily lives? We proclaim the gospel for three specific reasons.

First, we preach the gospel because we have been commissioned by God. It is both our duty and pleasure to honor the Lord by being His ambassador. We worship God as we proclaim His praises to the world. Second, we preach the gospel because it is necessary for our spiritual health. We often think the gospel is something for outsiders, and that somehow we are “past” that. But it is the gospel that refocuses us, encourages us, and guards us. We preach the gospel to ourselves to remind us of what is right and true in this world. Finally, we preach the gospel because it is the only hope for a dying world. So many have never heard or still don’t believe in the beautiful rescue that God has won for us. We share because they need to know the coming judgment and mercy of the Lord to pardon us.

Questions to Consider:

Which of these three motivations do you resonate with the most? Is there one motivation that is more important than another? How do they all work together?

Prayer Prompts:

- Pray through all three of these motivations, asking the Lord to help you understand where your heart may be lacking.
- Ask the Lord to develop in you a desire to honor Him through proclaiming the gospel.
- Pray for those with whom you have shared or will share that they would be receptive and respond in faith to God.

Day 11

Mark Four: A Biblical Understanding of Conversion

Key Scripture: *Acts 20:21- I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus.*

What is biblical conversion? Wayne Grudem states, "Conversion is our willing response to the gospel call, in which we sincerely repent of sins and place our trust in Christ for salvation." There are two necessary attributes of conversion—repentance and faith. Repentance is born from the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in us, giving rise to an unmistakable burden of our sin on our hearts, causing us to turn from it. Faith goes hand-in-hand with repentance in that as we turn away from sin, we turn to Jesus in trust that He will save us from that sin. Willing obedience to Him as Lord ensues for the duration of our lives.

There are very clear markers for us to see whether we have come into true saving faith. 1 John 3:9 tells us, "No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in them; they cannot go on sinning, because they have been born of God." Willful, unrepentant sin is not possible in the life of a true believer. With the presence of the Holy Spirit in us, we must see some sort of progressive victory over sin, and others will begin to see the fruits of the Spirit (see Galatians 5:22)

Why is this important to a church? A church must operate under the leading of the Holy Spirit with its members living in true saving faith, otherwise it will be a house of legalism or self-acceptance, a feel-good church. These types of churches teach faith-by-effort or avoid the hard message of sin in our lives offensive to a Holy God, and so deceive their congregations, leave them in their sin, fail to offer the hope of a new nature, and lead people to eternal death.

Questions to Consider:

Have you experienced the unmistakable burden of your sin on your heart by the power of the Holy Spirit?

Do you recognize the indwelling of the Spirit in your life through breaking of sin patterns and growing in love toward God and others?

Prayer Prompts:

- Heavenly Father, I pray for the indwelling of the Spirit in my life. I welcome you to reveal my sin and burden my heart.
- I thank you that I know the true gospel, your saving grace, and the work of Jesus on the cross to offer me a new nature free from sin, and a new hope for life eternal with you.

Day 12

Mark Four: A Biblical Understanding of Conversion

Key Scripture: *Revelation 12:11a They triumphed over him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony.*

In yesterday's study, we discussed what conversion is and how it looks for us personally. Today, we discuss that personal conversion, however, is never intended to be private. The book of Acts and the Epistles are abounding in stories of how our personal conversion testimony blesses others when we share it. When we talk about Jesus and how He saved us, it opens the door for the Holy Spirit to indwell the listener such that they also come into saving faith. This can be seen clearly whether it is three thousand people like after Peter's speech on Pentecost (Acts 2:41), or a single person as with Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:35-38). There are abundant Scriptures in which Paul shares who he was before his encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus, and who he was after, that lead to many believing in Jesus.

A truly converted heart will desire to see others come into the same saving faith. 1 John 1:3 reads, "We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ." Our conversion will mark a moment in our life whereby we are given new life in Jesus. By God's grace, as we grow in our faith and maturity, we will long to see others walk in that same freedom and life that we have been given.

Why is this important to a church? God desires for all to come to saving faith. And the church is the body of Christ. As the body of Christ, we continue the work Jesus began during His earthly ministry. John 14:12 states, "Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these ..." This is the purpose of the church.

Questions to Consider:

Have you created a personal conversion testimony centered on the gospel of Jesus?

Prayer Prompts:

- Father God, I thank you for your church and the power of the Holy Spirit to continue the work of Jesus through us, the body of Christ. I pray you will give me the faith I need to share my conversion story and the gospel message with others. I ask for your mercy in giving saving grace to those who hear your truth through me.

Day 13

Mark Five: A Biblical Understanding of Evangelism

Key Scripture: *Matthew 24:14 - And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.*

What is evangelism? Over the years evangelism was described in various ways--some of which include saying a prayer, walking an aisle, sharing a personal testimony, or even being baptized. But are those evangelism? Biblical evangelism must be informed and driven from a biblical foundation. The word "evangelism" is rooted in the Greek meaning "gospel" or to bring good news. To bring the good news is to teach, proclaim, preach, or bear witness of Jesus Christ. Jesus Himself preached the gospel. The church was given the gospel message to guard and proclaim, and to hand down to future generations.

Evangelism is to present Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit to sinful people in order that they may come to put their trust in God through Jesus Christ. As a Christ follower we must teach, preach, and proclaim this truth. Romans 10:14 asks, "How are they to believe in Him of whom they have never heard?" Disciples of Christ witness of Christ. We tell the good news of the gospel of the Kingdom of God. The result of our teaching, preaching, and proclaiming is left to God.

For the listener, saying a prayer, walking an aisle, sharing a personal testimony, can be a part of their salvation experience; however, evangelism is through the power of the Holy Spirit communicating who Jesus Christ is, and what He has done, so that they may see themselves as a sinner in need of a Savior.

What must an evangelist say or do as they proclaim this Good News? How do we evangelize in the power of the Holy Spirit? Tomorrow we'll look more into a biblical understanding of evangelism.

Questions to Consider:

Am I prepared to tell my lost friend the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ? Do I proclaim the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ in such a way that someone can realize they are a sinner separated from God, and understand they need a Savior who is Jesus Christ; then come to put their faith and trust in Him?

Prayer Prompts:

- Father God, I pray that I would be faithful to proclaim the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ to my friends, family, and to strangers. I pray that I would not be ashamed but I would depend on the Holy Spirit. I pray that _____ would come to place their faith in Jesus Christ for salvation. Help me be faithful to evangelize.

Day 14

Mark Five: A Biblical Understanding of Evangelism

Key Scripture: 1 Peter 2:9 “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.”

As believers we are privileged and commanded to proclaim the excellencies of God. Evangelism includes bad news about mankind, and good news about Jesus Christ. This news includes:

- God created mankind in His image with free will to be in relationship with Him. In our free will, we chose to sin against God through sinful attitudes, actions, and heart motivations. Our sin separates us from God (Genesis 1:27; Romans 3:23; Isaiah 59:2).
- God in His holiness will one day execute justice against sin (Psalm 7:11; Acts 17:30-31; Revelation 20:11-15).
- Jesus Christ is our substitute (Romans 5:8). Jesus, who is fully God and fully man, lived the perfect life in our place, bled and died on the cross, was buried and rose on the third day; conquering sin and death (1 Corinthians 15:1-4; 2 Corinthians 5:21). God offers the free gift of eternal life to all who will repent and believe in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord (John 1:12, 3:16; Romans 6:23; Ephesians 2:8-9). It is not enough to hear this good news. One must respond in repentance and belief (Romans 10:9-10, 13).

Evangelism occurs in the power of the Holy Spirit. “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and Samaria; and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8). Salvation belongs to the Lord. We cannot save anyone. “For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes” (Romans 1:16). The gospel is the power for salvation. Our responsibilities are to present this Good News in the power of the Holy Spirit and in prayer. Then we leave the results to God. As we proclaim, we must depend on the Holy Spirit of God to open the spiritual eyes and ears of those who hear (Acts 26:18).

Evangelism is the presentation of Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit to sinful people in order that they may come to put their trust in God through Jesus Christ.

Questions to Consider: Do I biblically know how to evangelize? Am I regularly, actively participating in evangelism?

Prayer Prompts:

- Father God, I pray that I would be faithful to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ. I pray for opportunities to share.

Day 15

Mark Six: A Biblical Understanding of Church Membership

***Key Scripture:** Romans 12:4-5 - For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another.*

As we think about what it means to belong to a local church body in covenant membership, we must rightly orient the focus of membership. Membership is not like being a member to your local gym, a member to the big box warehouse store, or a member of a sports team. No, covenant church membership is being a part of a family within a local church body with people who have professed faith in Christ. The gospel alone is what unites us. As Paul wrote in Romans 12, the local church is a family made up of multiple individuals with different functions; yet, they are one in Christ.

Local church membership has been a part of Christian history dating back to the early churches formed after the ascension of Christ. In many examples we see in the New Testament, a church is a local gathering of specific people. In his book on the Church, Mark Dever reminds us that "God has chosen to maintain a distinct and separate people for the purpose of displaying his character." When we reflect on how God has created us for community with one another, we remember that being a part of a church family helps move us from isolation into fellowship with other believers for accountability and growth.

When you think about your family and how it functions, does the importance of serving one another come to your mind? It should. In many families, we selflessly serve one another as we contribute to the health and prosperity of the family unit. Within the local church, every member has a unique opportunity to contribute to the overall health of the body by using their spiritual gift for the common good of others. Are you actively using the gifts God has given you? "As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another as good stewards of God's varied grace" 1 Peter 4:10

Questions to Consider: Have you chosen to join the family of believers at Richland Creek? If not, what is keeping you from doing so? Are you contributing to the displaying of God's character through the local church?

Prayer Prompts: Read Hebrews 10:24-25

- God, help me to see my purpose in the body of believers of Richland Creek. God, show me ways that I can contribute to the unity of the church family.
- God, give me opportunities to serve the brothers and sisters of Richland Creek with the spiritual gifts uniquely given to me.

Day 16

Mark Six: A Biblical Understanding of Church Membership

Key Scripture: 1 Peter 5:2 “Shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you.”

When we consider the membership of the church, we remember that it is a group of people gathered in agreement upon the gospel of Jesus Christ, having personally given testimony of salvation by grace through faith. The membership represents Christ through their living and partakes in the grace of Christ through the ordinances uniquely given to the local gathered body of believers. Therefore, the organized structure or polity by which the church is guided means that the pastors or elders of a specific congregation are entrusted by God for the care and protection of the flock as the spiritual shepherds. Church membership then is the ability for the shepherds/pastors of the local congregation to know for whom they are responsible and to whom they will give an account before God.

On those special occasions when the church gathers in remembrance of what Christ has done through the observation of the Lord's Supper, we remember that it was Jesus who established the church (Matthew 16); it is Jesus who is the head of the church (Colossians 1); it is the bride of Christ for whom He died (Revelation 19); and it is the church who unites as the physical representation of Christ to the world (Matthew 5).

Joining the family of believers at Richland Creek is quite simple. A covenant member of Richland Creek has done the following: placed his or her faith in Jesus for the forgiveness of sin, been baptized by immersion as a public testimony of salvation, completed church membership classes, committed to a membership covenant, and completed a membership interview with one of our pastors.

Questions to Consider:

How can I help the pastors at Richland Creek shepherd and care for me better? Why wouldn't I be willing to commit to the group of believers at Richland Creek? What am I waiting on?

Prayer Prompts: Read John 13:34-35

- God, thank you for the pastors who desire to shepherd and care for me. Help me make their task a joy for them and not a difficulty.
- God, allow me to see my purpose within the body of Christ at Richland Creek. And if you're leading me to commit to this family, help me to be obedient to complete the membership process.

Day 17

Mark Seven: A Biblical Understanding of Church Discipline

Key Scripture: *Matthew 18:15-17- If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.*

A biblically healthy church is one that practices church discipline. In Matthew 18:15-17 Jesus Christ institutes and describes the process of church discipline. Today we want to look at two things: (1) who comes under church discipline and (2) what are the steps of church discipline. Tomorrow we will look at the two reasons Christ commands us to perform church discipline: Love for one another and purity of the Bride of Christ.

Church discipline is carried out by the Church towards any person who is living in unrepentant sin. We read in verses 15-17 that the person “refuses” to listen. Even when shown clear biblical truth they are in sin (verse 15), they refuse to repent from that sin. The “who” of church discipline is an “unrepentant sinner”-- a person who understands they are in disobedience to God but chooses to continue in that sin.

Scripture points us to the four steps of church discipline from Matthew 18:15-17. The first step is when we know of sin in the life of our brother or sister. Consequently, we go to them personally and privately (verse 15). In that conversation, we are to biblically point out the sin they are involved in and the steps of repentance from that sin. If the brother or sister refuses to repent, then the second step is to bring witnesses. These witnesses are to listen to all the facts. When they are assured sin is taking place, they call the person to repentance (verse 16). If the person still refuses to repent, then step three must happen where the entire church must be involved. The entire church will confront the unrepentant brother or sister and urge them to repent of their sin. If the person refuses to listen to the entire church, then step four must take place; they must be removed from the membership of the church (verse 17).

Question to Consider:

Do you have relationships in the church for accountability? Who are you fighting against sin with?

Prayer Prompts:

- Pray that God will give His church wisdom and strength to obey His command for church discipline.

Day 18

Mark Seven: A Biblical Understanding of Church Discipline

Key Scripture: *Matthew 18:15-17* “If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.”

Yesterday we read about the “who” and “how” of church discipline. Today we will look at “why” we do church discipline.

The first purpose for carrying out church discipline is to show love toward our brothers and sisters in Christ. The person living in disobedience to the Lord is deceiving themselves (James 1:22 But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves). Confronting them with the truth of the Word is an act of love (James 5:20 let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins and Galatians 6:1 Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted). Sin is a destroyer of our lives and also has tragic consequences for others (James 1:15 Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death). If we are truly loving one another, we would confront each other over sin and help each other repent and be restored to our walk with the Lord.

The second purpose of church discipline is the role of purity. The visible earthly Church is to be made up of men and women who have placed their faith in the finished work of Christ, and in the power of the Holy Spirit, they are walking in obedience to the Word of God, participating in His work until the return of Christ (see Ephesians 5). When a person is unwilling to follow Jesus in His Word, even after several loving steps of church discipline, then they must be removed from the body of true believers. This keeps the commands of the Lord to love God with all of our being (keep His Church pure) and love others as ourselves (be accountable to each other over sin).

Questions to Consider:

Do you love your brothers and sisters enough to confront them? Do you need help to repent of any sin in your life?

Prayer Prompts:

- Pray that God would search us and remove anything that doesn't look like Christ Psalm 139:23-24. Pray that after we confess and repent of our sin we love others enough to help them Matt. 7:4-5.

Day 19

Mark Eight: Discipleship & Growth: Pathway to Maturity

Key Scripture: *Colossians 1:27-28 – To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ.*

False assumptions tell us church attendance, how long we have been a Christian, or Bible knowledge equals spiritual maturity. Maturity comes as the Spirit uses biblical knowledge applied in obedient action to transform believers. As infants are advanced from milk to solid food, plants are cultivated into bearing fruit, and athletes are trained over time; so too Christians are meant to grow in Christ-likeness (Heb 5:12-6:1; Col 2:6-7; 1 Tim 4:7-8; 2 Pet 3:18).

To facilitate growth, a biblical church develops an intentional pathway for its people – a continual process for Jesus' parting words. The church fosters cycles of sharing the gospel as God calls non-Christians out of darkness into His marvelous light, baptizing disciples, and continuing their growth by teaching them to obey all of Scripture's commands (1 Pet 2:9; Matt 28:18-20; Luke 6:40). In other words, we teach and model Christ-likeness for God's glory until presenting others mature in Christ.

Jesus is our example. He poured into His disciples for three years, shaping them toward His mission. He, the Good Shepherd, commissioned them to feed His sheep, His beloved people (John 21:15). Today, the church continues the feeding process and prepares a discipleship pathway to develop the youngest, most immature believers into seasoned disciples, sent to develop more disciples. Though imperfect this side of heaven, the church is purposeful, obedient to the Word for God's glory, aiming its members ever deeper in our knowledge and love of God, impacting our love for others. The growth pathway continues until we see Jesus face to face.

Questions to Consider:

How do I see God's faithfulness in deepening my relationship with Him? Where do I need to submit in obedience to the Spirit's transforming work?

Prayer Prompts:

- Father, may our church train disciples unto maturity in Christ-likeness.
- Give wisdom to our pastors as they plan and shepherd us toward growth.

Day 20

Mark Eight: Discipleship & Growth: Participation in Maturity

***Key Scripture:** Ephesians 4:11-13 And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of the ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ,*

The discipleship pathway necessitates participation by God's people in the maturing process – pastors and church members alike cultivating growth church-wide. Hebrews 10:24-25 frames our gathering together around the Word toward active involvement in other's lives as we spur each other on to love and good works. Pastors lead by biblical teaching and example, and the people actively follow as equipped ones. Everyone learns from and invests in others – from the oldest to the youngest, the most seasoned to the newest believer. In like-mindedness, each joyously leans into the work of the ministry (Acts 20:27-28; Heb 13:7; 2 Tim 2:2; Phil 2:1-5).

What is the atmosphere for this discipleship process? The church – a loving, committed family. Spiritual parents with spiritual children, along with big brothers and sisters in the faith living out God's Word in the power of the Spirit for the younger ones. Unity strengthened around our love for God and others for His glory. Biblical community is developed as we study the Bible, pray, worship, witness, give, serve, and live on mission together (John 14:15; Matt 22:37-39; 1 Cor 11:1; Romans 12).

This is God's work among His people (Phil 2:13). Yet, He asks Christians to put in effort to grow (2 Pet 1:5-8). Reflecting His grace, may we persevere to present one another mature in Christ. May we live as praise unto God until we are in His presence.

Questions to Consider:

Where is my pride inhibiting someone else from biblically shaping my life? How will I learn from and invest in someone else's discipleship growth?

Prayer Prompts:

- Thank you for our pastors. Continually develop them so they may encourage and equip one another and the congregation.
- Grow us for the work of Your kingdom ministry. Use me to train up others so they may impact families, churches, workplaces, schools, and mission fields for Your glory.

Day 21

Mark Nine: Biblical Church Leadership – Elder Led Body

Scripture Reading: 1 Timothy 3:1-7

The title “Elder” is synonymous with overseer, pastor, bishop or shepherd. The role given is to provide oversight of the people of God. Ultimately, the role of the elder is to shepherd the people of God. If one can imagine sheep wandering around without a shepherd, then one can imagine the church without biblical leadership. The church is not designed to function without biblical leadership. Imagine what the outcome would be for sheep who have no shepherd. God has given the church structure, which includes roles for all those involved, in order to help the church. The elder is to lead and provide direction to the congregation so that they are well taken care of and protected from straying away from the flock.

In order for an elder to be able to lead well, he must be qualified based on the biblical standards of an elder. The office of an elder is not to be taken lightly, and the congregation is to be the final authority on who can be an elder. If the congregation does not take the position of elder seriously, then they may choose an unbiblical structure of church leadership or possibly choose individuals who are not biblically qualified.

It is important to note that deacons and elders are not the same thing, nor do they have the same role. Their qualifications are similar but their roles are different. The deacons are to be servants in the church who help tend to the physical needs of those within the congregation. Both the elder and the deacon are vital to the function of the church and both are governed by the congregation. An elder is to shepherd and lead the congregation, but the congregation holds some authority over the elder(s). The congregation affirms the elder(s) who are to lead them and the congregation is responsible for keeping the elder(s) in check.

Questions to Consider:

Are you allowing your elders to help you in your spiritual growth? Are you spiritually mature enough to determine who should or should not be an elder? Are you actively supporting your elders as they lead Richland Creek?

Prayer Prompts:

- Pray for your elder body. Pray that they would be above reproach in every area.
- Pray that they will not grow tired in working to provide oversight to you. Pray that your elder body would continue to work in unity.

Day 22

Mark Nine: Biblical Church Leadership

Scripture Reading - Titus 1 & 2

As we see in the book of Titus, Paul's instructions are to appoint elders in every city. This certainly indicates that there are to be elders over every congregation. The true biblical model of the church is to have at least one overseer/elder to shepherd each congregation. God has laid out the expectations for both the congregation and its leadership. Titus is a great place to turn to when looking for how the church is to function. The older men and women are to help develop the younger men and women. The elder is to help adequately equip each of the members of the congregation for good works. The elder is not responsible for every discipleship relationship, but they are to equip the members to carry out the work. The leadership of the church as seen in Titus is responsible for protecting the congregation from false teachers and inappropriate practices. The members of the congregation are responsible for the work as well.

A church where the elders are the only people working for the Lord is not functioning properly. The whole body is to be busy working for the Lord, not just some. Every member of the church, whether elder, deacon, or congregant should be busy being fully devoted to the Lord and growing in their spiritual maturity. Spiritually mature believers should look to come alongside others less mature to help them grow in their walk. Likewise, those who are young in their faith (no matter the age), should seek out a spiritually mature person to help them grow in their faith. This is discipleship and discipling, and every believer is called to discipleship. An elder is to oversee or shepherd the flock so that all members of the congregation are able to grow. An elder can only do this correctly if he is both qualified and called to the position. The congregation should be very particular with who they allow to be an elder over them. The elder must meet the biblical qualifications or else the church may in fact be led astray.

Questions To Consider:

Are you either being disciplined to grow in your faith or discipling someone else to help them grow in theirs? Are you supporting the efforts of your elders as they desire for you to grow as a disciple?

Prayer Prompts:

- Pray and thank the Lord for your elder body who has worked hard to protect Richland Creek from false teaching.
- Pray that Richland Creek's members would continue to desire spiritual growth in their own lives and in the lives of others.
- Pray that God would protect our elders from failure so that they would remain qualified to lead you.

Day 23

Mark Ten: Missions - To Follow Jesus is to be Devoted to Missions (Part 1)

Key Scripture: Matthew 4:19 - "And He said to them, 'Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.'" Jesus, Acts 1:8 - "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

Our God does not work through random coincidences or accidental instances. The Lord is sovereign, purposefully working throughout all of history to redeem His people and receive His own glory. To that end, it is surely no coincidence that the FIRST words Jesus spoke to His followers align with His LAST words to His followers: To follow Jesus is to participate in His mission. Do you see the striking similarities? One well-known pastor said it right when he said, "When you accepted Jesus you accepted the call to missions, the gospel was never meant to stop with you, but to spread through you." Let's be honest for a second. Personally, we tend to think of missions as a special call for a special few. In truth, the call to serve on Christ's mission applies to everyone who is a follower of Jesus. Location, giftedness and age may vary, however, the call is gloriously inescapable. Jesus uses us, the church, to go as living testimonies of the mission of God to every corner of the earth so that people from every tribe, tongue, and nation will gather and adore the Lamb who was slain on their behalf (Revelation 5).

Questions to Consider:

Who is called to engage in the mission of God? What is involved in the mission of God? How might God be calling YOU to utilize the time, talents, and treasures that He has given you to serve His mission?

Prayer Prompts:

- UPWARD: Praise Jesus for fulfilling His mission to save you.
- INWARD: Confess your anxieties regarding the mission of God to the Lord and ask Him to fill you with boldness and big faith to live missionally.
- ONWARD: Pray for our Richland Creek mission partners to remain courageous, devoted, and faithful to the mission that God has called them to.
- Read John 17:14-23

Day 24

Mark Ten: Missions - The Church is God's Means to Reach the Nations (Part 2)

Key Scripture: *Acts 13:47* "For so the Lord has commanded us, saying, 'I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.'"

Romans 10:13-15 "For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in Him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, 'How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!'"

What is God's primary way that He will accomplish Revelation 7:9- "After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands..."? The evidence is overwhelming when we search Scripture's answer to this question. The answer is us, the church. One pastor said, "The church is God's 'Plan A' to reach the nations and there is no 'Plan B.'" God calls us to salvation, then commissions us as His ambassadors to preach the Cure--the gospel-- to the eternal disease that is plaguing the nations. Brothers and sisters, the church is the embassy of heaven on earth—namely, heaven gathering on earth. The church is a lighthouse: The brighter we shine the gospel message here in Wake Forest, the further that light will shine to the nations. This is the task of the church. Called by the Father, sent by the Son, and filled with the Spirit: we GO with complete confidence that this mission WILL be fulfilled and the Lord WILL be glorified. So, who will GO?

Questions to Consider:

Have you traditionally viewed missions as "A" ministry of the church or "THE" ministry of the church? What are different gifts between you and two other church members? Celebrate these God-given gifts and consider how to apply these gifts to engage in spreading the gospel in a way that impacts those around you.

Prayer Prompts:

- UPWARD: Praise God for entrusting the gospel message to you.
- INWARD: Ask God how He is calling you to use your gifts for His mission.
- ONWARD: Pray for our church to have the missional heart of Christ.
- Read 2 Corinthians 5:17-21

Day 25

Mark Eleven: Prayer

Key Scripture: *1 Thessalonians 5:17 Pray without ceasing.*

How far could you run if you held your breath? Without a sufficient supply of air, even an elite athlete would lack the strength to go far—much less finish a race. As air is to our lungs, so prayer is to the Christian. Neither we, nor the Church, will thrive without it. Prayerlessness weakens us. It leaves us vulnerable to sin, and the schemes of the Enemy. “For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities... against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places” (Ephesians 6:12). Yet, instead of “praying at all times in the Spirit” (Ephesians 6:18), we often neglect our relationship with God—setting aside the power and grace He intended to strengthen us. Imagine the implications for the Church, and the effectiveness of its ministries, if God’s people fail to pray.

The Bible tells us that our loving, wise, holy, Heavenly Father commands His people to devote themselves to prayer—both individually and corporately. Why? Prayer is an act of worship in response to what we know about who God is, what He has already done for us in Christ, and what He still intends to accomplish when Christ returns. He calls believers to spend time in prayer to grow in our knowledge of Him. As we enjoy the blessing of fellowship with God, our love for Him (and others) will grow. Prayer positions us to recognize our dependence upon God—for He alone is the source of everything we need for life and godliness. As sinners saved by grace, we must seek the Lord with an attitude of humble reverence. Apart from Him, we can do nothing! Prayer even aligns our thoughts and desires with God’s. Scripture tells us that His ways are not our ways. “For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are [His] ways higher than [our] ways...” (Isaiah 55:9). Imagine the implications for the Church, and the effectiveness of its ministries, if God’s people faithfully pray.

Donald S. Whitney writes, “To be like Jesus we must pray.... In every season, God expects every Christian to be devoted to prayer.” As we seek to trust and obey, may the fervency and frequency of our prayers increase—that we might glorify God and run with perseverance the race marked out for us!

Questions to Consider:

Can you think of any other reasons why prayer is vital to a healthy church? How can you increase the frequency and fervency of your prayers?

Prayer Prompts:

- Read Matthew 6:5-15. Following the pattern of Jesus, pray verses 9-13 in your own words.

Day 26

Mark Eleven: Prayer

Key Scriptures: Acts 2:42 *“They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.”*

James 5:13-14, 16 *“Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray.... Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him ... confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.”*

One of our eight Discipleship Goals is to love God in prayer by devoting ourselves, corporately and individually, to daily communicating with Him in light of who He is and what He has done according to His Word. In a healthy church, members pray for one another and with one another—passionately pursuing God and participating in His kingdom work.

Individually, we follow the example Jesus set for us—praying frequently and alone (Luke 5:16, 9:18; Mark 1:35). Corporately, we follow the example of the early church—praying frequently together (Acts 1:13-14, 2:42, 12:5). In both settings, this means praying prayers that, as John Onwuchekwa writes, “Linger on the glories of God, His attributes, and His character ... meditating unhurriedly on His Word ... asking God for help to do what only He can do: save the lost, feed the hungry, liberate captives, give wisdom to world leaders, fix broken institutions, sustain persecuted Christians.” It means searching our own hearts, lamenting, confessing, and repenting of sin—praying honest, transparent prayers that magnify God and reflect the magnitude of His mercy and grace toward us in Christ.

For biblical examples of prayer, read the psalms penned by King David, Ezra’s lament (Ezra 9), Israel’s confession (Nehemiah 9), or the profound prayers of the Apostle Paul. Our words need not be as eloquent, but we must approach God with the same humble and contrite heart. Be encouraged by the faith of those who came before you and those whom God chose to walk alongside you. Pray with your brothers and sisters in Christ at the monthly prayer meeting, in your Life Group, Discipleship Group, etc. A healthy church prays—that it, and its people, may serve and be sanctified, strengthened, and sustained by the power of God—for the glory of God!

Questions to Consider:

Is prayer a priority in your life? How frequently do you pray privately/corporately? How will participating in corporate prayer impact your walk with the Lord?

Prayer Prompts:

- Praise God that—in Christ—we can approach His throne of grace with confidence. Pray for God’s grace to help us be a people (individually and corporately) devoted to prayer.

Day 27

Biblical Ordinance: Baptism

Key Scripture: *Romans 6:3-4 Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 4 We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.*

Jesus, the Son, submitted to the Father through obedience in baptism, giving us a pattern to follow and imitate as believers. Matthew 3:16-17, When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him. And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

As believers, we are part of God's universal church (all believers) and we are also called to gather in the local church. The gathering of the local church must have baptism as one of their two ordinances (communion being the other). This is a command from Jesus Himself. Matthew 28:18-20, "And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, 'All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.' Amen."

Baptism occurs after a person places their faith and trust in the finished work of Jesus. It is important to note that baptism does not save - as salvation comes by faith alone (Ephesians 2:8-9 For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.) Baptism is an act of obedience after salvation).

We often say that baptism is an outward expression of an inward decision, a public profession of one's faith. Baptism is symbolic of Jesus's death, burial, and resurrection and is also a representation of our new life in Christ.

Why is this important to a church? Matt Merker states, "As a symbol of union with Christ, baptism also signifies entrance into Christ's body, the church." Baptism not only represents our identification with Christ but also our identification with the local church. 1 Corinthians 12:13- For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.

Questions to Consider: Have you rightly understood the ordinance of baptism and followed through in obedience, after salvation?

Prayer Prompts:

- Father, thank you for giving us the perfect example to follow in Your Son. We praise you that you have given us a clear picture of baptism through Your Word.

Day 28

Biblical Ordinance: Communion

***Key Scripture:** Luke 22:19-20 And He took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me." Likewise He also took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is shed for you."*

This remarkable depiction Jesus shared with His disciples, known as The Last Supper, can be found in all four Gospels (Matthew 26:26-29; Mark 14:17-25; Luke 22:7-22; John 13:21-30) as well as in 1 Corinthians 11:23-29. Jesus broke bread and gave thanks to God, instructing His disciples to remember Him and the new covenant through the shedding of His blood. Jesus knew He would be crucified the next day, becoming the fulfilled prophecy.

Today, this remembrance for believers is known as The Lord's Supper, Communion, or the Eucharist (which means "give thanks"). As we read yesterday, the gathering of the local church must have baptism and communion as their two ordinances. Looking again to Jesus as our perfect example, we participate in communion out of obedience and worship.

Why is this important to a church? The Lord's Supper is a time where the local church gathers, as an act of corporate worship and fellowship, in remembrance of Christ's sacrifice. The bread symbolizing His body and the drink, His blood. Jesus instructed, "Do this in remembrance of me," indicating that this was to be an ongoing ordinance. Paul instructed believers how long to do this—until Christ's return. 1 Corinthians 11:26 "For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes." As a church body, we have the blessing and privilege to experience communion together in a way that unifies us, in the gospel, as we reflect on the ultimate sacrifice through Jesus.

Questions to Consider:

In 1 Corinthians 11:28, Paul instructs believers that before participating in Communion, "Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup." Do you come before the Lord with a rightly postured heart or with unconfessed sin?

Prayer Prompts:

- Father, thank you for the ultimate sacrifice in Your Son, Jesus. Thank you for allowing us to participate together in the ordinance of communion as we remember the shed blood of Christ until Your return.

Day 29

What is a Healthy Church Member?

Key Scripture: *John 13:34 A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another...*

As we examine what makes a healthy church, it may seem as if the health of a church rests on the leadership. Moreover, reading about all these “marks” can leave us wondering what are our responsibilities within the local church? One pastor writes, “The health of the local church depends on the willingness of its members to inspect their hearts, correct their thinking, and apply their hands to the work of the ministry.” Everyone has a role to play. We all bear the responsibility to jointly build, maintain, and protect the body of Richland Creek Community Church.

Consider these New Testament instructions about our role as members of God’s kingdom and the local church:

- Matthew 18:15, If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault...
- Matthew 28:19-20, Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.
- Romans 12:10-13 Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor. Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality.
- 1 Corinthians 12:7, A spiritual gift is given to each of us so we can help each other. (NLT)
- Ephesians 4:15, Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.
- Hebrews 10:24, And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works.
- 1 Peter 4:10, As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace...
- Jude 20-21, But you, beloved, building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life.

Clearly, we have many responsibilities and much work to do—eternal work that God has prepared for us (2 Tim 3:17).

Questions to Consider: How are you contributing to the health of Richland Creek Community Church?

Prayer Prompts: Father, thank you for the gift of the church. Pray that our members would participate in and contribute to the building up of the body through serving, equipping, discipling, and prayer.

Day 30

Church Shopping

Key Scripture: *Ephesians 4:15, Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ*

Church shopping: the practice of looking for a new church—sometimes quite frequently. At times, necessary but in some cases, it is quite consumeristic.

To be sure, there are instances where leaving a church is unavoidable. For example, if there is a move far away. That's an obvious reason to go look for a new church. Other times, we look for a new church because of an unbiblical doctrinal issue or one (or more) of the "marks of a healthy church" is missing. It could be that undealt with sin exists within the leadership of the church. Other times, hurt, conflict or even abuse occurred within the church. Even though a hurt or abused member may have received counseling—and forgiveness has been received or given—it may be unwise for the parties to stay in the same church.

Yet, sometimes, church shopping stems from a self-centered desire to find a church that meets one's own personal wants and needs. Paul Tripp explains, "Like shoppers, we chase the deal of the moment. We have become high-expectation and low-commitment attenders. That's why there is always a good possibility that many of us will be worshiping somewhere different soon. Sadly, church has become a place we attend rather than something with which we are intimately involved." Serial church shoppers arrive seeking entertainment and gratification and leave asking, "Did I like it?" After a few months or years, shoppers decide the grass is greener somewhere else.

The pandemic rewrote the practices of church shopping. With the click of a button, we are beamed into any and every church—even beyond our local communities—on a weekly basis. Online services, while helpful, have given us access to attend but not join, watch but not participate, explore but not commit.

This shopping mindset not only hurts the shopper but the church as well. Shoppers deprive the local church community any contribution to the kingdom. We would be wise to remember we are to "grow up in every way into Him" which leads to v.16, "...makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love."

Questions to Consider: Are you a church member? Are you church shopping? Why? Is your reason biblical?

Prayer Prompts:

- Pray through and meditate on Romans 12:1-8. Specifically on v.5, For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.

Thank You

We praise the Lord for all those who contributed to make this prayer guide possible. We are so grateful for the faithful servants who have dedicated their time and talents to writing this prayer guide.

To God Be the Glory!

1 Thessalonians 5:12-13

But we ask you, brothers and sisters, to recognize those who diligently labor among you and are in leadership over you in the Lord, and give you instruction, and that you regard them very highly in love because of their work. Live in peace with one another.