

MAY

PRAYER GUIDE

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PREVIOUS PRAYER GUIDES ARE LOCATED ON OUR WEBSITE

WWW.RICHLANDCREEK.COM

EDITOR'S NOTE

This month's guide consists of carefully selected posts from prayer guides of the last two years– a prayer guide “best of the best,” if you will. As you pray this month, please take time to thank God for the many men and women who have faithfully served our church by writing these posts.

I would also like to say a special word of thanks to Eleanor Waterman, Claudine Snyder, and Joy Styers. From the very beginning of this guide, Eleanor has faithfully served as the driving force behind its production – generating ideas, assigning topics, editing posts, and really guiding it from start to finish. Claudine has served in numerous ways, including writing, editing, and administrative tasks. Joy's tireless design and layout work has beautifully captured the spirit of this guide each and every month. Ladies, we are indebted to you for your labor and praise God for what He has done through you.

After this month, the prayer guide is going on hiatus for a few months while we give our writers and editors a break and take some time to brainstorm together what new opportunities might await us. With us being two years into the endeavor, we thought it would be a good time to reassess and ask some good questions about design, format, and style. Thank you for your patience as we work through that process!

Yours in Christ,

Pastor Jason Hall

PRAY FOR VBS - JUNE 20-24

Vacation Bible School

Psalm 93:4 “Mightier than the thunders of many waters, mightier than the waves of the sea, the LORD on high is mighty!”

Today, we would like to focus on praying for all the participants who will be attending VBS and learning about how mighty our Lord is. Throughout the five days, they will see that God is mightier than the ocean, and He makes waves as His Word goes forth by the obedience of His servants. They will spend the week learning about creation, Peter walking on water, the resurrection, Jesus' teaching, and the fruit of the Spirit. There will be many opportunities for them to interact on different levels with the Word of God.

Praise the Lord for all who have already signed up! For some who attend, this may be their first time hearing God's Word or even being inside of a church. Many will hear the gospel for the first time. Throughout Bible story time, crafts, games, music, missions and evangelism, it is our prayer that these participants will learn who God is and take what they learn and share it with their families!

We ask that you, church family, partner with us in a few different ways. First of all, pray. Pray for the Word of God to be made known to all who attend and for lives to be transformed. Second, share. Share this opportunity with your friends, neighbors, co-workers etc. Third, serve. There are many opportunities to serve with us! For more information visit

WWW.RICHLANDCREEK.COM/VBS.

Questions to Consider:

Do you know of someone that could come and learn of our Mighty God during VBS? Have you signed up to serve at VBS?

Prayer Prompts:

- Please pray for the children to know God made them and that He is mighty.
- Please pray for an abundance of servants in all areas of need.
- Please pray for servants to have patience, endurance, and energy the whole week.
- Please pray for new families to connect to the Creek through VBS.

WALKING IN THE SPIRIT

Fruit of the Spirit: Introduction

Galatians 5:22–24 “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. And those who are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.”

The imagery of fruit in Scripture is frequently used to illustrate cause and effect relationships. In Galatians 5, the fruit, or result, of the indwelling Holy Spirit through faith in Christ should be as obvious as apples on an apple tree. But unlike apple trees, we are all sinners, and the fruit we produce is not always what God desires in our lives.

There is a battle of “flesh vs. Spirit” inside of us. Paul acknowledges this in Galatians 5:17, “For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do.” He even goes on to spell out some of the fleshly fruit in verses 19–21. Take a moment to contrast these to the Spiritual fruit in verses 22–24. Now take a moment to press your life up against these Scriptures.

The Bible teaches that a tree is known by its fruit (Luke 6:44). Through the next nine days we will examine each of the nine attributes of the fruit of the Spirit, giving biblical definitions and helpful prayer prompts. Our prayer for you is that the fruit in your life would bring glory to God as we follow His mission together.

Questions to Consider:

Have I truly “crucified the flesh with its passions and desires” through Christ? Are there specific attributes in verses 22–23 that I struggle with and may need help?

Prayer Prompts:

- Confess to God and repent of “the lust of the flesh.”
- Pray that God would grant wisdom and discernment as you seek to follow His Spirit and will.

Luke 6:44 “For every tree is known by its own fruit. For men do not gather figs from thorns, nor do they gather grapes from a bramble bush.”

WALKING IN THE SPIRIT **Fruit of the Spirit: Love**

Ephesians 5:1–2 “Therefore, be imitators of God as dear children. And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma.”

Our culture defines and expresses love in many ways. We can love our spouse romantically, our family and friends brotherly, and even our sports teams passionately. More often than not love is self-serving, based on what we get out of these relationships rather than what we put in. However, this idea is turned upside down and inside out when we understand how God defines love in His Word.

Love is sacrifice. Christ demonstrated this truth by making the ultimate sacrifice to save us from sin and death. In the above Scripture, Paul implores us to imitate God and walk in love as Christ did. God showed his love through Jesus as our sacrifice. Jesus took on flesh, putting aside His place in heaven to save sinful humanity. (John 3:16).

To walk in God’s love requires sacrifice. Offering our time, talent, and treasures to Him for the benefit of others is counterintuitive to our culture and our fleshly nature. The Holy Spirit living in us gives us the ability to love others sacrificially, submitting our will to God. There is good reason that love is the first fruit of the Spirit mentioned: God’s love manifested to us through Christ gives us the ability to truly love one another, binding the other eight attributes tightly together.

Questions to Consider:

Have I trusted in Jesus Christ as my Savior from sin and death? Do I love others selfishly or sacrificially?

Prayer Prompts:

- Praise God for demonstrating His love for us through Christ.
- Pray to love sacrificially, seeking to forgive and serve others.

Romans 5:8 “But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

WALKING IN THE SPIRIT **Fruit of the Spirit: Joy**

Romans 15:13 “Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.”

We’ve all probably heard the saying, “Do what makes you happy.” It sounds good and appeals to our fleshly desire to feel good. Most of us have also figured out that happiness is fleeting, and the chase for it never-ending. So how can we have joy in our lives if we cannot maintain happiness? We can because happiness is not how Scripture defines joy. Joy is hope. The hope of fulfilled promises, the hope of forgiveness, the hope of eternity. Happiness is determined by our feelings; joy is determined by our faith. Happiness is guided by outside influences (people, circumstances, etc.); joy is guided by the indwelling Spirit. Happiness is fickle and temporal; joy is constant and eternal. The hope that is in us through faith in Christ allows us to focus on the heavenly end of the journey rather than on the bumpy earthly road we travel.

We are all promised trials in this life. The trials could be spiritual, medical, financial, relational, or something else. We usually don’t get to choose the trials. We do, however, get to choose our response. Through the power of the Holy Spirit in us, we can choose joy.

Questions to Consider:

Are there things in my life that give me temporary happiness, but no lasting joy? How can I have hope in the midst of trials?

Prayer Prompts:

- Confess to God and repent of any “happiness idols” in your life.
- Pray that God would remind you of His promises during times of trial.
- Pray for His joy to guide and sustain you.

1 Peter 4:13 “But rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ’s sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy.”

WALKING IN THE SPIRIT **Fruit of the Spirit: Peace**

Colossians 1:20 “. . . and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross.”

During an Internet search on the word “peace,” the first two definitions that came up were “tranquility” and “a period in which there is no war.” These are both common definitions of peace in our culture that are also uncommon to achieve. Tranquility is relative and can be easily put out of balance by simple things like noise, weather, or illness. Wars and rumors of wars are promised by Scripture to continue (Matthew 24:6). It’s easy to conclude that true peace is not defined by these definitions. God’s Word defines peace in a very different way.

Peace is reconciliation. Peace in a right relationship with God is only possible through faith in Jesus Christ. Our sin separates us from God, breaking our relationship with Him in a seemingly irreparable way. We cannot fix what we have broken, causing turmoil within us. Jesus “made peace through the blood of His cross.” He reconciled us to God, repairing our broken relationship.

None of us are promised tranquility or an absence of conflict in our lives. Peace cannot truly be reached if measured in these ways. However, we can experience true peace through the reconciliation offered by Christ’s sacrifice on the cross. This is the peace that surpasses all understanding.

Questions to Consider:

Are there things in my life that take my focus away from the peace of God? Is there unconfessed sin in my life that is hindering peace with God?

Prayer Prompts:

- Confess to God and repent of any unconfessed sin.
- Pray for rest in the peace of your reconciliation through Christ.
- Pray for your relationships with people who need reconciliation.

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

WALKING IN THE SPIRIT

Fruit of the Spirit: Long-suffering

James 1:2–3 “My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience.”

We have just come through a long season of the pandemic where at times your patience may have been strained. We didn't know how much longer it would be until things got back to normal, or even what that “normal” would look like. We watched and waited, and then waited some more. Some truly suffered in that season, whether physically, financially, emotionally, or other ways. We can become edgy and even down right irritable when patience runs low. We must strive to see things God's way when it comes to long-suffering.

Long-suffering is endurance. It is keeping our eyes fixed on God and His promises while going through seasons of life. It is learning and growing from trials, processing things in the Spirit through His Word. It is relying completely on God. It is not merely putting up with the bad to get to the good; it is putting both the bad and the good before the Lord for His glory. It is not just limping through a race that never ends, but rather finishing the race in the victory already secured by Jesus.

This attribute of the fruit of the Spirit is often cited as the hardest one to keep and demonstrate consistently. Much of this may be due to our impatient fleshly desires pushing against the inexhaustible long-suffering of the Holy Spirit. Through the power of the Holy Spirit we can genuinely endure. If you feel discouraged, remember all Christ endured for you.

Questions to Consider:

Are there things in my life that cause me to become impatient? What is God teaching me through this season?

Prayer Prompts:

- Pray for endurance in this season.
- Pray for wisdom to grow through trials.

Hebrews 12:1 “Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.”

WALKING IN THE SPIRIT **Fruit of the Spirit: Kindness**

Philippians 2:3–4 “Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.”

Sometimes the English language fails to capture the complete essence of Greek words in the Bible. The Greek word *chrestotes* (khray-stot'-ace), translated as “kindness” in Galatians 5:22, is a prime example. When we think of kindness, we may think of being nice, friendly, considerate, or generous. But this Greek word also includes the idea of usefulness, serviceability, and meeting needs. There is no one English word that encompasses all of these ideas.

Kindness is beneficial. It helps meet the need of others in very practical ways. It is active, not passive. It is continuous, not selective. It is for the benefit of others, not for ourselves. Think of our Food Pantry Ministry as an example: the physical and spiritual needs of others are intentionally and actively met. Our kindness is the practical manifestation and application of the love Christ lavished upon us through His death and resurrection.

Through the power of the Holy Spirit we can put God first and others before ourselves. As we grow closer to God through discipleship, we can demonstrate kindness in our witness, our ministry, and our generosity. None of us need to selfishly look out for ourselves when we all look out for each other.

Questions to Consider:

How can I show God’s kindness to others? Do I genuinely esteem others greater than myself? Are there things I do out of selfish ambition?

Prayer Prompts:

- Pray to esteem others greater than yourself in word and deed.
- Pray for practical ways to demonstrate God’s kindness to others.

Psalms 116:12–13 “What shall I render to the Lord, For all His benefits toward me? I will take up the cup of salvation, And call upon the name of the Lord.”

WALKING IN THE SPIRIT **Fruit of the Spirit: Goodness**

Ephesians 2:10 “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.”

The concept of goodness, or being good, is one most of us have heard since childhood. We’ve been told to be nice, follow the rules, mind your manners, and so forth. We could do these things even if we didn’t want to or didn’t believe they were important. We merely had to appear good to be seen as good. This is because these require our behavior, not our hearts. However, goodness in Galatians 5:22 shows that it’s all about who we are, not what we do.

Goodness is authenticity. It is being exactly who you appear to be. It is not just living, thinking, or acting LIKE a Christian; it is living, thinking, and acting AS a Christian. Authenticity is not turned on and off depending upon situations and surroundings. True goodness flows from the Holy Spirit within us. The good works and good behavior are the fruit that naturally grow from a genuine faith. They are the effect, not the cause of faith.

Being authentic can be challenging as we all have fleshly desires and actions, past and present, that cause shame. Our sinful nature urges us to build walls around ourselves, lest anyone should see who we really are. Living as Christians, genuinely loving God and others, tears down these walls. We then quickly see that we are all quite the same: sinners saved by God’s grace on mission for His glory.

Questions to Consider:

Am I living like a Christian, or as a Christian? What part do my “good works” play in my faith? Are there things in my life that hinder my authenticity?

Prayer Prompts:

- Pray for the Holy Spirit to help you live authentically as a Christian.
- Pray for wisdom and guidance regarding your “good works.”

2 Corinthians 5:17 “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.”

WALKING IN THE SPIRIT **Fruit of the Spirit: Faithfulness**

1 Corinthians 15:58 “Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.”

Let’s say you are taking a train from Raleigh to Chicago. You’ve got your ticket, itinerary, luggage, and are ready to go. You sit back, relax and enjoy the ride all the way to Union Station. You trust that the train will get you to Chicago. Why? Because the tracks are set and the train just has to follow their path. You trust that you will get to Chicago because the train will get to Chicago. That is the idea behind faithfulness as a fruit of the Spirit.

Faithfulness is trust. Trust in God rather than in ourselves. God laid the “train tracks” for us, and we must trust Him as we travel in His direction. When we trust in His Son, His Word, and His promises we are then able to be trustworthy to others. There is integrity, or wholeness, that comes only from God. Walking in this integrity strengthens us to be people others can rely on, pointing them toward Christ.

Faithfulness can also be described as “God’s warranty.” It is the promises of Who He is, what He has done and will do, and how much He loves. Trusting and walking fully in these promises always puts us on the right track.

Questions to Consider:

Am I trusting in God or in myself and other things? Can others trust me? Does my life point others to Christ?

Prayer Prompts:

- Pray for the Holy Spirit to help you fully trust God, repenting of trust in other things.
- Pray that your life would point others toward Christ.

Ephesians 1:13–14 “In Him you also trusted, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory.”

WALKING IN THE SPIRIT

Fruit of the Spirit: Gentleness

James 1:19–20 “So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God.”

It's game 7 of the World Series, and the home team is down 4–3 in the bottom of the ninth. With one out and runners on first and second the power hitting catcher steps into the batter's box. He's thinking one thing: 3-run homer to win the Series! However, the third base coach is giving him the sign to bunt rather than swing away. He angrily accepts the sign and stabs roughly at the first pitch. Strike one. He calms down, remembers that his coaches have got the team this far, and squares away to bunt. He lays it perfectly down the third base line, sacrificing the out at first to move the runners to second and third. The next batter hits a two-run single, and the home team wins the championship in part because the catcher held back and trusted his coaches. He showed gentleness.

Gentleness is submission. It is the idea of strength under control, specifically God's control. It is walking in humility before God and others. The catcher in our illustration could have done things his way rather than submit to his coaches. Each of us must decide every minute whether to submit to God or do things our way. It's either the fruit of the Spirit or the lust of the flesh. There is tremendous power when we lay aside our own strength.

Questions to Consider:

Am I submitting my will to God? How do I demonstrate gentleness in my life?

Prayer Prompts:

- Pray to be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath.
- Ask the Spirit to identify anything I am not submitting to God.

1 Peter 3:15 “But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear.”

WALKING IN THE SPIRIT

Fruit of the Spirit: Self-Control

Galatians 5:25 "If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit."

It is quite significant that the fruit of the Spirit starts out with love. Think of the rest flowing out of Christ's sacrificial love for us. Without that love in our lives it would be impossible for us to have joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, and gentleness. It is also very significant that these attributes end with self-control. Think of self-control as the fruit basket, holding the others together and carrying them forward.

Self-control is accountability. The Greek word *egkrateia* (eng-krat'-i-ah) in Galatians 5:23 translated as "self-control" also speaks to the idea of "true mastery from within." It proceeds from within oneself, but not by oneself. It comes from the Spirit living in us through faith in Christ. We are given the ability to consistently choose Spirit over flesh. The bad news is that none of us can or will be perfect. The good news is we don't have to be: Jesus is already perfect in our place.

This is also most beneficial in our relationships with others. When we are accountable to God in all things, we can in turn be accountable to one another. Accountability is essential to Christian discipleship. It must be present for honest, life-changing discipleship to occur. Self-control is the outward manifestation of every attribute of the fruit of the Spirit. Let us walk together in the Spirit.

Questions to Consider:

Am I walking in the Spirit, or in the flesh? Am I accountable to God? Am I accountable to others?

Prayer Prompts:

- Pray for the Holy Spirit to help me truly walk with the Lord.
- Pray for accountability toward God and people.
- Praise God for demonstrating His love through Jesus.

Romans 14:12 "So then each of us shall give account of himself to God."

LOVED DEFINED **What Love is...**

John 13:35 "By this all men will know that you are my disciples that you Love one another."

Jesus said that one way the lost world will know if we are truly His disciples, His real followers, is how we show love toward each other. This love isn't based on anything to do with us -- not our emotions, not our preferences, not our circumstances. It is based on the Gospel. Our example, to love one another, is the example of God Himself who gave us His Son that we would be saved from sin and death. (John 3:16, Romans 5:8) Based on this greatest of all examples, we are compelled to truly, biblically, love one another.

We must examine ourselves and remove anything that doesn't adhere to the Word of God, and we must put on what the Word tells us to obey. As brothers and sisters in Christ, we are called to walk in love and unity. This month we will apply the Word to ourselves in prayer and allow God to transform us in the image of His Son. This is of utmost importance; we must be serious in our repentance and obedience as we move forward as the church of God in Wake Forest, NC.

Questions to Consider:

Do I love others based on who they are and how they treat me, or do I love others based on who Christ is and what He has done for me?

Prayer Prompts:

- God, remind me again how much you love me. Show me my life of sin and how You saved me through the sinless life, atoning death, and powerful Resurrection of your Son.
- Open my eyes, ears, and heart to the guidance of the Holy Spirit so that I would understand true biblical love, that I may love others in such a way that lost people would ask for the same love.

LOVED DEFINED

Love is Patient

“Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.”

1 Corinthians 13:4-7

Paul, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, teaches us what love means and how important it is. As you read 1 Corinthians 13:1-3, you see the priority of love in context to serving. No matter how great your gifting, no matter how great your service to the Lord or each other, without love it means nothing.

In verse 4, we learn love is patient. The word patient means long-suffering. It is a term used to describe people who allow themselves to be repeatedly inconvenienced and yet not become angry.

The world teaches us to become angry at every offense no matter how small; God's Word teaches us as brothers and sisters in Christ to be patient, to allow ourselves to be inconvenienced by our brothers and sisters over and over, not reacting with harsh words or actions, but instead loving patience. When any change occurs, there are always things that are frustrating. People will act like people. But instead of reacting like the world does, we will act in love with patience.

Questions to Consider:

With whom have you been harsh? To whom should you have shown patience?

Prayer Prompts:

- Pray God reveals to you someone you need to show patience toward.
- Pray God reveals to you someone who has been patient toward you, and that you are moved to thank them.

LOVED DEFINED

Love is Kind

“Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.”

1 Corinthians 13:4-7

Love is kind. While patience takes harsh words and actions from others without anger or retaliation, to be kind is to be useful, serving and gracious. John McArthur calls it “active goodwill.”

“And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.” Ephesians 4:32

Kindness is not an emotional word but an action word. When we show kindness, we don't wish someone to be better, but we actively work for them to be better. It's our love for others that causes us to reach out to them and discover what they need, then fill that need so that they may be better. This is without reward to ourselves, not for our good but solely for them. Again, as always, God is the perfect example.

“But when the kindness of God our Savior and His love for mankind appeared, He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by His grace we would be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.”

Titus 3:4-7

Questions to Consider:

To whom can I be kind today, and this week?

Prayer Prompt:

- God, fill me with the desire to be kind, not in thought, but in deed so I may follow your example.

LOVED DEFINED **Love is Not Jealous**

“Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.”
I Corinthians 13:4-7

Here, Paul starts the first of eight things love “isn’t.” Love and jealousy cannot coexist in people. Jealousy shows itself in us in two ways. The first is that we wished we had what others have. Instead of rejoicing in their blessings, we complain that it’s not us. The other is to desire that others would stop receiving the blessings of God all together. We see a brother or sister in Christ being noticed for their giftedness or sacrifice, and instead of thanking God for His gifting and thanking them for their service, we instead talk behind their back, or worse, wish they had not come here.

Like the seven things that follow in this chapter of 1 Corinthians, jealousy has no place in the Christian’s life.

Questions to Consider:

When have I acted in jealousy?
Is there anyone I have been jealous of?

Prayer Prompts:

- God, expose any jealousy in my life.
- God, may your Holy Spirit prompt me through Your Word to ask forgiveness of anyone of whom I have been jealous.

LOVED DEFINED **Love does Not Brag**

“Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.”
1 Corinthians 13:4-7

Only yesterday we learned that love is not jealous. Yet, when we brag of our successes, we tempt others to be jealous of us. When we brag, we want others to want what we have achieved, accomplished, or possess. The bragger wants attention, and ultimately, the praise of others. God knows all of your sacrifices and successes, because He orchestrated them all. God deserves the praise, no one else. The bragger wants to be lifted up. Love does not desire to be lifted up, but to lift others up, not to be served, but to serve.

Therefore, Paul says: “May it be that I would never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ through which the world has been crucified to me and I to the world.” Galatians 6:14

We have no boasting or bragging rights. All Glory, All Honor, All Praise is for the Lord. Love does not cause our brothers and sisters to stumble but instead turns all our accomplishments toward the glory of God where the focus of His children should be.

Question to Consider:

Where have you been bragging in your life?

Prayer Prompt:

- God, show me how I can take every accomplishment, every gift, every success and focus all the praise and honor toward You. Show me how to be crucified to this world.

Galatians 5:24 “And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.”

LOVED DEFINED Love is Not Arrogant

“Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.”

1 Corinthians 13:4-7

To be arrogant is to be proud, puffed up, to see yourself better than others. Love cannot act in pride. Paul speaks to the church at Corinth about their arrogance:

“Now these things, brethren, I have figuratively applied to myself and Apollos for your sakes, so that in us you may learn not to exceed what is written, so that no one of you will become arrogant in behalf of one against the other. For who regards you as superior? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?” 1 Corinthians 4:6-7

The church at Corinth felt superior to others because they had been taught by Paul, or by Apollos, or felt pride that someone like Paul had baptized them. Paul reminds them that it is through God that all good things come. He also reminds them that, no one is superior and as brothers and sisters in Christ we are equal in all things. Remember that we need the mind of Christ:

“Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” Philippians 2:5-7

Question to Consider: Do you see yourself as better than anyone else?

Prayer Prompt: God, show me where my pride needs to die so that I may love others like You love me.

LOVED DEFINED

Love is Not Rude

“Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.”

1 Corinthians 13:4-7

To act unbecomingly is to be rude, non-caring of the feelings of others. At first it may not sound as harsh as bragging or arrogance, but at its core it is. To be rude, to be non-caring are the actions of someone who doesn't regard other people. Others don't matter - they are just the background of your life.

Who are we rude to? The men volunteering in our parking lots on Sunday? The childcare worker in the lower level where you drop off your kids? Why are they less significant than you? Why don't you see them as people? Were you in a rush, in a hurry because you were late? Did you feel as though they should be serving you better? Have they become tools to use or are they people that Christ died for? To be rude is to be unloving.

Jesus had time for all, regard for all. There were no invisible people to Jesus. His love was equal for all.

Questions to Consider:

Who was the last person you were rude to?

Who are the invisible people in your life?

Prayer Prompt:

- God, let me see people not like tools to get things that I need done, but instead as brothers and sisters You loved so much that You sent Your Son to die for them. Their value is not in what they do for me, but in how much You paid for them -- everything.

LOVED DEFINED **Love is Not Selfish**

“Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.”

I Corinthians 13:4-7

We do not love only to receive gain. Love isn't selfish or it does not seek its own. It gives not to receive, but for the act of giving itself. We are not taught to love others only when we can receive love back, but we are to love others even when we know they can give nothing back. We are to love our enemies even when they only wish to repay us with harm. How much more are we to love our brothers and sisters in Christ selflessly?

“But God demonstrate His love toward us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us.” Romans 5:8

God does not love us because we can do something for Him, He just loves us.

“Love does not insist on its own way...” I Corinthians 13:5b

“Here is one of the most striking reminders of what love looks like in true religion. Why is that? Being selfish strikes at the very heart of every single one of us. “Insist” here means a continuous strong desire that demands “its own way.” Conversely that means being inconsiderate of the good or happiness of others. The Corinthians were abusing their Christian liberty. Paul told them on the one hand, God gives us all things to enjoy. But on the other hand, he said let no one seek his own good, but the good of his neighbor. Even when it comes to things that we have a right to enjoy, our freedom must always have a careful consideration for others. My happiness never trumps the life of my brother or sister in Christ.” - Erik Raymond, The Gospel Coalition

Question to Consider:

Who am I loving just for something in return?

Prayer Prompt:

- God, expose any selfishness in my relationships.

LOVED DEFINED **Love is Not Easily Angered**

*“Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.”
1 Corinthians 13:4-7*

To be provoked is to be aroused to anger. That I would allow the actions of a brother or sister in Christ to cause me to be angry with them is unloving. Love drives us to try to find answers to problems, to reach out and ask questions, to see how we can help.

Our first response to a perceived attack should be love, not anger, not irritation toward another, not being “upset.” We should seek reconciliation, not retaliation, in every relationship in Christ; we must respond to an attack with peace, that we may walk together in our transformation into the image of Christ.

“Anger itself is not sinful but can quickly lead to sinful expressions. For this reason, Paul wrote to the Ephesians, *“In your anger do not sin’: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry”* (Ephesians 4:26). There are times when we become angry, yet we are called to express our anger in non-sinful, constructive ways. Love will guide us in the proper handling of anger.

Being hot tempered usually involves making snap judgments, seeking instant vindication, and refusing to grant second chances. However, true love refuses to jump to conclusions, take revenge, or hastily judge anyone.” - GotQuestions.org

As we will see in the next few days, love does not excuse sin, but it doesn’t repay sin with sin.

Questions to Consider:

When do I get angry? Who do I get angry with?

Prayer Prompt:

- Father, show me how to replace anger with love.
- God, is there anyone who has provoked me to anger that I need to make reconciliation with?

LOVED DEFINED **Love Keeps No Record of Wrongs**

“Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.”

1 Corinthians 13:4-7

Love does not take into account a wrong suffered. “Take into account” is a bookkeeping term. It is a writing down of wrongs done to me so that I will remember to keep that person accountable for them. Love doesn’t keep an account of wrongs in order to punish others for our pain. Love forgives.

Nevertheless, we must remember that forgiveness is not forgetting. There is no way we can forget the harm others have done to us in this life. We cannot expect others to forget how we have hurt them. Forgiveness is not trust. Just because I have forgiven someone, I do not automatically have to trust them - that is not the point of forgiveness. Forgiveness is to leave all judgment and punishment to the only one who judges and punishes justly. Only God can justly and completely punish sin.

When my brother or sister in Christ sins against me, I cannot forget it. I may not be able to trust them right then, but I can immediately forgive them. I must not attempt to punish them myself, but leave that punishment up to the Lord.

There is a difference between what is legal and what is personal. I must legally report crimes. Having someone arrested for a crime is not punishment, but many times could be the road to help and healing. If I lend my tools to someone and they sell them for drug money, I should call the police; it may be the best thing for that person. I won’t forget what they did, and I won’t trust them with my new tools. However, my goal is not to hurt them for my pain, but instead help them. Love keeps no account of wrongs suffered, but instead strives to show forgiveness.

Question to Consider:

What wrongs have I suffered that I have not forgiven?

Prayer Prompt:

- Father, teach me to forgive others as you have forgiven me.

LOVED DEFINED Love Rejoices in Whats Right and Good

“Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.”

1 Corinthians 13:4-7

Love does not rejoice in unrighteousness but rejoices in the truth. Love cannot excuse evil. Using love to excuse unbiblical behavior is sinful and hurtful to others. It is a false love. Excusing sinful behavior is not love at all, but instead it is hate. Sin leads to destruction and death, so we should never excuse sinful behavior, especially in someone we claim to love.

“Then when lust has conceived it gives birth to sin and when sin is accomplished it brings forth death.” James 1:15

To celebrate sin in the name of tolerance or by trying to be kind by using language like “I don’t want to push them away” is all sinful and hateful. It means you would rather watch them suffer in their sin than to see them walk in righteousness. To rejoice in unrighteousness is to justify sin and love cannot do that. True love will not do that. Instead, love rejoices in Truth. God’s Word is Truth.

“Sanctify them in truth, thy Word is truth.” John 14:15

Love celebrates obedience to God’s Word. It is in obedience to the Word that people will find peace, joy and hope.

“True love rejoices in what is right and good. Anything that covers up sin or seeks to justify wrongdoing is the polar opposite of godly love. Love does not sweep sin under the rug. Love does not try to find ways to get away with bad behavior, and it does not put up with injustice. Instead, it treasures truth, celebrates good behavior, and promotes virtue. True love has nothing to hide.” - GotQuestions.org

Questions to Consider: Is there any unrighteousness in your life that you tolerate? Are you rejoicing in the sin of others?

Prayer Prompt: Father, give me the courage to point out sin so that I may demonstrate love.

LOVED DEFINED

Love Bears, Believes, Hopes, and Endures

“Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.”

1 Corinthians 13:4-7

Love bears all things. This is a helping word. A word that helps carry burdens. We love one another as we help carry each other's trials and tribulations. When we forgive and show patience and kindness and walk through this life together. Romans 12:15

Love believes all things. Love acts as if someone is innocent until proven guilty. The first thought of love is “I must be mistaken.” When I think my wife has said something hurtful to me, I must first assume it's not. She loves Jesus and she loves me, so whatever was said wasn't in malice. Love always gives the benefit of the doubt. Job's friends immediately believed all of Job's problems were a result of his sin, not giving him the benefit of the doubt, and not showing the love that Job needed from them. (Job 21:27)

Love hopes all things. Even when wronged by someone, love hopes for that person's restoration. Love prays for our enemies and hopes for them to find salvation in Jesus Christ. Love drives us to hope not despair -- for God's work in someone's life.

Love endures all things. To endure is to hold fast. It is a military term to stand fast, don't move, endure everything, to keep your ground. Love endures hardship, strife, arguments, trials and tribulations. Love doesn't leave; love doesn't abandon.

Questions to Consider:

Who needs help bearing something today? Who has lost hope? Who do you need to reach out to today and endure with them?

Prayer Prompts:

- Take time to praise the Lord for his perfect love.
- Thank God for demonstrating His Love toward us in His Son Jesus

PAUL'S PRAYERS

Introduction

Romans 12:12 “Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.”

The Bible contains numerous prayers and teachings about prayer, including those from the apostle Paul. In fact, Paul beautifully weaves his prayers into his letters with other topics such as the gospel and difficult doctrines of the faith. Paul's prayers have been classified by modern commentary writers into four groups: Simple prayer (where Paul appears to pray as he pens a letter), Prayer reports (where Paul tells his readers of his prayers), Prayer wishes (where Paul refers to God in the third person), and Encouragements to pray.

Throughout the 13 books in the New Testament authored by Paul, he has written 42 prayers (Romans, 1-2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1-2 Thessalonians, 1-2 Timothy, Titus, and Philemon). Some were written from house arrest or from a prison while being chained to a guard. By the will of God, the body of Christ has been given Paul's prayers so that we may learn from his prayer habits and imitate them. Focusing on how Paul prays will reorient our thoughts to a more godly and eternal perspective.

Most of us pray for the everyday “fix it” needs that we have without considering what God wants to do in every situation. Paul would pray for unity, for wisdom, for knowledge of the greatness of the love of God, and much more. Nineteen prayers have the two little words “so that.” For example, Paul prays for unity “so that” the church may bring glory to God (Rom. 15:5-6). Also, read Ephesians 1:17 where Paul prays for the Spirit of wisdom “so that” believers may know God better.

Likewise, Paul consistently thanks God for signs of His grace at work in people's lives, such as faithfulness in times of adversity (see 2 Thess. 1:3-4). He also consistently asks God for those things that carry eternal weight, such as believers' deepening knowledge of God, growing spiritual maturity, and increasing love for one another.

Questions to Consider: Are you willing to pray for God's will to be done in each prayer you utter? Will you consider examining the apostle Paul's prayers as a model of what to pray for?

Prayer Prompt: Father, turn my affections towards You and seeking you in prayer daily as did the examples You gave in the Bible.

PAUL'S PRAYERS Prayers from Ephesians

Ephesians 1:15–17 “For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him...”

The Apostle Paul wrote this letter to the faithful believers living in western Asia Minor. Though imprisoned in Rome, Paul was moved by reports of their faith in the Lord Jesus and their love for others. He wanted his brothers and sisters in Christ to know how grateful he was for them. Paul also wanted them to know that he remembered them in his prayers—praying that the “Spirit of wisdom” would help them grow in their knowledge and understanding of Jesus Christ.

God’s people were surrounded by worldly influences and pagan culture. Home to the temple of Artemis (Greek goddess of fertility), the city of Ephesus was the largest trade hub in the region, providing access to major shipping and land routes. Imagine the variety of people they encountered each day! Paul prayed for these believers to know Christ better because he knew that knowledge of the truth is power in an ungodly world. The more a person gets to know Jesus and matures in his faith, the more he will love Christ. That love will fill his heart to overflowing and leave no room for worldly affections to take hold. The only problem is that we do not generate true faith, love, or the knowledge of God on our own.

Read the passage that precedes these verses (Eph. 1:1–14). Notice that v. 13 identifies the “Spirit of wisdom and revelation” about whom Paul is speaking. When we accept the gift of grace and the redemption God offers us through the blood of Jesus Christ, we are sealed with the promised Holy Spirit. He is the source of true faith, love, the knowledge of God, and understanding of the Word. Praise God for “the riches of His grace, which He lavished upon us, in all wisdom” in Christ.

Questions to Consider: Are you growing in your knowledge of Christ? In what ways is the faith others have in the Lord Jesus an encouragement to you?

Prayer Prompts: Praise God and give thanks in prayer for the example of those whose faith in the Lord Jesus Christ encourages you. Ask God to bring to mind those for whom you could pray Ephesians 1:17.

PAUL'S PRAYERS Prayers from Ephesians

Ephesians 1:18–20 “... having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which He has called you, what are the riches of His glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His great might that He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at his right hand in the heavenly places.”

Yesterday, we looked at Ephesians 1:15–17. The Apostle Paul wanted the faithful in Christ to continue to grow in their knowledge of the One in whom they had already placed their hope. Today's passage (vv. 18–20) tells us that Paul also prayed that his brothers and sisters in Christ would better understand the work of the Holy Spirit within them—that is, that they might know the immeasurable greatness of the power they already possessed.

What does Paul mean when he prays for the enlightening of “the eyes of [their] hearts”? John Calvin writes, “Till the Lord opens them, the eyes of our heart are blind. Till the Spirit has become our instructor, all that we know is folly and ignorance.” The things of the Lord are spiritually discerned. It is the Holy Spirit who gives insight. He helps believers understand and appreciate every spiritual blessing available by grace, through faith, in Jesus Christ. Those who are not in Christ cannot understand the assurance we have that God is at work in us—in the present—to conform us to the image of the Son. Likewise, unbelievers cannot appreciate the hope we have for the future—namely, the fullness of all that awaits us when Jesus returns.

Remember, the “great might” at work in both the Resurrection and the Ascension of Jesus Christ (the power that raised Him from the dead and later seated Him at the Father's right hand) is at work in us (Col 1:27).

Questions to Consider: What does it mean to you to know that the same Spirit, and the same power that raised Christ from the dead, is at work in “us who believe”? Are you living as one who believes? Why, or why not?

Prayer Prompts: Praise God for every spiritual benefit and blessing you have in Christ. Pray that God will help you (and your brothers and sisters in Christ) to understand the greatness of His power at work in you. Ask Him to help you rest in His strength today.

PAUL'S PRAYERS Prayers from Ephesians

Ephesians 1:21–23 “...far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. 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.”

As Paul closes this prayer over the people of Ephesus he speaks about rule and authority. As ruler, Jesus is the head, which translates from the Greek word *kephale* as “top, chief, one to whom others are subordinate.” Jesus is above all, at that time and forevermore, above everything that was, is, or will come. He is superior and was given this all encompassing authority by His Father, God. Jesus is far above and over all rulers, authorities, powers, kingdoms, and titles.

In the next verse Paul speaks to the relationship Jesus has with His church—the body of Christ. By being the body of Christ we all are to work together for a common purpose, as we follow the directions that come from the head. Christ is the head of the church, and we are the body of the church.

“Paul claimed the church exists and functions only by reason of its vital relationship to its head, Christ Jesus. As the resurrected and exalted Christ, He is without need and is independent of anything. Yet as head, He is incomplete without the body, which is the church that fills up Christ. So the body and the head are one in the truest sense.” (Holmon Study Bible)

Questions to Consider:

Knowing that Jesus gives us His power, how should that make you go about your day?

Will you be as one downcast or as one who understands the authority of Jesus?

Prayer Prompts:

- Father, I am grateful for the power that raised Christ from the dead is the same power that saved me. Help me to live in that Spirit-filled power daily.
- Father, help me to utilize this power and love that You have given to help meet every challenge or trial I face.

PAUL'S PRAYERS Prayers from Philippians

Philippians 1:3-6 "I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now. And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ."

Paul opens this letter of rejoicing to the Philippian church with thanksgiving and praise to God. Paul says that every time he remembers the Philippian church and prays for them, he does so with joy. This church in Philippi was a source of great encouragement for Paul. Specifically, the reason he gives is because of their "partnership in the gospel."

This church took the groundwork that Paul laid during his missionary journey and ran with it. Throughout the rest of the letter, you can read about how they were loving one another, regularly preaching the gospel, and even enduring mistreatment. Because of their consistent faithfulness to the work of ministry Paul considered them dear friends and partners.

As believers we are united together in one work. It is often important in our walk as believers to remember that we have brothers and sisters walking the same road beside us. It is a beautiful thing when I can scan across the sanctuary on a Sunday morning and see everyone else there who also loves the Lord and desires to see Him glorified. It strengthens my heart and builds up my faith to see the body of Christ singing in unison the praises of God. Take time this week to praise God for the church body. Give Him thanks for all the friends and ministry partners you have there.

Questions to Consider:

What is different about unity in the church than unity in any other human-made institution? How do we prioritize and guard this unity?

Prayer Prompts:

- Give thanks for your church family, other faithful local churches, and believers around the world as the kingdom of God strengthens and expands.
- Pray that Richland Creek would continue in the unity of the Spirit and bonds of love, and that we would protect our purity and unity.

PAUL'S PRAYERS Prayers from Philippians

Philippians 1:7-11 “It is right for me to feel this way about you all, because I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus. And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve what is excellent, and so be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.”

Continuing on from verse 6, the “good work” that God has started in the Philippians is continuing to blossom. As they continue to minister alongside Paul, he prays for ongoing spiritual growth. This prayer has two parts to it—the end goal of their growth and the path towards that goal.

The end goal of this spiritual growth is two things: to be “pure and blameless on the day of Christ” and to be “filled with the fruit of righteousness.” These two goals are parallel, meaning someone who is pure and blameless will undoubtedly be filled with righteousness. However, one is a state, while the other is an action. I am pure but act righteous. So, Paul wants both their inner person and their actions to be completely holy.

The path to this goal is to grow in three specific things: love, discernment, and approving or judging. What Paul means is that when we grow in love, we begin to know what is good, true, and holy. When we grow in discernment, we begin to see these truths played out in everyday life. If we put both truth and love together, we can know and pursue holiness in all areas of life. If you want to be blameless and filled with righteousness, then you need both love and discernment, which leads you to approve of what is excellent.

Questions to Consider: How do we grow in love? How about discernment? What does it look like to disciple someone else in these areas, and how can you make that happen?

Prayer Prompts:

- Praise God for the spiritual growth you’ve already seen in your life.
- Pray through Proverbs 3:3-8. Ask the Lord for a deeper understanding of both love and wisdom.

PAUL'S PRAYERS Prayers from Colossians

Colossians 1:9–10 “And so from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to Him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God.”

In view of the Colossians' faith and their love of one another, Paul prays for further spiritual development through gospel transformation. Specifically, he prays for their spiritual maturity.

Spiritual wisdom and understanding are a work of the Holy Spirit in the life of a believer. Knowledge of God isn't only head knowledge but also a deep comprehension of who God is, and what God wills. Paul prays first that the Colossian believers would be filled with a knowledge of God's will; Paul then circles back around asking that knowledge of God increase.

Knowledge of God comes through study of the Word as the Holy Spirit opens spiritual eyes and ears. When we pray, study, meditate, and seek to know the Word of God, the Spirit opens our eyes to “see” (Psalm 119:18). God must give us a heart to know, eyes to see, and ears to hear His Word (Deut. 29:2–4). Without regular intake of the Word, increase in the knowledge of God will not occur.

Just as with the Colossians, as our knowledge of God increases, we are better equipped to walk worthy of the Lord. Empowered by the Holy Spirit, we are enabled to live in right relationship with God and others. We don't have to guess at how to please God. God has revealed His will in His Word. As we depend on the Holy Spirit to help us live a life pleasing to the Lord, spiritual fruit is borne. When we live in the power of the indwelling Spirit, our faith will be manifested in works that please God. Increase in the knowledge of God, walk worthy, so be fruitful.

Questions to Consider: Do I spend time in the Word so as to increase in the knowledge of God? As I evaluate my life, do I see spiritual fruit (Gal 5:22–23)?

Prayer Prompts:

- God, I pray to desire the Word and grow in my intake, understanding, and obedience of it.
- God, help me to increase in the knowledge of Your will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding.