



Parts 21 - 40

Day 21: Ephesians 3:14-19

When the Apostle Paul was traveling all over, helping the earliest followers of Jesus to start churches, and tell others about Him, Paul ran into a *lot* of trouble. The rulers over the towns and people groups where he went usually did not like the message about Jesus. That may sound crazy to you, but a lot of people did not want to hear about Jesus, and they didn't want others to hear about Him either.

They put Paul in jail, and sometimes they tried to beat him up, or kill him, but he just kept going and telling people about Jesus. All along the way, Paul would write letters back to the churches he had helped to start. In one letter, to the church at Ephesus, he told them not to lose heart, or be discouraged when they saw all the hard things Paul was going through.

Paul was suffering, and he said he was doing it for them. He was actually glad to suffer, so that people all over, from every town and people group in the world, could have real life in friendship with God through Jesus! For this reason, even while he suffered, Paul prayed and prayed for all those early churches!

He did not just pray that they would do good things. He did not just pray that their churches would stay together. He did not just pray to make the suffering stop. He prayed that they would be "rooted and grounded in love," and that they would really be able to understand the amazing love of Jesus!

Why? So that they would be filled with the fullness of God. You could think about that statement, "the fullness of God," for the rest of your life! Think about a cup, totally full of water. Every bit of the inside of that cup is completely covered and filled up. Can you imagine a life that full of the presence of God?

It sounds like a life of joy, and a life where you know you belong, where you have an important role to play! It is a life of knowing how much we are loved, and loving God in return. It is a life of obeying His commands which help us experience more and more of the fullness of God.

This is a life of true flourishing like a flower from a branch, in friendship with the almighty God. Whether you know it yet or not, this flourishing life is the life you really want and need. That is why the Apostle Paul prayed it for all those early followers of Jesus, and early churches, and why the pastor and leadership of this church pray it for you, too! May you flourish in Christ Jesus today!

**Let's pray with Paul that we would be rooted and grounded in love and filled with the fullness of God!*

Day 22: John 14:15-23, Galatians 5:16-25

Why does a root of a plant dig itself deep into the ground? So that the plant will grow and be healthy, and produce fruit, or flowers. There's a word we have for that- "*flourishing*." Flourish sort of sounds like "flower" because it comes from the same word!

That's a great picture of what God does in the lives of His people. That's why the Bible talks about the fruit of God's Spirit. Followers of Jesus should see this kind of flourishing in their lives. Like a flower, or a fruit sprouting from a plant, we should see love, patience, goodness, joy, peace, kindness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control sprouting up out of our lives!

Fruit and flowers don't just magically sprout up, do they? No, they get plenty of water, sunlight, and nutrients from the soil, and then we see the beautiful flowers or tasty fruit! We see the fruit of the Spirit in a person, when they live like the good news about Jesus is true, day after day.

They trust that they don't have to try to do good things to get God's friendship. Instead, they know that God has given His love and friendship and forgiven their sins in Jesus! We love Him, because He has first loved us! Jesus said that anyone who loves Him will obey Him. So, we trust that God loves us, and then we do good things *because* of His love!

It may not seem like it at first, but that is a huge difference! When you know that you are loved, you love. When you love, you obey. When you obey, you flourish! You begin to display the wonder of God to all the world!

Have you ever been to the Grand Canyon, or seen pictures of it? You might want to look up a picture of it right now ... It is amazing and beautiful! It is rare, too. There is nothing else quite like it. People come from all over the world just to stare in wonder at it! That's sort of how it is with a person who is really flourishing.

Before Jesus comes into our lives, even our good deeds aren't all that good. God says there is no way to be good enough, because our hearts haven't been changed by His love, yet and we still want to be in charge of our own lives. We can't do enough good things to change that!

Instead, God says, receive Jesus as your King, your friend, the one who takes your sin away! Know that you are loved and be changed. Dig your roots deep into the good news, and God says He will make His home with you, and produce His fruit through you, and you will become an amazing and rare display of His beautiful and glory to all around you!

**Let's pray that we will obey from the heart, because we are loved, today.*

Day 23: 1 John 3, John 13:34-35, 14:15-23

When you know that you are loved, you love. When you love, you obey. When you obey God from the heart, you flourish, but what does this flourishing and obedience look like? Well, there are all sorts of things that God told us to do. There are all sorts of things that God said would change about us as we follow Him.

One thing that He commanded us to do, which is also something that changes about us as we follow is loving others! Jesus said that the way everyone around will know that we are His people is when we love each other!

Love doesn't mean that we always feel like we enjoy being around everyone, even God's people. Sometimes we really struggle with that! It means that we take care of each other, and we are willing to give up the things that we love in order to take care of God's people. We know that we are loved because Jesus gave up his very life to take our sin!

That's how we know whether we love His people, too. When our hearts change, and we begin to find happiness in obeying what Jesus said, by giving up things that we love in order to take care of others, that is love! That is flourishing! It is not easy. It can feel like we're actually giving up our lives too when we really love God's people.

However, Jesus says, those who try to hold on to all the stuff they love, all the stuff that makes them feel like they have real life, will lose their lives. Those who give up their lives to follow Jesus and take care of His people will find that they have real life like they could never have imagined, and that life will go on and on and on, forever!

This is not just hard, it is impossible for people who do not have the Holy Spirit giving them His power to obey. However, when we remember the love of God for us in Jesus, it's like the root of a plant digging deep into rich soil. As we step out to obey, remembering that good news, the Spirit changes us more and more.

We learn to love more and more, and we even learn to enjoy being around people who used to be harder for us, more and more. This is like the very beauty of God, blooming out of our lives for the world to see. Everyone around will know that we belong to Jesus, and everyone will see that the good news about Jesus is the best news ever!

**Let's pray together that we would remember the love of God for us and step out in obedience to love and take care of God's people today.*

Day 24: Matthew 9:35-38

What if you came to the table for Thanksgiving dinner, but nobody else was there? Somehow, no one realized that the food was ready, and it was time to eat! It's way too much for you to have all by yourself, and half the fun of Thanksgiving is having everyone together! What would you do?

Maybe you'd sneak a few bites first... but after that, you'd run and tell them about the feast that was ready! It's the same with the good news about Jesus! Actually, sometimes the Bible describes friendship with God like a big meal together, and it says we are to run out and tell everybody it's time for the feast!

Sometimes, we might eat a little too much at a feast, but when you eat just the right amount of really delicious and good food, you feel full in a good way, and satisfied. The Bible says that life in friendship with God is like that. It is satisfying, and joyful. That's the kind of "feast" God brings us into in Jesus.

Sometimes, we might not be sure that everyone wants to hear about this feast. Maybe they don't understand how good it is. Maybe someone has told them the wrong things about it. We know how amazing it is to have God's friendship. We know, that when they come to this feast, they will be satisfied too! They will flourish!

We know that they can have the same full, joyful, *real* life in Jesus, too! So, what should we do? Well, we should definitely run and tell them about the "feast," but the Lord actually tells us to do something else too. He tells us to pray. We should certainly pray for them and pray that they would be excited to hear the news.

However, there's another prayer that Jesus says is very important. Jesus says to pray for more and more people to tell about the good news of life in Him! The Bible also talks about praying for courage for ourselves to tell about it, even when we think people don't want to hear it!

When we really know Jesus, and are full in Him, we will follow what He commanded. We will bravely bring His message of fullness and flourishing to the world around us!

**Let's pray like Jesus taught us, that He would make us brave to tell about the great feast and send out more and more people to do the same!*

Day 25: Matthew 4:17, 6:9-10, Revelation 21:1-5

What will it look like when the kingdom of heaven comes? Most people think about going *to* heaven. We don't think about the fact that Jesus said heaven would actually come to us! What an amazing thought!

Did you know that when Jesus first started His ministry, He told people that the kingdom of heaven had come near? Later, when His followers asked Him to teach them how to pray, He told them to pray that the kingdom *would come*... So, is it here, or is it on its way? The answer is, both!

The kingdom of heaven has come to us in Jesus. He is the King, and all authority in heaven and on earth is His! That means He is in charge of it all. However, we know that not everything happens in a way that is pleasing to God. We don't even fully obey the way that we should, as His people, do we?

Heaven is the fullness of God's presence. Heaven is the place where God is obeyed perfectly, and there is perfect joy! No wonder people want to go there! Jesus says, pray that heaven comes here, fully, completely. He says to ask God that His kingdom would come, and His instructions would be obeyed perfectly on earth, just like they are in heaven.

What do you think would change in our area of Atlanta, if the kingdom of heaven arrived completely today? What about your town, or county? Maybe you live in Johns Creek or Alpharetta, Forsyth or Gwinnett County. What do you think would be different about that place and people if God's kingdom came today? Think (or talk) about that for a moment ...

Can you even imagine a place where everyone is always kind and generous, where all of our work and play are just as much worship as the songs we sing on Sundays, and where we experience the fullness of our friendship with God, as we see Jesus face to face? That's what the Bible describes, and it tells us to pray for it.

Jesus says He is making all things new. That means not just people, but also our places, and our plans for how we go about our lives every day. Jesus says we should want to see things on earth look more and more like the fully flourished garden of life in the kingdom of heaven, and He tells us to pray for it, here and now!

**Let's pray for Atlanta, and our town, schools, and neighborhoods to flourish, as God's kingdom comes to earth! If you thought of any ways that your area would change, pray specifically for that!*

Day 26: 2 Timothy 2:1-6, Proverbs 21:1

What do you think about people who are in charge? No matter where you are, someone is always in charge. Schools, workplaces, towns, and countries all have someone in charge. The sin of every person is that we want to be the ones in charge of our lives, instead of God, so we usually don't like the idea of other people being in charge of us either!

Some people try to get close to the people in charge, to get the boss to do what they want. Other people spend all their time talking about how much they don't like the people in charge! It's certainly ok to be friends with your boss, or teacher, or a person in the government, and it's ok to say when you don't like something, but the Bible gives us a different plan.

The Apostle Paul said what we really need to do is to pray for our leaders. In a letter that he wrote to his younger friend, the pastor Timothy, Paul said to urge all of the people at Timothy's church to pray for kings and people in high positions, the same way we would pray for all people! Whether we like the way that person is leading or not, we should pray for them. Whether we think the person should be in charge or not, we must pray.

We should obey what the Lord has told us in His word! We should ask God to bless our leaders! We should ask God to guide them in the big decisions they have to make. We should ask that He would put people in their lives who would share with them about life in Jesus.

Yesterday, we imagined how things would change if heaven came to our communities. Today, imagine if leaders over our towns and communities knew the love of Jesus, and made all their decisions to honor Him.

What would be different? How would the community flourish? Would people appreciate God's wisdom and instruction more? Would the community care for other people or groups better than they do right now?

**Let's pray together for the leaders of our community (maybe take a moment to look it up right now,) that God would bless them and guide them!*

Day 27: Genesis 12:2, 15:5-6, 22:15-18,

From the very beginning, God has had a plan to rescue people from sin and death. All people have chosen, with Adam and Eve, to try to be in charge of our own lives, instead of worshipping God and obeying Him as we should. So, all people need rescue! Right after the very first sin, God made a promise to send a rescuer. It was a very tiny bit of good news, but it was still good news!

Over many years, God revealed a little more and a little more of His great plan to send Jesus. One of the first things He did to put this plan into place, was to begin working in Jesus' family, through one of His ancestors, Abraham.

God told Abraham that He would bless Abraham's family more than he could ever imagine! He told Abraham to count all the stars in the night sky, or the sand at the beach. In the same way that the stars and grains of sand are too many to count, God was going to do good to Abraham's family in a way that no one could ask or imagine!

It gets even better, though. God was not only doing good to Abraham and His family. He was planning to do a good thing for every family on the earth! That's what He said to Abraham. Every family on earth would receive good gifts, because of the good gift that the Lord was giving to Abraham! God said He would make Abraham's name great, in order that he and his family would pass the greatness on to others!

God loves to do good things for people. God loves to do good for families in a special way, too. There is something about a family that God loves so much, He pours out gifts in a special way, like a waterfall of love and mercy, that they would bloom and flourish together.

Maybe that's because God's whole plan from the very beginning was to bring people into *His* family. So, He chose to bless this one tiny family, in which Jesus would be born. Jesus brought His followers into the family of God, and then said, go to all the world! Go to families that don't look like yours, and don't speak like yours, and don't think like yours. Go to people who are lonely and don't feel like they have a family. Go to people who have hard families and don't feel loved.

Go and tell them that the great rescue plan is not just from death and sin. It's not just that we get real life here and friendship with God, and it's not just that this life goes on forever and ever. The great rescue plan is to pour out the love of God on people and call them His sons and daughters!

**Let's pray that God would bless the families in our community, and that He would work through our family to care for lonely people!*

Day 28: 1 Thessalonians 2:8, Matthew 28:18-20

What do you want for the people you love? Do you want them to have good things? Do you want them to know you love them, and that they are loved by God and others? Do you want them to have joy? If you love someone, you want what is best for them, (even if you don't know what the best thing is!) That's what love means.

If you love someone, you want them to do well in life. You want them to grow into and use their gifts just as God has planned for them! If you could help a person that you love to grow, to use their gifts, and to do well in life how would you do it? Would you tell them things? Would you show them things? Would you want to spend a lot of time around them?

Yes, of course! You would do all of those things. The same way that someone learns how to do everything from parents, and the older people around them, we learn and grow in every way in life. It isn't just about telling a person true things, though that's part of it. Think about all the things people tell us everyday, and how much of it we forget!

It isn't just about showing someone how to do things, though that's part of it, too. We never learn if we're only watching. We have to try to do new things, too, don't we? If you really want to help someone grow into everything that God has planned for them, you live life with them. You tell them things and you listen to them. You show them things and you let them try.

You spend lots and lots of time together. Sometimes it's serious time, sometimes it's fun time, and sometimes you're just together. That's how Jesus taught His followers. They were together all the time for about three years. When Jesus sent those followers out into the world, people may not have known their names yet, but the Bible says they knew that these men had been with Jesus from the way they spoke!

They kept doing that with others too! The Apostle Paul describes it in a letter he wrote to the church at Thessalonica. He says that when he and his team came to start the church, they were almost like a mama or daddy with children. They shared not only truth with the people, but their lives!

That is God's plan. That is how we make followers of Him, as Jesus commanded. We share the good news about Him, *and* we share our lives with others. As we do so, they begin to see how the good news changes *everything*, and we learn too! The word the church usually uses for this is "discipleship," and it is God's plan to reach the world with His love and help His people to truly flourish in their faith!

**Let's pray that we would have others to disciple us with their lives, and that we would be able to disciple someone as soon as we're able, as well!*

Day 29: Matthew 26:38-39, Colossians 1:24-29

Have you ever really thought about the story of Jesus in the garden before He was crucified? He knew what was coming, and He was very sad. Do you know that it wasn't really the pain of nails and whips that Jesus was worried about? He was going to experience a separation from His Father. That was far more painful to Him than the cross itself, because Jesus knew what real life was.

He prayed to the Father, asking if perhaps there was another way to rescue all of His people. Then He prayed and said He wanted the Father's plan even more than His own request for another way. He was ready to endure more suffering than any human has ever experienced.

Why? For the joy of being reunited with His Father afterward, with all of the people they would rescue and bring into heaven! Jesus was willing to go through the hardest of hard things for you and me! Jesus suffered quite a bit throughout His life, just because He loved His people. He was that committed to bringing them into His family and rescuing them!

People who know that they are loved in such amazing ways begin to love others in amazing ways, too. The Apostle Paul knew that he had once been an enemy of God. So, He was truly amazed that Jesus would love him and rescue him. After Paul came to know Jesus, he spent the rest of his life sharing with others about Him.

Paul started to love these other people in amazing ways, too. He became willing to suffer for them. He was willing to work really, really hard just to be with them and be able to tell them about Jesus, and how they could be rescued and come into Jesus' family too!

He spent his life with all these people he didn't even know before, because he didn't just want them to know *about* Jesus, he wanted them to see how the good news changes everything! When that happens, you grow, spiritually. Like a plant flourishes in spring, and we see its beautiful flowers, or leaves, or fruit, people can become mature in Jesus.

If real life is found in friendship with God, then our hearts should want to become better and better friends with Him forever! That's what heaven will be like. However, since we still have sin, sometimes we still live as if we'll find real life in things we can buy, or friends and fun, or being really good at something.

That's why Paul was willing to suffer. He shared his life with others, so that they could remember the truth, and spend their lives coming to know Jesus more and more, blooming and flourishing like a big oak tree with roots down deep in the love of Jesus!

**Let's pray that we'll remember that real life is in friendship with Jesus, and that we'd be willing to work hard and even endure pain to help others remember this as well!*

Day 30: Romans 1:15-17, 1 Corinthians 3, Philippians 1:6

When we become a follower of Jesus (or a “disciple,”) we grow up spiritually, just like our bodies grow up. Just like a tree starts out as a tiny seed, and then year after year gets taller, and spreads its branches wider, and can get quite big, we grow “*in Jesus*.”

A person or a plant which has grown up tall is called, “mature.” When a person is mature spiritually, they help others to become disciples and to grow, also! They spend time with these new followers, teaching them things, showing them things, and just being together, and God causes the Jesus-follower to grow!

If you want a person or a plant to grow, you have to feed it! Plants need water, sunlight, and minerals and nutrients in the ground to grow. People need things like food, water, oxygen in the air, and shelter from the heat or cold. If people are going to grow spiritually, they need to be “fed” in that way, as well!

If you want to help a person grow spiritually, you not only give them what they need, you help them understand what they need. You help them to understand praying and learn to do it often. You help them to understand the instructions they need to follow as a disciple of Jesus. You help them understand the truth in the Bible and learn to read it often.

They’ll need to read it often, because they forget (and we do too!) People don’t just forget the instructions, they forget the good news about Jesus, too! We might even continue doing the good things the Bible tells us to do, but our hearts slowly start doing them for different reasons, because we are *all* so forgetful.

Can you imagine someone saying, “I love you,” but having a mean and angry look on their face? It wouldn’t feel like they loved you at all, would it? When we do the right things, in order to make God do things for us, or in order to make God like us, those things aren’t all that good anymore. It’s like saying “I love you,” to God but having a bad attitude toward Him. Even though it’s normally a good thing, it wouldn’t be so good anymore.

We grow spiritually by remembering the good news about Jesus. We don’t have to do things to make God like us! He *loves* His people no matter what! You can’t change that. That is the best news! Some people hear that and they don’t really care. God’s people hear it, and they are amazed!

We need to hear the good news again and again, so that we remember the truth, and remember our amazement! God has loved us! As we remember, we follow from hearts that really love Him. We realize in so many little ways every day, how the good news really changes everything, and slowly it changes everything about us!

**Let’s pray to remember the good news about Jesus and be amazed today!*

Day 31- Romans 6:5-15

If the good news about Jesus is true, and we believe in Him, how should we live our lives? The Bible tells us that Jesus offers forgiveness for every sin, even the worst thing you could ever do. So, can we accept that forgiveness and keep living the exact same way, trying to be in charge of our own lives and trying to find life in things other than friendship with God?

Some people think that sounds like the perfect plan. They pray a prayer, asking Jesus to forgive their sin, but they really aren't interested in changing. They like their sin and want to continue. Other people really want to change. They don't want to keep on sinning in the same old ways.

Those people still mess up and sin plenty. They have bad attitudes sometimes. They try to act like they are in charge sometimes, but really they want Jesus to be in charge of their lives. When they sin, it hurts their hearts. They don't try to pretend like it's not that bad. They agree with God that it is sin and remember the good news.

Jesus died to take the penalty for their sin. He has forgiven them. However, they aren't just pretending to be sorry and then continuing exactly the same way. No, these people realize that in addition to taking the penalty for sin, Jesus broke the power of sin on the cross! They consider themselves dead to sin and give themselves to the Lord in obedience.

Yes, they will sin again, but they will confess and repent, and seek to obey the Lord by the power of His Spirit again, also! Those who are truly forgiven plan to obey! They are so amazed at the forgiveness, love, and friendship that God has given that they could never deserve, and they turn away from their sin, back to the good news of Jesus.

For God's people, His grace actually makes them more eager to obey, not less so! They expect the Lord to give them His strength to obey, when they trust His good news, and they pass all this on to others! They expect God to use their words to others, to see many of them become followers of Jesus, too! They can't help but tell about the amazing life of experiencing the power of God, in friendship with Jesus! May that be true of us!

**Let's pray that we would walk in obedience, trusting the good news of Jesus, and expecting Him to work through us!*

Day 32- Ephesians 5:15-21, Psalm 39:4-5, 90:12

If you only had a little bit of time with someone you really loved, what would you do or say? What would you want to do or say? We don't always use our time wisely, but if we knew we only had a few more minutes with a good friend or loved one we would usually want to make the most of it!

We might say how much we care about them, or spend the last few minutes doing something together which we both love. We probably would not want to ignore them, or just waste the time. The Bible says that we should use our time wisely, and not waste it!

The Apostle Paul wrote a letter to the church in Ephesus, saying this. Moses, the great leader of God's people out of slavery in Egypt, prayed that the Lord would teach them to number their days. King David wrote a Psalm asking for the same thing. All over the Bible, we are encouraged not to waste our time here on things that don't matter.

How *should* we spend our time? Paul says we should not only follow God's instructions about how to behave. That's very important! But we should also spend time remembering the gift of Jesus to us! He made Himself our friend. He forgave us! Paul says that we should spend our time remembering and thanking God for this!

He says that we not only do this on our own, but with one another. We should remind one another of the good news, so that we will be full of the Spirit's power. We should encourage each other with the words of the Psalms, like David and Moses wrote, and songs that remind our hearts to trust in Jesus. We should give God thanks together!

When we do this, we are not only reminding each other of nice things that Jesus did. We are actually helping one another to obey and follow the Lord, from the heart! We don't have that much time together on this earth. We should spend that time wisely, reminding each other, and the whole world about the beautiful reality of who Jesus is and all He has done for His people!

**Let's pray that God would teach us to use our time wisely, remembering the good news and following His ways and encouraging others to do the same!*

Day 33- Matthew 18:21-35

A follower of Jesus is a person who has been forgiven, totally. Every bad thing they have ever done, or thing they have said, or thought they have had is forgiven by God because of Jesus! He took the punishment for all of our sin, even the things we have not done yet! When you really know you've been loved and forgiven of that much, you obey.

You don't obey perfectly. You still mess up and sin, but you plan to follow the one who has given you such a great gift! One of the things that Jesus told us to do was to offer forgiveness to others, also! That is not an easy thing to obey. When someone hurts us, the last thing we want to do is forgive, but Jesus said we must!

When we really know how much we have been forgiven, we realize that we cannot continue to hold onto our anger and our desire to get back at others. We must forgive. Sometimes, the person who hurt us must still have a consequence. A parent can forgive a child for disobeying, but still give the child a consequence to help them learn.

Someone who steals can be forgiven, but they will probably have to pay back what they stole. A person who tries to hurt you over and over again and is not really sorry can be forgiven in your heart, but that doesn't mean you keep hanging around that person, if you have a choice. Forgiveness does not mean there is no consequence, but it's still hard!

However, the Lord has forgiven so much more than any of us, and He says He will give us His strength! So, we can expect that when we trust the good news that God has forgiven us and will work through us, and we choose to obey, He will help us forgive!

He will help us to stop hating people who have hurt us very, very badly. He will help us to stop wanting to hurt them back. He will help us to really obey Him, from the heart! This is one of the most incredible things that God does in and through His people.

Other people are amazed by it, and God uses that to make them into His friends and followers, as well! Real forgiveness is impossible without Him, but when we do it, we are not only being obedient, we are helping others to see the power of God, and the beauty of following Him!

**Let's pray that the Lord would help us to forgive people who have hurt us, today!*

Day 34- Matthew 5:21-26, John 13:35

Jesus came to us and showed us the love and grace of God. He died on the cross, taking our punishment for sin and forgiving us. He came to give us life, real life! A lot of people don't realize though, that Jesus also came to remind people just how much sin we have!

It makes sense, when you think about it. We really know that we need Him to rescue us when we see how great our sin is! When Jesus taught about God's instructions, He usually showed people how they were guilty of disobeying things that they did not realize!

Most people think they're pretty good. They've never done the really, *really* bad things. Jesus said when you hate someone, when you hold a grudge against them, or when you say something mean to them in anger, it actually deserves the same consequence as the worst sin, because your heart is in the same place.

Instead, He said, we should seek forgiveness. If someone has hurt us, we must choose to forgive. If we have hurt someone, we must go to them and repent, even if we're in the middle of bringing a gift before the Lord! We should not pretend that everything is ok, if it's not.

When we come together to worship Jesus, singing songs to Him, praying, listening to the teaching of His word, and coming to the communion table together, we are announcing that we are united to Him, and united to one another, like a big family!

So, we should not pretend to be united to Him if we are not really followers of Him, and we should not pretend to be united to one another if there is sin dividing us. It is not really telling the truth, is it? Forgiveness is a way to live honestly, and a way to help other followers of Jesus to live honestly as well!

Sometimes it seems like forgiveness won't work. The pain is too much, or the friendship too broken. When we do it by faith, though, God the Spirit brings His people together, united in friendship and partnership with Him and one another!

When His people love each other, the world notices, and the Spirit brings even more people to be followers of Jesus. We are called to live lives of forgiveness and expectation that God will use it to fix broken hearts and friendships, and help others come to know Him.

**Let's pray that the Lord will remind us of any situation where we need to seek forgiveness.*

Day 35- Acts 2:42-47, Romans 8:32, 2 Corinthians 8

As the church was first starting, the Apostle Paul and others went from town to town telling people the good news about Jesus and bringing them together as God's family to worship Him in songs, prayers, and teaching. In many of these places, the first followers of Jesus were very poor. They didn't have much at all.

Most people do not really like the idea of giving away something they want or need, especially if they already feel like they don't have enough. That's not how the early church acted, though. It was amazing. They shared with each other, as each had need.

Even though many of them were poor, they were actually eager to give and take care of others in God's family. Trying to take care of others and do what is best for them is what it means to love. They really loved each other, even though they came from different places, and looked different from each other, and spoke different languages.

Can you imagine it? Why would they do this? Why were they doing things so differently from the way people normally act? The answer is Jesus. The good news about Jesus had so changed their hearts that they actually wanted to give up all kinds of things to help others! It wasn't just because it felt good. For most people that feeling wears off pretty fast!

They gave because they became amazed at how much Jesus gave for them. No one has more than God! He owns everything! In Jesus, God actually gave up more than any person ever could! Paul says Jesus was rich, but became poor, in order to take care of His people, and rescue them, and give them real life like they could never imagine that would last forever!

People who really understand this good news are changed by it. They know that the Lord has given them everything, and that He will continue giving and taking care of them. So, they actually look for opportunities to give away what they have, as crazy as that sounds!

They know that real life is in Jesus, and not in the stuff that they own. So, they think about how to take care of others. They give. They give until it hurts. That's actually a way to know if a person has really been changed by Jesus, or if they're just playing along, pretending to know Him. His people are eager to give and love the family of God!

**Let's pray that God would give us hearts that want to give and take care of others!*

Day 36- Matthew 6:19-24

Where is your heart? You have a heart at the center of your body, in your chest, pumping blood out to your hands and feet and head and keeping you alive. You also have a heart that just means your thoughts, feelings, choices, and things you really want. The center of who you are.

Think of your body, even the heart and brain inside you as the outside person, and your thoughts, feelings, choices, and things you really want as the inside person. The Bible speaks a *lot* about that inside person, or the heart.

The Lord said that the thing He cares about is not the outward appearance of a person, but the heart. That makes it *really* important! Jesus talked about our hearts, too. He said that our heart will be wherever our treasure is!

Treasure could be many different things. Treasure just means the thing you care about most. It could be friends, or feeling popular. It could be exciting experiences, or feeling safe and secure. Some of us really treasure feeling like others need us.

Often, people treasure the things that they own, or the money that can help buy things, because that gets them these other things, like feeling important, being in control, or just filling their lives with fun! None of those things are bad, but when they become our treasure, that's not good. Jesus said not to treasure things on earth, because nothing here lasts forever.

When God created everything, He didn't plan for anything on earth to be a person's treasure. The plan was for us to treasure Him! That's how real life works! When we care about God's love and friendship more than anything, all the other stuff becomes less important. It's like a cherry at the top of a huge ice cream sundae. It's nice, but we don't need it.

When we try to store up all of the treasure we can find on this earth, whether it's things we own, or money that buys those things, or just trying to stay in control of our lives, it doesn't work. You might have years and years of fun and everything you want in life, but eventually it will run out, and you'll have a heart that is very, very far from the Lord.

The more that you treasure those things, the harder it will be to want God's friendship or His guidance. So, store up *heavenly* treasure, Jesus says! Look at the beauty of all God has given you in Jesus over and over. Look for chances to give like Jesus and take care of others, instead of keeping everything to yourself!

Ask Him to change your heart and expect Him to do it! The more you look at the right treasure, and remember how much the God of the universe has treasured you, the more you will use the things you have to care for those in need, and the more you will treasure Him!

**Let's pray that our hearts will treasure Jesus above all today!*

Day 37- Matthew 6:25-34

Do you ever worry that you won't have what you need? People often worry about things like money, or taking care of their children, or whether they'll get the things that everyone else seems to have. Sometimes we worry about our health or whether we're doing well enough at school or work.

We all have different reasons, but we all tend to worry. That just means thinking about what we don't have, instead of everything else there is to think about in life. When our hearts are thinking all the time about what we don't have, that changes the way we act.

Worry can cause us to make all of our choices to get the thing we think we need. Before you know it, our whole lives become taken over with worried hearts and working hard to get it. Even when it's a really good thing, that's a *really* bad way to live. Jesus said that God would take care of us. He told His followers to look at the birds and flowers.

Have you ever seen a bird who is a farmer? Of course not! Yet, they have food from the Lord. Have you ever seen a flower out shopping at the store, or sewing a pretty new dress for itself? Of course not! Yet, even the most wonderful clothing in the world does not compare to the beauty of a simple flower in the field!

The Lord cares for tiny things, like a hungry bird and the beauty of a lily. He will care for His children. That is hard to trust. Jesus never said that God would give us what we think we need, but what He *knows* we need right now.

God will provide exactly what we need for exactly as long as He gives us time on this earth. So, even when God does not give us what we ask, we can have total confidence that we have not needed it, so far. That also means that whatever He does allow into our lives is something He thinks that we need.

The good news of Jesus means that we can pray to God the Father, as if His number was in our phone on speed dial! We can cry out to Him when our hearts are broken, and we feel so certain that we need something. It also means that we can trust that the Lord cares for us far more than ravens and wildflowers, even when we're in very hard times.

It means that we can expect Him to teach our hearts to trust Him far more than we are able, when it seems we don't have what we need. It means that even then, He will actually teach us to give like Jesus, and think about others, instead of what we want so much, and that is a really *good* way to live.

**Let's pray that we would trust God to meet our needs and look for chances to give today!*

Day 38- Mark 12:41-43

Most of the time, people give if they have more than enough. We are usually worried about what we think we need, and not really thinking about what others might need. Even those of us who have received the amazing gift of friendship with Jesus often forget how much we have been given.

When we give, we usually wait until we have everything we think we need. Then, when might give once we have extra. Most of us think about giving sort of like a child with candy who has been asked to share. We would really rather not!

Usually, even if we do share, we give the pieces of candy we don't like much. If we give you the good stuff, that's because we have more than we can eat on our own. Jesus tells us that we should give differently, though. Essentially, we should give until it hurts!

It doesn't hurt to give the candy I don't like. It doesn't even hurt to give the good candy, if I have plenty of it. When it was something I was planning to eat and enjoy, though, that's a different story!

Once, Jesus saw people giving their gifts to God. There were many people who had more than enough. They gave huge gifts! Then, a poor widow approached. In those days, a woman on her own did not have many good ways to make money or take care of herself.

She was a widow, which means she had no husband, and she was probably old, so she would not be getting married again. So, she did not have much, she did not have ways to get more, and she did not have another person to care for her.

Still, she brought a gift! She brought two little coins, less than a penny. It was all that she had! Jesus saw this and said that her gift was actually *more* than the big gifts brought by the rich people! They gave more stuff and more money, but she gave until it hurt.

Why would she do this? Giving to the Lord means that you are giving so that the good news of Jesus will go out into all the world. It means that you are giving so that others will be cared for, as well.

Those who have been taken care of by Jesus are excited to give so that others can be cared for and have real life in Him! As we continue to think about all we have been given in Jesus and follow what He told us we'll be changed into people who give until it hurts, others will come to know the love of God, and we will have great joy as we worship Him with our gifts!

**Let's pray that we would become eager to give until it hurts, like the widow.*

Day 39- Isaiah 55:1, 64:6-7, Matthew 10:8, Romans 3:10-11, 6:23

Maybe the most amazing thing about the good news of Jesus is that it's *totally* free! God chose to take our punishment onto Himself and He offers new life and joy which is everlasting. He promises that He will completely change us to love what is good and follow Him perfectly in the end.

All of this is *free*! That means God does not offer to give us all these things *if* we will act good enough. We cannot be good enough to get friendship with God. Actually, He tells us that people try to make themselves His enemies!

Each time we disobey even the smallest of His instructions it shows our hearts. A heart that chooses to disobey is one that wants to be in charge, but that's God's job. Our sin is actually a way that we tell Him we don't want to honor Him as King. We want to be the boss of our own lives, until He changes us.

When people who still want to be bosses of their own lives try to get to God by doing good things, that's actually even worse. It's like we're still waving the enemy flag in the middle of a great war but pretending to be on God's side.

In order to become friends with Him, you just need to receive the free gift of coming over to His side. You admit that you have tried to be your own boss, you receive Jesus as the new King over all of your life and accept his payment for your sin forever.

Anyone who truly comes into friendship with Him changes. Their heart changes. Their desires change. Now, they really want to do things which please the Lord because He has accepted them in Jesus, instead of trying to get Him to accept them by doing good things. That is a totally different way to live, isn't it?

God also promises to give us His Holy Spirit and His power to make us more like Jesus. The good news really does change everything when it gets ahold of us! One of the biggest things that changes about us is that we begin to look out for others in a new way.

Because so much love has been given to us for free, we excitedly look for the chance to give freely, as well! We can give our time, our friendship, the things we own, and the great news we have about real life in Jesus! His followers give freely, just like Him!

Sadly, even God's people try to be in charge of our own lives, often. We forget the incredible gift and start living like we need to earn God's friendship again. When that happens, we treat others like they need to earn gifts from us, too. When we remember the free gift, though, we give freely of all that we are and have!

**Let's pray that we remember the free gift of God and give to others with abandon!*

Day 40- Nehemiah, 1 Corinthians 12, Proverbs 3:9, 1 Timothy 6:6-11

There was a time when God's people were exiled from their land, and their temple. Over many years, they had some leaders who followed the Lord, but most did not. Their leaders wanted to be great, wealthy, powerful and successful, like the leaders of other peoples.

Eventually, God allowed them to be conquered and taken from their land into a place called Babylon. It was very sad. The Lord told them that they would return, but it would take a long time. They were to work and make their lives in this new place and pray for the people and kingdom of Babylon.

So they did, and some of them rose to very important jobs in the kingdom. One was named Nehemiah. He was very close to the king. One day, Nehemiah heard that things back in Jerusalem were not good. The walls had been torn down. Nehemiah was so sad!

What would happen with God's great plan to bring a rescuer through Abraham's family? This was the place where they were to return and worship the Lord. This was the place that would be like a light on a hill, that the many nations would see the greatness of God and come to worship Him. Was it all over?

Nehemiah prayed to the Lord to see what he should do, and then he went to the king, and asked if he could go and rebuild his home. This was a big request! If the king allowed them to rebuild the city, they might turn against him. They might use the new walls to protect themselves as they fought against him.

The king let Nehemiah go, and even gave Nehemiah help in accomplishing this great task! However, when Nehemiah arrived back in Jerusalem there were plenty of people who wanted to stop him, and there were people who were too busy trying to get rich, or stay rich to care for the family of God, or worry about God's great rescue plan.

Nehemiah remembered that the all powerful God was in control, though. He remembered how the Lord had brought him this far, and he moved forward. Through much hardship they rebuilt the wall, and they restored worship of the Lord in Jerusalem! God's plan could not be stopped!

The great rescuer, Jesus did come through that family in that place, after all! That means the great rescue is still on! Now, God's people, the church, are to take the light of Jesus out to all the people of the earth!

Like Nehemiah, we get to pray and see how we can be a part of this plan! We aren't building a physical wall, we're building up the church of Jesus. We are all called to give our time, our resources, and the things we're good at. Some will give more, but all have an important part to play as we give ourselves for the rescue of all nations and the glory of our matchless God!

**Let's pray and ask God to show us how we get to give and be a part of this great plan, together!*