

MARCUS MECUM

*START
STRONG*

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A Letter from Pastor Marcus

First and foremost, congratulations on making the most important decision that you will ever make. The Bible says in the book of Luke that all of heaven rejoices when a single person is saved, and I believe that heaven is celebrating your decision today!

Often, when someone makes the decision to follow Christ, they are left asking, “What’s next?” We hope that this book will provide you with some clear and basic answers to the questions that you may have regarding your newfound faith. There are three things that you can do right away:

Some people in your life will not understand the decision you just made, and that’s okay. Your responsibility now is to love them and pray for them, but do not let anyone or anything come between you and your relationship with God.

Jump into the life of the church. Do whatever you can to be in the house of God. If the doors to the church are open, do everything you can to be there.

Commit to giving the church one year of your life. I promise that if you give the church one year of your life, you will look back and see how faithful God has been in fulfilling His promises to you.

I hope that as you continue to dive into this book, it will be a guide for you as you begin to walk out your faith. I pray that it will help you start strong in your walk with God. The Bible says in Zechariah 4:10 that we are not to despise small beginnings, as the Lord rejoices to see the work begin. My prayer for you as you start this journey is that you would not despise the beginning but instead hold onto the promise found in Philippians 1:6 that the Lord, who has begun a good work in you, will carry it on to completion until the day of Jesus Christ.



Marcus L. Heenan



*START STRONG
WITH PRAYER*

Start Strong with Prayer

Start Where You Are

*After Ehud, Shamgar, son of Anath, rescued Israel. He once killed
600 Philistines with an ox goad.*

- Judges 3:31

Think about the idea of 600-to-one odds. The scripture says 600 people are trying to assassinate Shamgar. How did Shamgar pull this off? How did he beat the odds that were stacked against him?

It appears Shamgar started where he was. He was on a farm in a field. And he seemingly turns a cornfield into a battlefield. Wouldn't you agree that the temptation in life for most of us is to say, "If I was just somewhere else; If I were just in this place or that place, then life would be so much better"?

But Shamgar simply started where he was. He didn't have a position of power. He didn't have a military background. He realized that if anything was going to change in his life concerning his future, destiny, and purpose, he couldn't sit around and wait for some big opportunity. He couldn't sit around and wait for some miraculous door to open. He had to start right where he was.

Imagine what your life could be like if you could get ahold of that today. If you could begin to say, "I'm going to start right where I am. It's not desirable. It's not what I wanted. It's not what I hoped I would have. But here I am, as difficult as it is, I'm going to start right where I am."

Many people don't pray simply because they don't know where to start. Can I help you out? You don't need a theology degree to pray to God. You don't need to attend a seminary school to communicate with the Lord. I want to encourage you to take a page from the book of Shamgar today. Simply start right where you are!

Take the Time

You desire but do not have, so you kill. You covet, but you cannot get what you want, so you quarrel and fight. You do not have because you do not ask God.
-James 4:2

There is no such thing as a failed prayer in heaven. Did you know that your prayers never die? When you say a prayer, it immediately becomes eternal. You have never prayed a prayer that God has not answered.

Do not mistake that as God giving you everything you want every time you ask for it. He is a good Father, not an irresponsible One. God knows that if He said “yes” to some of the things that we are praying for, it would bring a curse into our life. He knows that He can’t just give us everything we want. He knows that sometimes our weaknesses and immaturity can cause us to abuse or cause harm to ourselves. God always answers prayer, but sometimes His answer is “no.”

Have you ever looked back on a prayer that God answered and been thankful that His answer was “no”?

Other times God’s answer is “wait” or “not yet.”

Seven times in John 15, Jesus tells the Apostles that if they ask anything in His name, it will be done for them. It is almost annoying how many times Jesus repeats Himself. But have you ever considered why Jesus said it repeatedly? The critical question is not, “Does God always answer prayer?” but instead, “Are we praying?”

Are we even taking the time to ask Him? The Bible says in James 4:2 that we have not because we ask not. God desperately wants to be in relationship with you. Bring your requests to the Lord. The most important thing is simply that we are praying to our heavenly Father.

Establish Your “Cool Place”

Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden. But the Lord God called to the man, “Where are you?”
-Genesis 3:8-9

Regularly, God would show up in the cool of the day and meet with Adam and Eve. He showed up in the cool place so regularly that Adam and Eve didn't show up one day. When He sees that Adam and Eve aren't present, He asks the question, “Where are you?” He asked that question because Adam and Eve disconnected from the vine. They disconnected from the source.

The enemy deceived Adam and Eve, and they were told that if they ate the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, they would no longer need God. Eve literally reached for the fruit and disconnected it from the tree. The moment she pulls and disconnects the fruit from its source, Adam and Eve are disconnected from their source.

What was their source? Regular, consistent times where they would show up and commune with God. We need to establish our “cool place.” If you do not have a time and place to pray, you will not pray.

What is your “fruit”? What keeps you from a regular, consistent time and place to commune with God? Think of those things that keep you from your “cool place” and ask God to remove the “fruit” that keeps you from time in prayer with Him.

Guard Your “Cool Place”

Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you—guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us.
-2 Timothy 1:14

Through the Holy Spirit, we are instructed to guard the treasure that God has entrusted to us. Do you know what that treasure is? It's your connection to God, your “God connection.” You must guard your God connection.

There was one critical mistake that Adam and Eve made. God commanded Adam in Genesis 2:15 to be the keeper of the garden. It wasn't the enemy that took them out of the “cool place.” He was just let in because they weren't guarding the “cool place.” The enemy didn't force them to grab the fruit; they chose to disconnect.

Prayer is how we guard ourselves against grabbing the fruit and disconnecting from the vine. We tend to try to grab hold of negativity, gossip, and bitterness. We try to reach for all kinds of things that disconnect us from our relationship with God. We reach for affirmation, criticism, negativity, and bitterness, and they all cause us to sacrifice our God connection. Prayer is how you ask God to guard you against separating spirituality from life. Pray that God would protect you from your own tendencies, and pray that He would bring the right people into your life and keep the wrong people out.



START STRONG
WITH THE WORD

Start Strong with the Word

Scripture Speaks Specifically

So Eli told Samuel, "Go and lie down, and if he calls you, say, 'Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.'" So Samuel went and lay down in his place. The Lord came and stood there, calling as at the other times, "Samuel! Samuel!" Then Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant is listening." And the Lord said to Samuel: "See, I am about to do something in Israel that will make the ears of everyone who hears about it tingle.

- 1 Samuel 3:9-11

God called out to Samuel specifically. He called out to Samuel personally. God's voice is personal and specific. And God wants to speak to you. One of the most important things I can do as your pastor is teach you that God wants to speak to you.

One of the saddest stories in scripture is when Israel looks at Moses and says, "Moses, you can go up the mountain and hear from God for us" (see Exodus 20).

Does God speak through His children to His other children? Absolutely! But God wants to speak to you personally and specifically.

Jesus said, "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me" (John 10:27).

Jesus is the Shepherd. If you're following Him, then you are His sheep. And what do sheep do? They hear the Shepherd's voice. I know there are many people who don't believe God speaks. Who are you going to listen to: the unbeliever or Jesus?

“If God doesn’t speak today, then the greatest disservice we could ever do to people is to tell them that they can have a personal relationship with God”
- Dallas Willard

Take some time today to listen. God wants to speak to you specifically and personally. Don’t expect someone else to hear from God for you. Your story is your story. Your history is your history. Your intellect is your intellect. Your personality is your personality. You are His sheep, and you can hear His voice. Spend some time in God’s Word today, knowing that no one can hear from God for you as you can!

Bring the Book

And all the people gathered themselves together as one man into the street that was before the water gate; and they spoke unto Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses, which the Lord had commanded to Israel.

And Ezra the priest brought the law before the congregation both of men and women, and all that could hear with understanding, upon the first day of the seventh month.

And he read therein before the street that was before the water gate from the morning until midday, before the men and the women, and those that could understand; and the ears of all the people were attentive unto the book of the law.

- Nehemiah 8:1-3

A revival is sparked throughout Jerusalem because of three words: “Bring the Book.” The revival begins when Ezra opens the scripture and reads it aloud. They knew that it was important that God’s hand was on their lives, but the one thing that they didn’t want to miss was the importance of “Bringing the Book.”

What triggered this revival was a hunger for bringing the Word of God back to its rightful place in Israel. A need for the Word of God to have its rightful place in people’s hearts.

We need that kind of a revival today. We desperately need this revival in our churches, personal lives, and families. We need a hunger for the Word of God.

We must bring the Book to our trials. We must bring the Book to our temptations. We must bring the Book to our sin. We must bring the Book to our doubts. We must bring the Book to our unbelief.

Every revival of the heart begins when you include the Book. We can renew the spirit of our minds by getting into God's Word more often. Ask God to give you a hunger for His word! Make today the day that you dust it off and "Bring the Book."

Shout the Sword

Gideon and the hundred men with him reached the edge of the camp at the beginning of the middle watch, just after they had changed the guard. They blew their trumpets and broke the jars that were in their hands. The three companies blew the trumpets and smashed the jars. Grasping the torches in their left hands and holding in their right hands the trumpets they were to blow, they shouted, "A sword for the LORD and for Gideon!"

- Judges 7:19-20

God tells Gideon that when he reaches the edge of the enemy camp to break the glass pitchers, lift their torches and blow their trumpets. And then God tells them He wants them to shout, "The sword for the Lord and for Gideon."

In the book of Hebrews, the Bible talks about a two-edged sword. The Jewish thought is that a two-edged sword is:

- What God says on one edge
- What you say God says on the other edge

The sword does not become two-edged until you speak what God speaks. The Bible says it's Gideon's sword and the Lord's sword. So, it's not enough for God to say it...you, and I must learn to say it. You and I must learn to open our mouths and say what it is that God says. We believe; therefore, we speak. We speak what we believe.

The largest nerve in the body is the tongue, and it's connected to your brain. Your brain needs to train your tongue to speak what you believe. We have a responsibility to speak what God speaks. Let the weak say I am strong. Let the poor say I am rich. You've got to learn to say to the mountain be thou cast into

the sea! You must learn to speak what God speaks!
Choose a verse in the Bible to speak aloud with your tongue today. An excellent place to start: Psalm 139:14 – “I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful; I know that full well.”



START STRONG
WITH WORSHIP

Start Strong with Worship

God is on the Search

But the time is coming— indeed it's here now —when true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth. The Father is looking for those who will worship him that way.
- John 4:23

John tells us that God is looking for people who will worship Him in spirit and in truth. Often during worship, we'll bring our problems to God.

Maybe you've prayed something like this: "God, I'm going to seek you. I'm at church today because I'm seeking you. I need answers. I've got this problem in my life. I've got this issue in my life. I've got this struggle in my life. I've got this area of addiction in my life. God, I need answers. I need answers for my job. I need answers in my marriage. I need an answer for my kid. I need an answer in my finances. I need direction in my life. I need answers."

Now, none of this prayer is bad or wrong. We are told to cast our cares on Him because He cares for us (1 Peter 5:7). We come and make our requests known to God. Again, all of this is good! We go into a time of worship, seeking God to intervene on our behalf.

Yet remember...God is also on the search. He's looking for a worshipper. Many times, the key to worship isn't trying to find answers. It's becoming a worshipper so that the solution can find us. And what David teaches us is that when you become a worshipper, you're no longer saying, "I'm trying to seek God to get

More than a Song

*Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit
from me.
-Psalm 51:11*

Worship is more than a song. It's more than just singing. Worship is completely yielding yourself to the Lord. It is surrendering yourself and letting God know that you desire to be in a relationship with Him.

The life of David provides us with a picture that we can worship God no matter what season of life we are in. When David is given the position of king and has prestige, prominence, and power, he still looks for the Ark of the Covenant so that he can worship. When David is on the backside of the desert and has been rejected by his father and his brothers, he still worships from the place of rejection. When David sins with Bathsheba, he doesn't let his heart harden and go into hiding; he responds with worship. Regardless of David's position, his response was always worship.

David's ultimate prayer is found in Psalm 51:11 when he prays, "Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me." He was saying, "You can take everything from me, but do not remove your presence from my life."

No matter what David went through, his worship was strong. This teaches us that nothing in our lives is authorized to rob us of our worship. No demon, disease, or devastating circumstance has the authority to rob you of your worship. No matter what season you find yourself in today, let the Lord know that you desire to be in relationship with Him.

Proclaim His Promises

But You are holy, Enthroned in the praises of Israel.

-Psalm 22:3

Some people think that all we're doing is singing when we gather for worship. Some believe we have a band with a light show, and we are just holding a mini-concert.

But we know that isn't what is really happening. We are singing praise and worship to God. When you worship and praise God, you're declaring His promises and His word. We praise and worship to declare God's character and truth over our lives.

The most powerful thing about praise and worship is that God inhabits the praises of His people. You create a throne for God to come and sit down in your midst. The Bible says that angels are dispatched when you worship and praise God. Praise is a weapon God has given you to push back the darkness and attract heaven.

Some people may think that it's just a song. But we will clap or shout for our sports team, so why can't we do that for our good God?

There is real power and blessing that comes on the other side of your praise and your worship. I want to challenge you to spend some time praising and worshipping the Lord today. Allow God to inhabit your praise! I believe wholeheartedly that this is your weapon against the spiritual attacks in your life!



START STRONG
WITH GOD

Start Strong with God

God is Gracious

For the sake of His great Name, the LORD will not reject his people because the LORD was pleased to make you His own.
- 1 Samuel 12:22

God does not turn His back on us. We may reject God, but that doesn't mean God rejects us. This scripture says that God does not reject us for the sake of His great name. Not because we deserve God's grace. Not because we've earned God's mercy. That's not how it works. God is not good to us because of anything we have said or done. He's good to us because of His great namesake. It's His character. It's who He is. He is who He is despite what we do or do not do.

What thundering grace says is that no matter where you've been or what you've done, God is faithful to announce that He is never giving up on you. He is never going to throw you away. Thundering grace says that we're God's people despite our dumb decisions. Despite all the crazy things you've done, God still calls you His son or His daughter. Even when we are at our worst, God knows how to be at His best. When we are weak, that is when God's grace is made strong in our lives.

God is Hands-On

But in the next breath, they were cutting him down: "He's just a carpenter—Mary's boy. We've known him since he was a kid. We know his brothers, James, Justus, Jude, and Simon, and his sisters. Who does he think he is?" They tripped over what little they knew about him and fell, sprawling. And they never got any further.

Jesus told them, "A prophet has little honor in his hometown, among his relatives, on the streets he played in as a child." Jesus wasn't able to do much of anything there—he laid hands on a few sick people and healed them, that's all. He couldn't get over their stubbornness. He left and made a circuit of the other villages, teaching.
-Mark 6:3-6

We often take issue with God because we want Him to be hands-off. We want Him to leave our plan and design for our lives alone. We don't want His hand on our unforgiveness. We don't want His hand on our stubbornness. We don't want His hands altering the plans we have made for our lives.

Imagine if a two-by-four told the carpenter to be hands-off. Imagine if a two-by-four told the carpenter to let it do things its own way. It would sit there forever, stuck and without meaningful purpose for as long as it existed. If the two-by-four was able to resist the hand of the carpenter, the carpenter would be limited in what they could accomplish through it.

The same can be said for the believer that resists the hand of God on their life. If we resist the hand of God, we will remain stuck and be limited our entire lives.

God's kingdom cannot be fully recognized in your life if you refuse to lay down your own plan and your own agenda to allow Him to do a deeper work in you.

God is a carpenter. He is hands-on. He is consistently and faithfully working in our day-to-day lives to

fulfill His plan for us. Trust your life in the hand of the Carpenter. His plan for your life is greater than anything you could ever imagine on your own!

The God of More or Less

*"For where two or three gather in my name, there am I
with them."*

- Matthew 18:20

God will always want the best for your life. The scripture above says two or three. I love this about Jesus. He says the goal is three, that you should be "shooting" for three. But, if you've given your best, if you've given everything you have, God doesn't say He's going to "back out" on His relationship with you.

He doesn't leave you and say, "I'll be back when you have everything together." God desires that you will get to the "more place" of three. That's what He wants for your life. But, if all you have is the "lesser place" of two, He is still faithful in the times when all you have is less.

God is saying that His grace and His presence are activated in the seasons of "more" and the seasons of "less." Maybe you feel like you aren't where you need to be spiritually. Perhaps you feel like you're in a season of "less" – Take heart, He's the God of more, and He's the God of less.

God is Not a Surface Cleaner

This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!

- 2 Corinthians 5:17

I meet people every week that come to church and feel like they've made a mess of their life, and they think to themselves, "If I go to church, maybe God can help me clean these things up. Maybe God can clean up the mess in my life."

But many times, people miss that God is not a surface cleaner. He's not a "Windex God" to spot-remove things in your life. God loves to do a much deeper work. He's the God of the refiner's fire. This means that when God gets a hold of you; He doesn't want to do a "surface" work; he wants to make you into a brand-new vessel.

You may feel inadequate. You may feel like you've messed up some things in your life. Be reminded today that in God's eyes, your old life is gone. He wants to completely, whole-heartedly, and permanently make you into a brand-new person.



*START STRONG
WITH JESUS*

Start Strong with Jesus

The Physician

When he saw them, he said, "Go, show yourselves to the priests."

And as they went, they were cleansed.

- Luke 17:14

Jesus doesn't heal people to prove that He is God. He heals them because He wants to. He heals because He cares. He heals because He is compassionate. Jesus heals people specifically and personally.

Jesus heals physically, emotionally, and spiritually.

Jesus doesn't heal because you deserve it. His healing is undeserving and unmerited. If your healing has been delayed, it's not because you've done something wrong. Know that He desires to heal you completely and totally.

In the above scripture, Jesus is on His way to Jerusalem when ten lepers cry out to Him, "Jesus, Master, have pity on us!" When Jesus saw them, He told them to show themselves to the priests. And the Bible says that as they went, they were healed.

Healing is often a process. It's usually not something that happens overnight, but along the journey. Sometimes healing comes with one-touch (like the woman who touched His garment in Mark 5:21-34). Sometimes healing comes with one word (like the centurion's servant who told Jesus to simply "say the word" and his servant would be healed in Matthew 8:5-8). Sometimes healing is "as you go."

Whether you need healing physically, relationally, emotionally, or spiritually, I want to encourage you not to give up! Don't throw in the towel. Don't stop. Your healing may be in the process. Trust His timing!

The Shepherd

*This is what the LORD says: "As a shepherd rescues from the lion's mouth only two leg bones or a piece of an ear, so will the Israelites living in Samaria be rescued, with only the head of a bed and a piece of fabric from a couch."
- Amos 3:12*

The book of Amos provides us with an incredible picture of how good of a shepherd Jesus is. In this scripture, the only thing left of the sheep is two leg bones and an ear. If it were up to me, and I had to decide whether to put my life at risk to save some leg bones and an ear, I'd probably let the lion finish his lunch. If we are honest, the same will apply to most of us. When we see something too broken, too devoured, and too far gone, we just seem to give up on it.

But Jesus, the Good Shepherd, will not give up on us even when all that's left of us is two leg bones and an ear. If you come to church and all you have left is an ear to hear what the Lord is saying, He still believes you can be redeemed. Some days may feel like you barely have a leg to stand on, and it takes everything you have just to get out of bed. God can still restore you on those days. Jesus never gives up on us if we have an ear to hear and a leg to stand on.

It's what Jesus came into the world to die for. He didn't come expecting us to be put together. He came to pick up the broken pieces of our life and restore us once again. Rest assured that you don't have to have everything together to come to Jesus. He can meet you right where you are!

Fully Man and Fully God

For this reason, he had to be made like them, fully human in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people. Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.

- Hebrews 2:17-18

Have you ever wondered if God in heaven can relate to you on earth? The truth is God became a man, Jesus so that you would know that He does relate to you. For 33 years, Jesus walked the earth and experienced the same temptations, challenges, joys, and sorrows that you experience. He knows and understands exactly how you feel.

Why would the God in heaven come to earth and become man? He didn't do it for Himself; He did it for us. He did it to show love in the purest form. Jesus wants us to know that He relates to all people. He works through people and uses them to bring hope to a dark world in dark times. Even now, He's aware of every weakness, flaw, and issue in your life, and He still loves you. He understands you even when you do not understand yourself.

We do not have to become good before coming to God. When we receive God, He begins to work in our life. You are a perfect candidate for Jesus to use in a mighty way. Jesus lived the life we are living. He experienced rejection, pain, and betrayal. He was one-hundred percent God and one-hundred percent man. He completely understands, and He still loves you, and He still chose you.

Refining Fire

When Sanballat heard that we were rebuilding the wall, he became angry and was greatly incensed. He ridiculed the Jews, and in the presence of his associates and the army of Samaria, he said, “What are those feeble Jews doing? Will they restore their wall? Will they offer sacrifices? Will they finish in a day? Can they bring the stones back to life from those heaps of rubble—burned as they are?”

Tobiah the Ammonite, who was at his side, said, “What they are building—even a fox climbing up on it would break down their wall of stones!”

Hear us, our God, for we are despised. Turn their insults back on their own heads. Give them over as plunder in a land of captivity.
Nehemiah 4:1-4

God prefers to use those that have been through the fire. When God was talking to Nehemiah about rebuilding the wall of Jerusalem, He said something out of the ordinary. He told Nehemiah to use the burned stones. More specifically, use the stones that have been through the fire, the stones that are charred and blackened.

And the world mocked Nehemiah because he used the burned stones. They didn't believe the stones would be strong enough because they were “stones from a rubbish heap – and charred ones at that.”

But God said, “That's the exact kind of stone I want you to use.” When God wants to do something, He doesn't always look for the “perfect” stone. He doesn't always look for “perfect” people. He often uses people that have been through the fire. He prefers to use the stones that have been burned and charred.

Maybe you've been burned by the fires of divorce. Perhaps you've been burned by a failure. Perhaps you've been burned by some sin or mistake. Maybe you've been burned by someone else.

You're the stone God wants to use! The fires you've been through make you even more suitable to be used by God. When God wants to build something great, He looks for people that have been through the fire. It's okay that your life isn't perfect. God wants to use you!

START STRONG
WITH
THE HOLY SPIRIT

Start Strong with the Holy Spirit

The Powerful

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.
- Romans 15:13

Have you ever received bad news, but somehow, deep down, you had a feeling that everything was going to be okay? It's almost like you have an overwhelming sense of peace, even when it isn't merited. Whether you knew it or not, that was the Holy Spirit working in your life.

When you don't have enough faith on your own, the Holy Spirit can provide you with the faith you need to make it through even the most difficult of trials. He will empower you and give you peace. Be open to receiving His help.

The only way you can receive the help of the Holy Spirit is by spending time in prayer. Prayer prepares you to hear from the Holy Spirit and receive His gifts. The more time you spend in prayer, the more clearly you hear His voice. The more clearly you hear His voice, the less often you mistake it for your own.

Nothing is too complicated for the Holy Spirit. He wants to empower you daily. He not only wants to do great things for you, but He also wants to do great things through you.

The Shipmaster

The captain went to him and said, "How can you sleep? Get up and call on your god! Maybe he will take notice of us so that we will not perish." Then the sailors said to each other, "Come, let us cast lots to find out who is responsible for this calamity." They cast lots, and the lot fell on Jonah. 8 So they asked him, "Tell us, who is responsible for making all this trouble for us? What kind of work do you do? Where do you come from? What is your country? From what people are you?" He answered, "I am a Hebrew, and I worship the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land." This terrified them, and they asked, "What have you done?" (They knew he was running away from the Lord because he had already told them so.) The sea was getting rougher and rougher. So they asked him, "What should we do to you to make the sea calm down for us?"

-Jonah 1:6-11

God sends the shipmaster to ask Jonah eight difficult questions. Did you know that God is a questioner? He loves to go into the areas of our life we are ignoring or are hiding and ask questions.

When Adam and Eve sin against God in the Garden of Eden, he shows up to ask them, "Where are you?" Then when they try to justify why they were hiding and try to blame it on things outside of their control, God asks them, "Who told you that?" He is a question asker. The shipmaster shows up, and he encourages Jonah with some difficult questions. But God's hard questions can be viewed as a gift.

"Jonah, why are you sleeping? Why are you ignoring this? Why do you think your problems are just going to resolve themselves?" God asks difficult questions because they will open doors that otherwise would remain closed.

Questions can cause you to break out of old mindsets. Questions can help you get out of the rut you've been in this past season. Questions are extremely powerful.

Never forget this: A good question can inform, but a great question will transform.

The shipmaster's questions are great questions: "Jonah, what are you doing? What are you running from? Don't you realize that your choices are hurting those closest to you? Can't you see that this is bigger than just you? I understand that the storm has caused you to go down into some dark places. I get that you want to run and hide from the storm. But can't you see that as you go down, you're dragging other people with you?"

Jonah was uncomfortable with the shipmaster's questions, but the shipmaster was still unafraid to tell Jonah the truth. It's like he was telling Jonah, "You can lie to yourself if you want. You can play the victim if you want." The shipmaster is not afraid to tell you the truth, even when you refuse to tell yourself the truth.

It takes humility, brokenness, and openness, but the gift of receiving the right question at the right time will make all the difference in your life. This is why God gives us the gift of the Holy Spirit. He is our shipmaster. Many people believe that the Holy Spirit is sent just to comfort us - and He does - but that doesn't mean He is here to make us comfortable. He is a teacher, and we all know that a great teacher is willing to ask the hard questions. He is a coach, and we know that a great coach comes alongside us to guide us and pull the best out of us.

We may not like the hard questions, but they are evidence that God loves us. He is faithful to correct us and convict us. The Holy Spirit is faithful to pull the best out of us! What question(s) is the Holy Spirit asking you lately? Take time to hear it and be bold enough to search your heart to answer it truthfully.

Write those questions here



The Intercessor

In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans.

-Romans 8:26

Let's not as a people lose the language of the Holy Spirit. It is our history. God still wants to show off in demonstration and power. The Bible teaches there is a heavenly language that you, as a believer, can receive. It builds you up in your most holy faith.

The Bible says that praying in the spirit builds your faith. It strengthens and edifies you. The Holy Spirit can intercede through you, meaning that He will stand up for you when you can't stand up for yourself. He will pray through you and stand up for you.

When you don't know what the devil is up to, the Spirit knows what He is up to.

When you don't know what the enemy's strategy might be, the Spirit knows what He is planning.

The Holy Spirit intercedes through you and pushes back principalities and powers and rulers of darkness that are determined to destroy your life, your family, and the church.

We can pray through the Holy Spirit as He enables us. He is a gentleman, and he will not barge in on our lives. You must be open to Him. Don't speak down on Him. Don't reject Him. Don't push Him to the side. Stay open to what He wants to do in your life.

Maybe the idea of praying through the Holy Spirit is a foreign concept to you. Perhaps you don't even know where to begin when praying in a prayer language. Ask the Lord to receive your prayer language today if you are comfortable doing so. It may not be immediate, and it may take some time to develop, but He will strengthen you and intercede for you if you will just remain open to Him!



START STRONG
WITH THE CHURCH

Start Strong with the Church

Born for Adversity

The LORD said, 'People of Jerusalem when you stumble and fall, you get back up, and if you take a wrong road, you turn around and go back.'
Jeremiah 8:4

Nobody is exempt from the “falls of life” – the scripture says when you fall and stumble, not if.

I think the “falls of life” are sometimes God’s way of humbling us. The falls of life are sometimes God’s way of gutting us of pride. It’s God’s way of gutting us of “control” - it’s God’s way of reminding us that we need him. It’s God’s way of reminding us that every blessing, every sense of security, peace, and joy aren’t in our control. They’re a gift from Him.

So, what do you do when you fall? Ecclesiastes 4:10 says, “...But someone who falls alone is in real trouble.” This is why church family is so important. Proverbs 17:17 tells us that a brother is born for adversity. The best place to be when you’re in your worst place is God’s house.

If you’re going through a divorce, guess what? You need your church family.

If you’re struggling with an addiction and you think there is no way that it will ever change... You need your church family.

If you’ve lost your job, you need your church family.

If you're mad at God, you need your church family.

Whatever you're facing today, God is ready to help you through your adversity. That is what the church was born to do: help you see God through your adversity. You are not alone.

The Wise Woman

Then the woman went to all the people with her wise advice, and they cut off the head of Sheba, son of Bikri, and threw it to Joab. So he sounded the trumpet, and his men dispersed from the city, each returning to his home. And Joab went back to the king in Jerusalem.
- 2 Samuel 20:22

In 2 Samuel 20, a wise woman from Abel goes into the battlefield because she has some ideas. She feels like she has a solution to the fighting and can bring reconciliation.

I believe the wise woman in this story represents the church. We are the bride of Christ. Notice the first thing the wise woman must do: she must leave the four walls of Abel. She can't bring resolution and reconciliation within the comfort of her four walls. She must go out into the enemy's territory. But she doesn't go out with a sword. She doesn't go out with threats and ultimatums. Instead, she goes out seeking answers. She ventures into the enemy's territory "looking for wisdom," the Bible says.

The church is called to be a wise woman. We're called to leave our four walls. We're called to go out into the enemy's territory with a spirit of humility and prayer, seeking God for answers so we can help a troubled world in troubled times.

Called to Keilah

One day news came to David that the Philistines were at Keilah stealing grain from the threshing floors. David asked the Lord,

“Should I go and attack them?”

“Yes, go and save Keilah,” the Lord told him.

But David’s men said, “We’re afraid even here in Judah. We certainly don’t want to go to Keilah to fight the

whole Philistine army!”

So David asked the Lord again, and again the Lord replied, “Go down to Keilah, for I will help you conquer the Philistines.”

So David and his men went to Keilah. They slaughtered the Philistines and took all their livestock, and rescued the

people of Keilah.

- 1 Samuel 23:1-5

David is having a conversation with God about the city of Keilah. David asks God what he should do. David says, “Keilah is under attack. The Philistines are destroying the lives of these people. The enemy is constantly harassing them. Is there anything that You would have me do about it?” I love that God doesn’t just sit there and listen to David. God responds, telling David, “I want you, David, to go save Keilah.”

As the Church, we have a Keilah. Our nation is under attack. Families are under attack. Anyone who has experienced racial injustice is under attack. An unborn baby whose life is at risk is under attack. Someone who struggles with their mental health is under attack.

And I am thankful God never has, nor will He ever, stop saying to the church, “I want you to go save Keilah.” God will never stop sending us to save Keilah! There are people right now in our world that the enemy is tormenting; they feel isolated and under siege. Perhaps their life is being destroyed by addiction or

depression. You need to know: God is very passionate about saving Keilah. It is His heart that all of humanity understands the saving knowledge of His Son, Jesus. And He primarily uses us, the church, to go save Keilah.

The Bible says that the Spirit and the Bride (the church) work together and tell Keilah:

“Come.” Let anyone who hears this say, “Come.” Let anyone who is thirsty come. Let anyone who desires drink, to drink freely from the water of life (Revelation 22:17).

Our job is to tell Keilah, “You’re welcome here. You’re loved here. You’re valued here.” As the church, our job is to go save Keilah!

Stand in the Gap

"The people of the land practice extortion and commit robbery; they oppress the poor and needy and mistreat the foreigner, denying them justice. I looked for someone among them who would build up the wall and stand before me in the gap on behalf of the land so I would not have to destroy it, but I found no one..."
- Ezekiel 22:29-30

People are passionate about politics. People are passionate about fame and fortune. Some people are passionate about things that can be self-destructive or harmful.

But what is God passionate about? If you study the scriptures, you will find a common theme. If there is one thing God is passionate about, it's the souls of mankind. He desires that all would be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth. He desires that every man and woman would repent and receive the new life that He died for us to come to know.

God reached out to the world through His death on the cross, and He continues to reach out through His body in the earth, which is the church, the bride. Through the church, Christ speaks, acts, and fulfills all things with His presence. He has granted us as people the ministry of reconciliation. We are the human ladders across which people come to Christ.

Whom do you need to stand in the gap for today? Whom do you need to become a human ladder for? The church should be quick to stand in the gap... to prevent people from heading towards a life of destruction.

The Purpose-Driven Lighthouse

*"You are the light of the world—like a city on a hilltop that cannot be hidden. No one lights a lamp and then puts it under a basket. Instead, a lamp is placed on a stand, where it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your good deeds shine out for all to see so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father."
- Matthew 5:14-16*

Up and down the coast, all over the world, you can find former lighthouses turned into museums, yacht clubs, and country clubs. Some lighthouses are now dilapidated, abandoned, or even destroyed. Places that once were rescue stations now seemingly forgot their purpose.

If we're not careful, the Church (or any organization for that matter) can fall into the same trap. By losing sight of the purpose, every organization is at risk of being the next lighthouse.

God has not called us to be a museum. God has not called us to be a country club. God has not called us to lose sight of our significance in a world that wants to dwarf us and make us feel like we cannot accomplish what He's called us to do. He's called us to be a bright, shining beacon of hope. He's called us to be a light in a darkened world and to be a city on a hilltop.

Will you join me in praying that God will continue to use His church to be a purpose-driven lighthouse to the world? Will you pray that God will continue to entrust us with lost people?

The Sin of Being Saved

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.
- Romans 12:1

The Bible challenges us to present our bodies as a living sacrifice, and it's our "reasonable service." Our bodies represent our time, our talents, our gifts, our abilities, and our influence. Anything we have in the "natural" - our physical life - is to be presented to God, and this is our reasonable service.

This means that I am not just going to give God lip service. It means that I am completely and entirely surrendered, and everything that I am belongs to Him... this is our reasonable service.

One of the core values of 7 Hills Church is that we allow the unchurched population to determine our growth. Our job is not to think about the size of our church. Our job is to think about the unchurched population. That is our responsibility. Why? Because we were all a part of the unchurched population, and someone thought about us at one point.

What happens is we get around all these people that fall into the "sin of being saved." They look good. They sound good. They have a thousand scriptures to defend themselves. But the bottom line is they haven't been effective for a long time because they've taken their eyes off why God rescued, saved, and restored them. God did not save you to park you in a church sanctuary. God saved you to use you in every possible way. He wants to use your body, influence, gifts,

talents, heart, words, and your whole life. God wants to use everything about you to be poured out for His namesake. Pray that God will not allow you to fall into the sin of being saved. Pray that He will use you to fulfill His purpose for you!

Congratulations on completing this journey!

You can continue by signing up for my daily devotional
“Daily Bread with PM” and scanning the QR code
below.



I'm praying you would sense His presence as you
continue to grow close to Him.
Finish strong!



