

40 DAYS of PRAYER

Week Four

DAY 22

Take time to slow down and spend some time today thinking about God, talking to Him and listening to Him.

Is God too busy to hear our prayers? Is He occupied with weightier matters than our lives and troubles? There are some religions that claim that God created and wound up the universe like a watchmaker winds a watch, leaving it to run on its own. Our belief as Christians is this – God really cares not only about the larger scheme of the universe, but also for each person. He is not a “detached deity”, but a caring and active God. He transcends His creation, but is active in it. No prayer is too small for God to hear. Neither is any prayer too large for God to handle.

As Christ said, *“Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?”* (**Matthew 6:26 NIV**) The answer to the question asked by Jesus is that we are indeed “more valuable than they,” for we are created in God’s image (**Genesis 1:26**), “we are God’s workmanship” (**Ephesians 2:10**), and He loves us.

An important step in receiving the blessings of prayer is to humbly and sincerely offer our prayers to God. Fortunately, we can do this anywhere and anytime, because prayer is always available to us. But we must take the initiative. If we do so, God is eager to hear us, comfort us, strengthen us, help us, and uphold us with His “righteous right hand” (Isaiah 41:10).

PRAYER REQUEST

In the Lord’s Prayer, Jesus taught us how we are to pray and what we are to pray for. We are reminded to pray **“YOUR KINGDOM COME, YOUR WILL BE DONE”**. What does this mean?

When God sets up His kingdom on Earth, things will be perfect. Then, at last, we will see God’s will being done on Earth just like it is being done in heaven right now. But, in the meantime we should be praying that people would do things God’s way here on Earth! You can pray, “Father, while we wait for Your return, help us to do Your will here on earth just as the angels do in heaven.” Too often we treat prayer as if it’s catalog shopping. “Dear Lord, I want this, give me that...” There is nothing wrong with asking God to provide us with our needs and even some of our wants. However, God isn’t just our gracious provider; God is our King. That is why we are called to pray “May Your Kingdom come soon.” God is the king of Kings. And, He expects us to obey

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Him. So, we need to find out what our King's plans and desires are for our lives.

When God views our church, He sees its potential. In the mind of God, He envisions what it can and should become in the future. We call that "God's preferred future". He loves our church so much He doesn't want it to remain where it is today. He has in mind a "preferred future".

Pray today asking God to reveal to you and to other church members what God envisions for the future of our church. Prayerfully consider this question: HOW DO YOU WANT OUR CHURCH TO CARRY OUT THE GREAT COMMISSION IN OUR CONTEXT.

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DAY 23

Luke 11 is one of the greatest “prayer” chapters in all the Bible. In it, Jesus gives not only a template for our prayers, but teaches us why prayer is important to our lives.

One thing is clear – Jesus MODELED a lifestyle of prayer before he gave a MESSAGE about prayer. His disciples SAW Him praying before they ever asked him about it.

Luke 11:1 reads, *“One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, ‘Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples’”*

There’s much to learn from this passage beyond the significant Lord’s Prayer that follows it. For one, we learn that what sparked the unnamed disciples’ curiosity to learn about prayer was the fact that he saw Jesus in prayer.

We also learn that John the Baptist taught his disciples to pray and, thus, the disciples of Jesus were also interested in learning to pray, or at least one of them was! Isn’t it interesting that out of all the disciples only one of them asked Jesus to teach them to pray?

It sometimes seems the church is in a similar situation today regarding prayer. We talk about prayer, we study prayer, we say our prayers, but how many of us seek earnestly for God to teach us to pray?

PRAYER REQUEST

One of the most important things a church can do is to be on the “same page” when it comes to God’s vision. For the church to be revitalized and to have an impact in the world our focus must never be on “are you on my side” or “are you on their side”? Effective, impactful churches ask: “Are you on the Lord’s side”.

“WE WILL KNOW THAT WE ARE WITH GOD WHEN OUR DESIRES FOR HIS CHURCH MATCH HIS DESIRES.” As you pray today, ask God to bring true UNITY in our church. Ask that everyone at Joshua would know God’s vision and commit themselves to it. Pray and ask God to help us make our desires for Joshua match His desires for Joshua.

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PRAISE AND THANKS

1 Thessalonians 5:18 says, “In everything give thanks; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.”

We are to be thankful not only for the things we like, but for the circumstances we don’t like. When we purpose to thank God for everything that He allows to come into our lives, we keep bitterness at bay. We cannot be both thankful and bitter at the same time.

*We do not thank Him for evil, but that He is sustaining us through it (**James 1:12**). We don’t thank Him for harm He did not cause, but we thank Him when He gives us the strength to endure it (**2 Corinthians 12:9**).*

*We thank Him for His promise that “all things will work together for the good, to those who love God and are called according to His purpose” (**Romans 8:28**).*

We can have thankful hearts toward God even when we do not feel thankful for the circumstance. We can grieve and still be thankful. We can hurt and still be thankful. We can be angry at sin and still be thankful toward God. Giving thanks keeps our hearts in right relationship with Him and saves us from a host of harmful emotions and attitudes that will rob us of the peace God wants us to experience (**Philippians 4:6–7**).

Today, make a list of the “hard things” you are facing in your life, in your family, on your job – and then take time to pray a prayer of thanksgiving in each situation. This is not thanking God for the problem, but thanking Him for what He can do through the problem. Write down any insights God gives you today.

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As we continue to think about our own prayer life, it is important to look at the prayer life of our Lord.

Have you ever asked this question – Why did Jesus pray?

One way we can learn to pray is by looking at the prayer life of Jesus. Although the Gospels don't provide a detailed biography of Christ, they do offer captivating glimpses into His prayer life. First, however, it will be helpful to answer the question, ***“Why did Jesus pray?”*** This is sometimes puzzling for Christians. After all, if Jesus is God, why did Christ need to pray?

Theologically speaking, there are at least three reasons that Jesus prayed.

First, Jesus prayed as an example to his followers. This is an example we continue to learn from.

Second, while Jesus was on earth, He had both divine and human natures. From His human nature, it was perfectly natural for a Jewish believer such as Christ to pray.

Third, the nature of the Trinity allows for communication between its members. As God the Son, Jesus could pray to God the Father.

The very fact that Jesus made prayer an integral part of His life ought to be the best motivation for us to give it the same importance in our lives. May we have the same commitment to prayer that Jesus had.

PRAYER REQUEST

The four keys to revival – revival of a nation, revival of a church and revival in our own hearts. The four keys are: ***HUMILITY – PRAYER – SEEKING GOD – REPENTANCE.***

ARE YOU PURSUING REVIVAL? Do you want God to move in your life and in our church more than anything else? If so, are you putting into practice the four keys of humility, prayer, seeking God and repentance. All of them are necessary for God to work in our lives. Pray today and ask God to make humility, prayer, seeking Him and repentance real in our lives and our church.

“ASK GOD TO HELP YOU AND OTHERS IN YOUR CHURCH TO HUMBLY WALK WITH HIM, PRAYERFULLY DEPEND ON HIM, DILIGENTLY SEEK HIS FACE, AND HONESTLY REPENT OF SIN THAT HINDERS YOUR FELLOWSHIP WITH HIM.”

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PRAISE AND THANKS

The book of Psalms is the praise book of the Bible, and it gives us hundreds of reasons why praise is important, as well as examples of how to give praise to God. In examining those reasons and examples, one thing becomes clear. ***“It is good to praise the LORD and make music to your name, O Most High...” (Psalm 92:1).*** Praise is a good thing. That means it is pleasant, valuable, and morally excellent. **Psalm 147:1** tells us that praise is beautiful and agreeable.

If praise is pleasant and valuable, then it ought to be a part of our everyday lives. Praise is NOT something we do only on Sabbaths, it is to be in the fabric of all we do all the time. No matter what time of day you are reading this, it would be great for you to stop everything you are doing and think about all the things you can praise God for today. In fact, stop right now and as you think of something to praise God for, write it down and then give Him the praise He rightfully deserves. Take a few minutes and let this prayer “exercise” fill your heart with worship. You will be surprised when you think of all you can praise God for right now.

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As we continue to think about our own prayer life, it is important to look at the prayer life of our Lord.

Here are three important lessons the life of Jesus teaches us about our own prayer life.

Jesus prayed for others. In **Matthew 19:13**, we read, *“Then little children were brought to Jesus for him to place his hands on them and pray for them.”* Even though “the disciples rebuked those who brought them,” Jesus said the children should not be hindered “for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these” (**v. 14**). In **John 17:9** we read, *“I [Jesus] pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given Me, for they are Yours.”* This underscores the need for intercessory prayer.

Jesus prayed with others. **Luke 9:28** reads, *“[Jesus] took Peter, John and James with Him and went up onto a mountain to pray.”* Jesus prayed alone, as we’ll read below, but He also knew the value of praying with others. **Acts 1:14** underscores the importance of Christians praying with one another: *“They all joined together constantly in prayer ...”*

Jesus prayed alone. **Luke 5:16** reads, *“But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.”* As much as Jesus understood the value of praying with and for others, He also understood the need to pray alone. **Psalms 46:10** reads, *“Be still, and know that I am God.”* Sometimes it’s important for us to “be still” before God, but the only way to do this, especially in our hectic culture, is to do so alone with God.

PRAYER REQUEST

The danger of falling out of love with Jesus. There’s an old saying which says, **“The good is ever the enemy of the best.”** There’s nowhere that this is truer than in the kingdom of God; in the lives of Christians and in the church. Think about it, it’s one of the Devil’s oldest schemes. Wherever God is at work, be certain that Satan is not far behind. Scripture tells us that he is our enemy who like a roaring lion is seeking whom he may devour.

As you read the New Testament, you will see clearly that the Devil employs many tactics as he tries to thwart the work of God in our lives and in our church. Whenever he can he tries to introduce false doctrine into the church. Where this does not work, he introduces schisms and division, knowing that a

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house divided against itself cannot stand. With a nasty tool chest, full of things like gossip, jealousy, suspicion and pride, he causes God's people to take their eyes off of Jesus and His commandments and causes them instead to focus on earthly things which have no eternal value.

When these tactics are not completely successful there is another tool he uses to stop the forward progress of a congregation. It is perhaps the most insidious tool, because it is masked behind the façade of success. **When he cannot deceive us, divide us or daunt us what he will often do is divert us.** The love, passion and commitment we once had for Jesus is replaced with an acceptance of things as they are. Satan wants us to become so satisfied with where we are, with what we are doing and with what we have accomplished, that instead of maintaining a red-hot passion for Christ and for His kingdom, we would lose our zeal for Christ and His kingdom; replacing a once consuming internal passion with a complacency that is content with the religious status quo.

Could this be the reason why then have some 80% of churches in our country either reached a plateau or are in decline?

We must be vigilant. We must on guard, corporately and individually, against losing our passion, we must guard against becoming what the church at Ephesus had become. We must never fall out of love with Jesus.

Today, pray that your heart would be "white hot" with love for Jesus. If you don't love Jesus as much as you once did, cry out to God and ask for His forgiveness for choosing the good over the best and recommit your life to Him. As you pray today, cry out to God and pray that Joshua would truly be a church PASSIONATELY in love with Jesus and "white hot" with a desire to honor Him more than anything else. Pray that we would be a church that truly LOVES the Lord more than anything. As you pray today, take time to ask God to be with those who are suffering or sick today. Ask God to be near to each person going through a hard time today.

PRAISE AND THANKS

What the Power of Praise Can Do!

- 1. Praise gets our focus off ourselves and back on God.** In our often "selfie" focused world, we need this constant reminder – life is not all about us. We may know that in our heads, but yet our hearts think differently so often. We're prone to selfishness, He desires our eyes be set

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firmly on Him, because that's where our true hope is found. He is worthy of our praise, no matter what we face from day to day.

*“Praise him for his mighty deeds; praise him according to his excellent greatness!” **Psalm 150:2***

*“And my tongue shall speak of your righteousness and of your praise all the day long.” **Psalm 35:28***

2. Praise brings us to a place of humility. We remember our dependency on God, as we acknowledge our need for Him. As we praise Him as Creator and King of this world, we admit and recognize that we're not in control, but He is. He is above all.

*“Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving; let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise! For the Lord is a great God, and a great King above all gods.” **Psalm 95:2-3***

*“I will give you thanks in the great congregation: I will praise you among much people.” **Psalm 35:18***

Take time today to simply praise God for the blessing of your family. Think of each person (spouse, children, parents, etc.) and thank God for them and what they mean to you.

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DAY 26

As we continue to think about our own prayer life, it is important to look at the prayer life of our Lord.

Here are three more important lessons the life of Jesus teaches us about our own prayer life.

Jesus could pray as a sprinter or a marathon runner. The Lord's Prayer is full of wisdom, but it is short enough to be easily memorized and serve as an example of a sprint rather than a marathon prayer. But Jesus also knew how to dedicate long periods of time to prayer. As we read in **Luke 6:12**, Jesus "*spent the night praying to God.*" We, too, need to be able to offer short prayers, as well dedicate long periods of our lives to prayer.

Jesus prayed regularly. This insight is gleaned from a passage cited earlier, **Luke 5:16**: "Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed." The word "often" is not hidden, but makes it obvious that Jesus prayed regularly. Throughout the Gospels whenever we read of Jesus and prayer, it comes up regularly and naturally. It was simply a part of His worldview, integrated into every aspect of Christ's life. Can we say the same about prayer in our life?

The prayers of Jesus were heartfelt. Jesus did not pray in a cold, distant manner, but in heartfelt supplication, demonstrating empathy and a genuine love for God. This is demonstrated clearly in **John 17**, where Jesus prays for Himself, His immediate disciples, as well as for all believers.

PRAYER REQUEST

The importance of putting God FIRST in our lives every day. The common tragedy for many Christians is that they spend their lives in "trivial pursuits" and neglect the most important thing – SEEKING JESUS BEFORE ANYTHING ELSE.

"IF BELIEVERS WOULD MAKE THE FATHER'S KINGDOM A PRIORITY THEY WOULD LACK FOR NOTHING IN LIFE."

What does it mean for us to "seek God"? **SEEKING GOD FIRST SAYS THAT WE'RE DEPENDENT ON HIM, WE'RE DESPERATE FOR HIM AND THAT WE'RE DEDICATED TO HIM.**

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So, as we prepare to pray, let's all get totally honest before the Lord and ask ourselves some important questions:

1. ***Are we truly dependent on Him? Are we trusting in ourselves or relying on Him for everything?***
2. ***Are we truly desperate for Him? Do we want to know Him more than anything else? Do we put other things above Him in our hearts and lives? Do we crave to connect with Him?***
3. ***Are we truly dedicated to Him? Is He the unrivaled Lord of our lives? Do we base every decision on what He wants? Is He in control of our lives?***

As you pray today, ask God to help you align your heart with His. Ask God to give you a “white hot” passion for Him. The word “SEEK” means to pursue, look for, focus on or go after. As you pray today, make a fresh commitment to pursuing God, focusing on God and going after God as never before. Dedicate yourself to seeking Him FIRST before anything else in your life. Pray and ask God that our church would be a church that continually seeks God above all else.

PRAISE AND THANKS

What the Power of Praise Can Do!

3. **Praise makes the enemy flee.** It pushes back the darkness that surrounds, and blocks the attacks and hissing lies over us. Evil will not stick around if we're praising our God, who will fight our battles for us. In the story of Jehoshaphat, we see God miraculously defeat the enemy, because of the people's obedience to praise Him.

“As they began to sing and praise, the Lord set ambushes against the men of Ammon and Moab and Mount Seir who were invading Judah, and they were defeated” 2 Chronicles 20:22

4. **Praise leaves no room for complaining and negativity.** Sometimes even within our prayers, we can tend to complain about our problems. God knows our hearts. And He cares about all that concerns us. But through praise, we're focused on Him, no longer allowing too much attention to be centered around the struggles. We're reminded of what He has already done in our lives. We're reminded that He knows what concerns us, and is capable of taking care of all that burdens us.

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*“Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits, who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy.” **Psalm 103:2-4***

*“By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name.” **Hebrews 13:15***

Today’s praise assignment – praise and thank God for the physical and financial blessings God sends your way. If you have a house, car, clothes, furniture, food and more – you are blessed. Take time to give God a shout of praise today.

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As we continue to think about our own prayer life, it is important to look at the prayer life of our Lord.

Here are three more important lessons the life of Jesus teaches us about our own prayer life.

Jesus based His prayers on the knowledge of God and His truths. The prayers of Jesus were based on God's revealed truths and, as such, were in line with a solid biblical worldview. In **John 4:24** Jesus said, "*God is spirit, and His worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth.*" He also said, "*the truth will set you free*" (**John 8:32**), underscoring the importance of truth in the life of Jesus and, in turn, our lives. Proper prayer requires us to have a truthful understanding of God and what He has revealed to us through His Word.

Jesus taught persistence in prayer. "*Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up.*" (**Luke 18:1**) The parable Jesus shared is not meant to depict a pestering disciple who finally bugs God enough that He chooses to respond, but about persistence in prayer and waiting on God and His timing.

Jesus knew that not all his prayers would be answered as expected. This is a difficult prayer

lesson to learn, but the fact of the matter is that not all our prayers are answered in ways we expect. Even Jesus knew this hard lesson as he cried out to God the Father from Gethsemane (**Matthew 26:36-44**). Three times Jesus prayed for God to allow an easier path, but Jesus knew, "*Yet not as I will, but as You will.*" (**26:39**)

When Jesus prayed in Gethsemane, "*Yet not as I will, but as You will,*" He offered a tremendous but seemingly simple insight into prayer: God is in charge. As we learn from the prayer life of Jesus – and there is much to learn – we need to keep this overarching principle in mind. A disciple asked Jesus, "*Lord, teach us to pray,*" (**Luke 11:1**) and in response was taught the Lord's Prayer. But by studying the prayer life of Jesus, we can learn not only the important truths of the Lord's Prayer, but so much more.

PRAYER REQUEST

Each of us must strive to please our neighbors, pursuing their welfare so they will become strong. (Romans 15:2)

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“TROUBLE DECREASES WHEN THE MEMBERS SEEK TO JOIN TOGETHER AROUND A MISSION AND VISION RATHER THAN EACH ONE PURSUING HIS OR HER OWN DESIRES”

Pray today for your church family. There are people in our church today who are sick and struggling, discouraged and defeated, stressed and sad – and we need to pray on each other’s behalf. Ask God to meet the needs of the people in your church family. Ask God to bring them fresh hope and encouragement.

PRAISE AND THANKS

What the Power of Praise Can Do!

5. **Praise makes room for God’s blessings over our lives.** He will not hold back His goodness, praise opens the gateway of blessing as we come into the Presence of our King.

*“Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise! Give thanks to him; bless his name!” **Psalm 100:4***

*“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ.” **Ephesians 1:3***

6. **Praise invites His presence.** God dwells close to us when we praise Him. He lives there. He looks for it.

*“He inhabits the praises of His people.” **Psalm 22:3***

*“But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people; that you should show forth the praises of him who has called you out of darkness into his marvelous light;” **1 Peter 2:9***

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Most of us have encountered problems in our prayer lives to one degree or another. Maybe God did not answer our prayer or we encountered a moral dilemma such as should we pray for or against enemies? Perhaps we wonder whether prayer is worth bothering about. After all, if everything is already going to happen according to God's will, then our prayers cannot possibly change His mind, right? For the next couple of days, we will discuss some matters relating to problems and prayer.

Should we pray for enemies?

Do our enemies deserve our prayers? The answer to this problem of prayer is easy and hard. It is easy, biblically speaking, because Christ said, "*You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you ...*" (**Matthew 5:43-44**, NIV). But this directive to love and pray for our enemies is a problem for us sometimes because our natural inclination is not to pray for our enemies. But by seeking to imitate Christ, we grow in our level of maturity enabling us to love and pray for our enemies.

Should we pray against enemies?

Doesn't the Bible support praying against our enemies? There are instances in the Psalms, for instance, where prayers openly ask God to defeat enemies. Biblically, we can pray for victory over enemies, but coupled with the command to love our enemies, we should not do so spitefully or out of malice. We should pray for the defeat of enemies with the right attitude – that of wanting to see God's Kingdom increase, not to satisfy our petty grudges. God is just, but He is also merciful. Therefore, praying for God's justice to prevail against enemies is right. We should also keep in mind that there are instances where our enemies are not truly fellow human beings, but "*the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms*" (**Ephesians 6:12**).

PRAYER REQUEST

Psalm 133:1 "*How wonderful, how beautiful, when brothers and sisters get along!*"

There is nothing that can compare to the incredible joy that comes when God's people in the church come together, grow together, serve together and walk together in true unity.

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“WHEN A CONGREGATION IS UNIFIED AROUND KNOWING, AND SERVING GOD IN THE FULFILLMENT OF HIS PURPOSE AND VISION FOR THE CHURCH IT IS A BEAUTIFUL THING”.

Each one of us has a part in preserving and promoting the unity in our church. Jesus said that our love for each other in God’s family will prove to the world that we are truly His disciples. That is why we must do everything to get along and love each other in the church.

1. **What ways are YOU seeking to promote unity at Joshua?**
2. **Is there anyone in your church family with whom you need to seek reconciliation?**

As you pray today, ask God to bring true unity in our church. Pray that you would be a person that promotes unity.

PRAISE AND THANKS

What the Power of Praise Can Do!

7. **Our spirits are refreshed and renewed in His presence.**

We’re strengthened by His peace and refueled by His joy. Through a heart of praise, we realize that God doesn’t just change our situations and work through our problems, He changes our hearts.

“In His presence, there is fullness of joy.” Psalm 16:11

“Because your love is better than life, my lips will glorify you. I will praise you as long as I live, and in your name, I will lift up my hands.” Psalm 63:3-4

8. **It paves the way for God’s power to be displayed, miracles happen.**

People’s lives are affected and changed. God shakes things up through praise. As Paul and Silas sat in prison, shackled, and chained, they kept right on praising God. And God sent an earthquake that shook the cells and broke the chains. The jailer and all his family came to know Christ that very night.

“About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them, and suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken. And immediately all the doors were opened, and everyone’s bonds were unfastened.” Acts 16:25-26

We have a choice every day in this life. To live absorbed in worry and stress, on the fast track of busy, focused only on what surrounds us, tuned into the roar

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of the world. Or, we can ask God to help us take our eyes off all that may be swirling around, our problems and mess, or the voices of others. And we can look up...to Him, the One who holds it all together, and who holds us in his hands. God desires our whole heart. He waits for us to return. He longs for us to know the power of His presence over our lives. He desires to bless us more than we could imagine. His Spirit urges us onward, calling us closer.

Today write down 5 things you can thank and praise God for regarding the Joshua Church.