

IN THINKING ABOUT WHAT GOD HAS IN STORE for Black Rock Church in the coming months, I recalled a dialogue which takes place between two characters in C.S. Lewis' renowned work *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*. In the tale, the hospitable pair known as Mr. and Mrs. Beaver inform the children, Peter, Lucy, Susan and Edmund, that they will take them to see the king, Aslan. The following dialogue ensues between Susan, Lucy and Mr. and Mrs. Beaver:

Susan inquires with some trepidation: *"Is He a man?"*

*"Aslan, a man?"* said Mr. Beaver sternly. *"Certainly not. I tell you he is the King of the Wood and the son of the great Emperor-Beyond-the-Sea. Don't you know who is the King of Beasts? Aslan is a lion – the lion, the great lion."*

*"Ooh",* said Susan, *"I thought he was a man. Is he – quite safe? I shall feel rather nervous about meeting a lion."*

*"That you will, dearie, and no mistake,"* said Mrs. Beaver; *"if there's anyone who can appear before Aslan without their knees knocking, they're either braver than most, or just silly."*

*"Then he isn't safe?"* said Lucy.

*"Safe?"* said Mr. Beaver; *"don't you hear what Mrs. Beaver tells you? Who said anything about safe? Course he isn't safe. But he's good. He's the king, I tell you."*

In recalling this dialogue, I could not help but think of our church and what God is doing among us. Is this "ministry expansion" safe? No. Is our God a God who calls us always to walk forward in a direction which we would call a safe one? No. Therefore, I cannot help but ask with Susan, 'Is He safe?' No... but He's good.

It is my heart's desire that as we embark on this journey together of discovering what God has for us in the area of "ministry expansion" in the coming months, that we have this focus corporately – the "Goodness and Faithfulness of God."

God has shown Himself faithful in the lives of many here at Black Rock over the years. He has "wept with those who have wept; and rejoiced with those who have rejoiced," showing us that no matter what the circumstance that we have faced in our lives, 'His grace is always sufficient for us' (II Cor. 12:9) and that He truly is good. I invite you to spend a brief time each morning, over the next 30+ days, recounting with the people of Black Rock the goodness and faithfulness of God. Each of these readings contains devotional thoughts written by the people of Black Rock Church as they have spent time reflecting on the faithfulness of God in their lives in anticipation of how God will be faithful in the future.

*"Is He safe? Course He's not safe... but He's good... He's the King, I tell you."*

Enjoy the journey . . .

*Pastor Steve*

## God's Incomprehensible Faithfulness

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**Key Verse:** *“Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.” (James 1:2-4 NIV) See also: Exodus, Esther, Job, Hosea, Jonah, and Hebrews 11*

**Meditation:** After a year of raising prayer and financial support, teens from across the USA and Canada met to form mission teams at Teen Missions International - in the swamps of Florida. After a successful time of training at “The Lord’s Boot Camp” and a service of commissioning, they were on their way to serve around the world.

On Thursday, July 12, 1984, three teams of student missionaries were headed, via bus, to California for a flight to the Philippines. On a sunny afternoon in Arizona, a tractor trailer truck full of gravel crossed the double yellow lines and hit one of the buses head on. Three adults were killed and two students were severely injured. Seven other team members were sent home due to injuries. As one of the seven people sent home, I had so many questions that filled my mind: Why did it happen? Why to this bus? Why to this group? Why now? And yet, even with these questions still unanswered today, I know that God has been—and continues to be faithful in and through this event. People through-out North America and the world heard about “The Busload of Miracles.” Families had doors opened for the opportunity to share what God had done to change their lives through His son Jesus Christ. —Randy Schmidt

**Prayer:** *Father, please help me to trust You even when situations in my life arise that I cannot understand – no matter how hard I try. Please use these events to help me grow closer to You. Help me to be a person who “lives on purpose” and help me to make an eternal difference in the lives of people in my family, my neighborhood, and around the world. Amen.*

## In All Things Give Him Thanks

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**Key Verse:** *Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. (Ephesians 5:20)*

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**Meditation:** Years ago I worked on the staff of a weekly newspaper with a man named Charles who was also a country Methodist pastor. Many work days we would eat lunch at a crowded café where the plate lunch food was served piping hot. When the waitress came to our table, Charles always had a kind word for her. She acted as if we were her favorite customers.

After the iced tea, the plate lunches would come. After placing them in front of us, the waitress would back off a couple of steps and watch, waiting to receive our approval.

Charles would bow his head, and in that crowded café would pray out loud for all to hear, “Lord, thank you for this food we are about to receive, and for Thy gracious bounty...” After the first few bites, the waitress would return to her busy routine.

I was a little embarrassed by Charles’ public prayer, and one day I asked him why he prayed the way he did before he ate. He said, “It always helps the food go down better.” I never pursued it again.

Over the years I have often thought about Charles, having never forgotten his example to a young man. What did he mean by, “It always helps the food go down better”? It certainly did not have anything to do with digestion. And, I doubt it meant that he was clearing his conscience by praying.

In retrospect I believe he was saying, “Jim, God called me to be a witness to Him, and thanking God publicly for my food in front of believers and unsaved alike is one way to do that.” Who knows, one day in Heaven we may see that waitress again, who will tell us that she is there because of the faithful example of one praying Methodist country preacher.

—Jim Livingston

**Prayer:** *Thank You, Father, for a country preacher who led by example and cared more about the salvation of others than his own “embarrassment.” Help me become more like the faithful servant he was, putting my own comfort aside to be faithful in sharing the Gospel. Amen.*

## Stormy Skies

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**Key Verse:** *Though He slay me, yet will I hope in Him. (Job 13:15)*

**Meditation:** It is easy to trust in the Lord when things are easy; when the road is straight, the skies are cloudless and the sun is radiant. But let the journey get difficult, the sea begin to froth, the sun darken, and often our confidence in God plummets. Have you ever prayed a prayer to God something like this? “Lord, if you answer this prayer exactly this way, it will strengthen my faith in You even more.”

The writer of Hebrews defines faith this way: “Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see” (Hebrews 11:1). As strange as it may seem to us, scripture tells us that our faith only grows when we do not immediately get what we want. Faith grows best in the midst of darkness. Faith in God only shines in our soul when we cannot see His face, or even His shadow. It is only after Job loses everything and endures the unwise counsel of his friends that he makes the remarkable statement, “Though He slay me, yet will I hope in Him.”

Possibly today you are experiencing a time when your faith is being tested. The billowy clouds of doubt have rolled in over you and you cannot see God’s hand. But rest assured that you are not abandoned. V. Raymond Edman, the former President of Wheaton College, used to be fond of saying, “Never doubt in the dark what God has told you in the light.” God has told you in the light of scripture that nothing can separate you from His love (Romans 8:38-39). Rest in the assurance and never be afraid to trust an unknown future to a known God. Only a growing faith exercised in the fog of life is a lasting faith. —Larry Fullerton

**Prayer:** *Lord, I ask that You would help me have a growing faith. When things are difficult, may You help me to continue to walk in faith and to continue to learn to trust in Your unfailing love. Amen.*

## **Standing In The Need Of Prayer**

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**Key Verse:** *Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything.*  
(Philippians 4:6a)

**Meditation:** St. Paul, the greatest apologist for the Christian faith, was never lacking in confidence. He said, "whatever you have learned or received or heard from me or seen in me—put it into practice" (Phil. 4:9). In other words, "do what I do, say what I say, mimic me." He said, "join with others in following my example, brothers..." (Phil. 3:17)

Paul wrote to the Corinthians, (1 Cor. 11:1) "Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ." The great Apostle was so confident in his integrity and ability to live the life that Christ demanded of his followers that he could say, "do as I do."

Overconfidence? Pride? Boasting? No, the Apostle Paul knew his human failings, his weaknesses. He wrote to the Ephesians, "... and pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. ...Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I might declare it fearlessly, as I should." (Eph. 6:18-20)

This giant of the Christian faith needed the prayers of God's people in order to faithfully execute his God-given task.

Our prayers should uphold our pastors, elders and church leaders before God's throne. Then we should pray for ourselves, that our walk would match our talk so that, in humility, we might say with Paul, "Follow my example." —Dave Topazian

**Prayer:** *Heavenly Father, grant that all of us—leaders and followers—may fearlessly declare the Good News. In the name of Jesus, Amen.*

## The Power of Praise

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**Key Verse:** *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)*

**Meditation:** King Jehoshaphat had just learned that a vast army was on its way to attack Jerusalem. His first reactions were to inquire of the Lord and to proclaim a fast for all the people in the country. There was a wonderful response from the population. They rallied to the capital, and the king led them in prayer, praising God and concluding, “We do not know what to do, but our eyes are upon You.” Men, women and children humbled themselves before the Lord, and waited.

Then the Lord spoke to them through a Levite in the crowd, telling them not to be afraid or discouraged because “the battle is not yours, but God’s.” They should march forward! The king and the people responded with praise “with very loud voice”.

The next morning as the army of Judah prepared to march out against incredibly superior odds, King Jehoshaphat appointed men to sing and praise the Lord as they went, chanting, “Give thanks to the Lord, for his love endures forever.”

And the Lord defeated the impossible obstacles and blessed Judah with rich rewards.

How often we plan and scheme and calculate and worry about a difficult task. Our heavenly Father wants us to move toward the challenge, but not in our own wisdom or strength. He wants us to go forward trusting in Him and singing His praise as we go.

—Deidre Topazian

**Prayer:** *Dear Heavenly Father, forgive us for thinking that we are capable enough to work out almost any problem on our own. There is no ability or quality that we have that does not come to us as a gift from You. Please receive our praises today. May we praise You every day as we move forward in the tasks You have given us to do. Amen.*

## Be Strong.....Who, Me ?

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**Key Verse:** *Haven't I commanded you? Be strong and courageous, don't be afraid or discouraged, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go. (Joshua 1:9)*

**Meditation:** Have you ever noticed how often God makes a point of encouraging us? He obviously knows that living as a Christ-follower in this fallen world is a challenge for all of us. Sometimes we need to be comforted....at other times we need help with fear...and then come times when we really could use some extra strength.

Joshua faced such a time when the Lord asked him to assume the leadership of Israel, succeeding Moses, the man who led them out of captivity and was a spiritual giant in the eyes of the people. He was overwhelmed by the thought of filling Moses' shoes (pretty understandable, wouldn't you agree ?) and even came up with a list of excuses for God as to why he wasn't qualified. At this point, God reminded Joshua that he wasn't being asked to take on this huge job with his own resources but through God's strength.

God's statement to Joshua wasn't a suggestion...or simply a reminder. He used the word *command* to get Joshua's (and our) attention. God also told him to think about God's faithfulness over many years...how He led Moses and the nation through the wilderness...how He fed them daily with manna. (Makes me think of the song, "Count your blessings, name them one by one....".)

I've been dealing with some difficult situations at work over the last year or so and have needed encouragement, peace, and direction...just like Joshua. At times I've felt overwhelmed...just like Joshua. God has reminded me, with the same words He gave Joshua, that I need to trust Him, to rest in His strength and His courage, not my own. He promises to be with me in all of life's situations....and where Jesus is, there is no fear. —Ken Brix

**Prayer:** *Jesus, as we face life's challenges help us to lean on You and not ourselves. Thanks for Your promises, Your faithfulness, and Your amazing love. In Your strong and matchless name, Amen.*

## **Finding Freedom from the Fear of Failure**

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**Key Verse:** *My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the salvation of my heart and my portion forever! (Psalm 73:26).*

**Meditation:** Throughout my life I have struggled with the fear of failure. Whether in the classroom, the baseball diamond, work, or in relationships, the fear of failing has often managed to paralyze me in varying degrees.

In recent years the most challenging step, or should I say leap of faith, was to enter seminary. I believed the Lord was calling me into full time ministry, and this meant giving up a financially secure position for one that financially offered little; the fact that I live in Fairfield County did not make the decision any easier.

To complicate matters I was required to take a prerequisite course in biblical Greek in order to qualify for the seminary. I had never taken a foreign language before and, to be honest, English had always been enough of a challenge. The class was Monday through Friday from 8:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. with a 3½ hour commute. After day two of the class it became quite clear that I was in way over my head; I felt doomed to fail.

My first reaction was to blame God. I went into my closet and yelled, cried, and pleaded for understanding. I asked, how, God, could You allow me to fail? It did not take long for God to respond. In a heart-to-heart conversation I could hear God speaking to me, saying, “You are not in seminary for a degree; you’re there to know Me.”

At that precise moment I felt as if heavy burden had been released from my shoulders, and all I could do was thank and praise God for His faithfulness. The fear of failure had been greatly reduced and eventually, with hard work, I passed Greek.

We will all experience failure from time to time. However, as long as we continue to walk in faith we will never be a failure in God’s eyes. — Ted Fiorito

**Prayer:** *Dear Jesus, I come to You with thanksgiving in my heart. I know that whatever this day has in store Your faithfulness is more than enough to sustain me. I pray, Jesus, that You will protect me from the fear of failure; may I even be willing to fail for Your glory. Amen.*

## Assessing Life's Primary Focus

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**Key Verse:** *For to me, to live is Christ. (Philippians 1:21a)*

**Meditation:** I have a friend who has often said, "My son is my life." He proudly says that everything in his life revolves around his son. He sacrifices a lot for his son, he arranges his schedule to maximize his time with him, and every important decision he makes is subject to consideration of how it will effect their relationship.

My friend's deep devotion to his son carries significant risk; when we focus our lives entirely on another person we can be devastated if that person is taken from us or rejects us. However, that kind of devotion helps me to understand better what the Apostle Paul meant when he said, "To me, to live is Christ." Similar to my friend's expression, he essentially said, "Jesus is my life," and it is true that everything in Paul's existence revolved around Jesus Christ. He worked for Jesus, sacrificed much for him and did everything possible to enhance his relationship with him.

In our desire to make Jesus the center of our lives we also will want to spend time with Him, work and sacrifice for Him, and consider how all our decisions impact our relationship with Him. Thankfully, in placing our life focus on Jesus there is no risk of being left alone because He has promised to never leave us or forsake us!

—Don Treash

**Prayer:** *Lord Jesus, You are the One who gives us life now and for eternity. We want to give our lives back to You in praise and thanksgiving. Amen.*

## Are You a True Worshiper?

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**Key Verse:** *But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.* (John 4:23-24)

**Meditation:** The Samaritan woman to whom Jesus was speaking was concerned about *where* was the right place to worship God. Jesus cut to the core in his answer: “it’s not the place (or a certain ritual) that makes it true worship, it’s the spirit of the worshiper and the truth of who his God is.” Is the God I worship the one revealed in scripture? The one that is love, but also wrath, forgiving but just, righteous but merciful. Do I live my life as I please because I know He loves me, or do I have awe and reverence for His holiness? If I don’t acknowledge *all* His attributes, I’m not worshiping in truth.

Worship, it has been said, is the soul being occupied with God. Worship does not automatically take place when you enter the sanctuary on Sunday morning. We can sing the songs and go through the motions. The Jews did. But Jesus, quoting Isaiah in Matt. 15:8 said: “These people draw near to Me with their mouth, and honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me, and in vain they worship Me.”

Is God pleased with my worship? With yours? Do we have a broken and contrite spirit as we acknowledge and confess our sins? Are our spirits “bowed” before Him in thankfulness, praise and honor as we give our money? Are we *longing* to know Him more intimately through His Word? Is our greatest desire to be the kind of worshiper the Father seeks? — Berit Halvorsen

**Prayer:** *Lord God, we are unworthy of Your love and mercy, yet You have been so gracious to us. Cause our hearts to overflow with gratitude, that we would desire to worship You every day, and live our lives so as to bring glory to You. Amen.*

## The Nudge

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**Key Verse:** *John chapters 14 and 16*

**Meditation:** A number of years ago I suffered from a corneal problem that caused me almost constant pain. As a result I practically took up residence in my then doctor's office but found little relief. At that time a dear lady in our church had undergone a corneal transplant with wonderful results and became an avid fan of her doctor. When she learned of my problem she became a "nudge," a nag and a nuisance to convince me to see her doctor. Because of her relentless persistence I finally saw her doctor and today I enjoy almost total freedom from pain in my eye. If I had not listened to her I could have lost the sight in that eye.

That experience reminds me of the work of the Holy Spirit as He dwells in me. He reveals the truth of the Word and empowers me to apply that truth in my life. He will not leave me alone to go my own way but lovingly and persistently convicts and convinces me to trust and obey Him. —Eleanor Banyas

**Prayer:** *Lord, help me to be sensitive to the leading and prompting of the Holy Spirit and not to grieve or quench the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

## Camping and Hampton Inns

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**Key Verse:** *For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted. (Luke 14:11)*

**Meditation:** My family and I went camping this summer, six kids, two adults, and one tent, even though I am clearly a Hampton Inn kind of guy. I like the beds, the breakfast buffet, the long hot shower on someone else's water bill, cable TV, Internet hookup...

My wife convinced me that camping would be FFF (forced family fun) so I reluctantly agreed to go. I must admit that I was pleasantly surprised by the whole experience, yet humbled by my lack of outdoorsman skills. It was apparent that if I was ever cast on *Survivor* I would be one of those delegated to gathering the firewood since I have no chance of actually starting a fire. I also discovered that camping is the great equalizer. Everyone sweats and mumbles putting up their tents. Everyone looks haggard after a day of swatting bugs, trying to start a fire, and trying to keep things dry. Best of all, everyone looks unshaven, unkempt, and tired waiting in line for a dirty shower stall. Camping is not filled with the haves and have nots, everyone is in the endeavor on equal footing. No one asked me what kind of work I do or what degrees I have earned or what kind of vehicle I drive.

Golfing is my preferred method of recreation and whenever I am paired with a stranger it is inevitable that within three holes I will be asked what I do for a living. I then quickly decide whether I should say "private school administrator" or "Christian school administrator." The sad part is that I even think about it. It painstakingly demonstrates my desire to create the right image for others.

It makes me think that churches should be more like campgrounds and less like country clubs. According to Jesus the first shall be last and the last shall be first. Obviously Jesus is not familiar with the marketing schemes of America for it is all about what we have and do and make. As American Christians we must guard ourselves and discipline ourselves not to take this faulty attitude into our congregations. Just like camping we are all in this endeavor together. We are all dirty sinners waiting in line for the cleansing shower of Jesus' blood.

As we look for God to be faithful to Black Rock in this next phase of ministry that He is calling us into, it is important that we identify ourselves as an important member of Christ's body here in Fairfield county. We need to purposely involve ourselves in ministries that welcome all newcomers and create an atmosphere where all are accepted.

—Barry Giller

**Prayer:** *Father God, Lord we know that we are nothing without You and that You have showered numerous blessings on us that we do not deserve. May we only desire to cast an image as a Christ follower. Amen.*

## Tired of Waiting

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Key Verse: *Psalm 130*

**Meditation:** We are impatient people and waiting is difficult. We spend months during our lifetime just waiting – waiting in lines, waiting for people, waiting for appointments. These are mundane, but other times we wait with anxiety for help to come, for a diagnosis from the doctor, or maybe for relief from pain. Waiting is difficult because it affects our lives, our blood pressures rise, we become anxious, we start to worry, or become discouraged.

How often have we been told to wait or to be patient? I've been told that my entire life. And my answer is that I'm a Type A personality, always on the go and I don't have time for waiting.

As I search the scriptures I am reminded so often that I am to wait on the Lord. As I find it difficult to wait in my everyday life, this too is an area I need to understand and practice the Word of the Lord. How about you?

Waiting on the Lord requires confidence and expectation, expecting new measures of help from God. (Ps. 27:14)

To wait in silence, resting in the will of God (Ps. 37:7)

I wait for the Lord; from Him I expect relief and comfort, believing it will come, longing till it does come, but patiently bearing the delay of it and resolving to look for it only from the Lord. My soul waits for the Lord. In His Word I hope, remembering that "joy comes in the morning." God will not fail!

"But those that wait on the Lord," and by faith rely upon Him and commit themselves to His guidance, shall find that God will not fail them. They shall have grace sufficient for them, they shall renew their strength.

You may be struggling because you have waited so long for an answer. Don't give up!

Rest in the Lord for He **is** your source of help.

—Pastor Jim Marshall

**Prayer:** *O God, forgive me for the times I've been impatient. My need is great, but You are greater. I am trusting, resting and quietly waiting for You to work in my life. Amen.*

## **More or Less?**

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**Key Verse:** *He must increase but I must decrease (John 3:30)*

**Meditation:** Have you ever been hit between the eyes with a question?

And I don't mean, Dad I know I'm only 14, but I really would like to go out with him. He's real cute and he drives a mad car! Can I? No, that question might generate a far different response from you.

I mean the type of question when you're sitting comfortably in your seat, and you are relatively interested in the pastor's message, and then wham! It comes out of nowhere and your entire focus is on the question. I imagine at some point you were there. This happened to me recently. The message was highlighting a teaching point referring to John the Baptist and then came the question, "so how exactly are you decreasing?"

What does this mean? How does one go about focusing on decreasing yourself? And most importantly, am I decreasing and is Jesus increasing in my life? It challenged me to recommit myself to a more obedient prayer life and time in the Word.

I think in many ways the membership of Black Rock faces the same question as we prepare for the Ministry Expansion of our church. It would be easy to see this as a project where we have the opportunity to "*increase*." Increase our parking lot, increase our classrooms, our sanctuary, our recreation area, etc. But rather we should be challenging ourselves to make sure we are "*decreasing*" our personal agendas and increasing our focus on the mission of our church to know Jesus Christ and to make Him known.

So how are you going to decrease? —Bob Donovan

**Prayer:** *Lord Jesus, forgive me for being filled with myself. I pray for Your Holy Spirit to give me the inner strength to submit more of myself to You each day. I pray that You teach me what I need to know and do to learn how to decrease and allow You to increase. Lord of the universe be Lord of me. Amen.*

## What Ever Happened to a Sense of Wonder?

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**Key Verse:** *I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Marvelous are Your works, And that my soul knows very well. (Psalm 139:14)*

**Meditation:** More and more we feel like we can find the answers to just about anything. Why it's as simple as going to google.com and we can discover a discussion on any issue. We are growing more confident about our ability to discover a cure for almost all illness, another new program that will end a war or feed the masses, or a technology that makes our lives easier. Yes, we need only to find the formula that will make us rich, healthy, or attractive. Sometimes this worldly wisdom is transferred to our vision of Christianity, and we institutionalize the proven ways in which God works with his people. We may find success and happiness in using our rational capabilities to build a great church. But what ever happened to a sense of wonder? Wonder goes beyond our expectations or measurements, and in wonder we stand in awe of something new.

We have been made in the image of God (*imago dei*), and one of the key elements of this is the ability to communicate with a God who is not limited, nor fully explained by the rules of our world. But we live in a modern society that no longer accepts the reality of the supernatural. Yet our soul knows God, for He has created us in order to have fellowship with us. We are wonderfully made, and this wonder goes far beyond biological, rational, or social dimensions. We are capable of creating amazing things, and God has endowed us with a rational capacity which allows us to develop modern science. Still, the wonder that is part of our very nature is only grasped by seeking God through the depths of our soul. In the end we must praise God that he has made us so much more wonderful than we can ever grasp, and this is a reflection of His great love. Someday, however, we will stand in eternal praise when we see the real wonder of God: "You are worthy, O Lord, To receive glory and honor and power; For You created all things, And by You will they exist and were created" (Rev.4:11). —John Roney

**Prayer:** *God of all creation and the source of everlasting wonder, we praise You for making us in Your image. We stand in awe of Your mighty power. Help us to expect much more than we are accustomed to. Grant us a new perspective so we can see beyond our daily experiences and the rules that our society has created, which limit Your power. Help us to gain a sense of wonder at Your creation and how each and every person has been wonderfully made. Amen.*

## **Prayer: The Foundation for Trusting God**

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**Key Verse:** *Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will direct your paths. (Proverbs 3:5,6)*

**Meditation:** For years I didn't want to "bother" God with my daily challenges but a sovereign God had other plans to show His strength in our weakness. (2Cor.12:9). My weaknesses were to become very evident.

Suddenly, financial and medical responsibilities for five elderly people had to be assumed. Two with cancer and two with Alzheimer's disease. Selling two houses, finding appropriate doctors and nursing home facilities, and settling estates were overwhelming challenges. God showed my wife and me that we needed His help for wisdom, physical and spiritual strength and peace. We prayed for a humble heart and unwavering faith to trust and obey His leading (James 4:10). It wasn't easy to completely turn over control to God but He knew we were trying and He was faithful (Mark 11:24).

Doors of opportunity opened, decisions were easier and good things happened that were not even anticipated (Romans 8:28). God clearly showed us He works in mysterious ways His wonders to behold. He created in us an even stronger servant's heart, which led to a wider church Deacon Board and Care ministries involvement, where Christ would be glorified by serving others (Matthew 25:40).

God has a plan for each of His children's lives if we pray daily for a humble heart and a strong faith that allows us to trust and obey (John 15:10).  
—Ray Strickland

**Prayer:** *Father, thank You for teaching the importance of prayer in learning to trust and obey You. Give us an ever strengthening faith and an ear always quick to listen to Your directions for our lives as we seek to glorify You in the days ahead. In Christ's precious name we pray. Amen.*

## **Get Out of the Way!**

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**Key Verse:** *I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of his robe filled the temple...Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory... (Isaiah 6:1,3,5)*

**Meditation:** Recently I had the opportunity to facilitate a small group for a women's Bible Study. I have struggled with pride all my life and hesitated to lead a group as I wanted to avoid the possibility of stumbling again. Driving to Bible study one evening, I reminded the Lord that He had led me into this and also of my need for Him to be the leader and not me. The result was that our Bible study benefitted from the best discussion we had ever had. The Lord mercifully moved me out of His way so that He could accomplish what needed to be done. He has convinced me that everything is much more effective and glorifying when I get out of the way!

Over the last two years, I have most often seen the Lord's faithfulness through His conviction of pride in my life. This has frequently come as the result of recognizing His glory—His holiness and righteousness in contrast to my own sinfulness. He has mercifully pulled me out of the pit of pride so many times and continues to do so every time I stumble. For the first time I have begun to recognize the depravity of my own soul with a clarity from which I had always shied away. Amazingly, coming to grips with this truth about myself has been both enlightening and healing. The glory of the Lord is so amazing—for it is this glory that has brought such healing and spoken such words of comfort into my heart. It is this glory that has caused me to not only see myself the way I would be and have been without fully relying on His grace, but also has allowed me to see myself as a beloved bride of the Matchless King. Oh, love so amazing, so divine.

As we embark on this new step of ministry, hand in hand with our Savior, let us not forget His glory. Allow His glory to bring you to a place of awe in His presence. Allow Him to show His faithfulness to you through His gentle conviction in your life.—Lisa Giller

**Prayer:** *Lord Jesus, peel off the blinders and open my eyes, that I may see Your glory and always hear Your voice of love and conviction in my life. Amen.*

## **Where Is Home?**

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**Key Verse:** *For we know that when this earthly tent we live in is taken down-when we die and leave these bodies-we will have a home in heaven, an eternal body made for us by God Himself and not by human hands. (2 Corinthians 5:1 NLT)*

**Meditation:** Another visit with my family comes to an end. Once more it is time to say good-bye. I hug my mom; the children still cling to their Grandpa, tears flow freely. When will I see them again?

The plane ride from Europe is long and exhausting, and as we enter the United States the emigration officer smiles at me and says: “Welcome home.” Home? Where is my home? Is it in ‘the old country’ where I was born and raised? Is it ‘out West’ where I got married and made deep friendships for the last decade? Or is home now here in Connecticut?

Thankfully I do not have to decide because God has already settled it! My home is in heaven! As a matter of fact Philippians 3: 20 tells me that my ‘citizenship is in heaven.’ This earthly tent is very temporary. It may be set up here or there but it will, in the end, be taken down when I die and leave this body. I will have a home in heaven never to be taken down again—it will be eternal! Jesus Himself is preparing it for me right now.

While putting the suitcases on the cart, the tears flow again but this time they are tears of pure joy, because I know that home is in His eternal arms, now and forever. And someday soon I will be truly home, sitting with my Lord at the welcome table feasting in His eternal presence. I can’t wait! —Tanja Jensen

**Prayer:** *Dearest Lord, I know that I will never be settled here on earth, because I am just passing through. Thank You for being my comfort when I am homesick, feel lonely or out of place. The truth is that I am not truly home until the day You will take me there—to my eternal one—my real home in heaven with You. I love you, Amen.*

## Pray Without Ceasing

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**Key Verse:** *Pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. (1 Thessalonians 5:17-18)*

**Meditation:** An opportunity arose recently for my husband and me to sell our house and buy another one more suited to our needs. We were facing the “empty nest” syndrome in the near future. Interest rates were low, and a variety of houses became available on the market.

We prayed fervently for the next few days for God to show us His perfect will before making the final decision. Immediately, everything began to fall into place. Our house sold in just a few days, we found a new house close to our present neighborhood, mortgage rates had dropped, and on and on and on. We became so confident that things would continue to go smoothly that we eventually stopped praying about it.

All of a sudden, out of the clear blue, we ran into a major roadblock with the inspection of our home. We had radon. Why was this happening when we knew it was God's will for us to move? “God, why are you allowing this to happen? Why have You allowed this obstacle to hold up our closing?” Eventually, we realized what God was trying to teach us.

We fell to our knees asking for forgiveness for our pride in our own abilities, forgiveness for our unfaithfulness in prayer, and forgiveness for our questioning of His perfect plan. We foolishly thought that, as long as things were going well, we really didn't need God.

Our radon problem has been corrected. The time to close on the house is at hand. But through it all, we've learned a very important lesson: Even when things seem to be moving smoothly, according to plan, pray without ceasing. —Judy Chagnon

**Prayer:** *Heavenly Father, forgive me when I question Your perfect plan for my life. Teach me to look to You for guidance and wisdom - in good times and bad. I love you. Amen.*

## **God's Will—With His Timing**

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**Key Verse:** *Now, the Lord said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing." . . . So, Abram went, as the Lord had told him. (Genesis 12:1,2&4)*

**Meditation:** We recently moved. It was not planned or expected. With interest rates low and only a little left on our mortgage we put our house on the market to see what would happen. We prayed daily for God's will. "Should we move or should we pay off our mortgage?" God answered our prayer clearly with a buyer for our house and a new house for us in less than two weeks. Just as God told Abram to leave his home and move to a new land, God told us to sell our house of 16 years and move to a different house. We were clearly doing God's will just as Abram was when he left Haran.

But after the decision was made to move, we wanted the rest of the process to go as quickly and easily. We wanted the inspections done, the contracts written and the closing set. But it didn't happen that way. It seemed to take forever. We wondered if we would ever close. How could God tell us that He wanted us to move and then allow the process to take so long? We finally realized that although we allowed God to make the decision for us to move, we were not letting Him orchestrate the timing of the process. We had to learn to be patient and let God accomplish things when He wanted them to happen.

Abraham had to wait for God's timing so many years ago. God had promised to make him a nation, but Abraham had to wait until he was a very old man before God gave him his son Isaac. We need to accept God's will for our lives, but also we must wait for His perfect timing to accomplish His will. —Mark Chagnon

**Prayer:** *Dear God, grant us the desire to see Your will done in our lives and give us the patience to wait for You to accomplish it. Amen.*

## **Are You Searching and Feel Lost?**

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**Key Verse:** *Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life. (John 5:24)*

**Meditation:** Years ago, before I became a believer in Jesus Christ as my Savior, I was lost and kept searching for spiritual truth.

Have you ever felt lost and were searching for something but you did not know what it was?

Well, that is the way I felt, but God, in His mercy, is faithful and led me to Black Rock Church where one can receive in-depth Bible studies and have opportunities to participate in various activities.

I now have a sense of fulfillment and enjoy the benefits of power in prayer.

The scripture quoted above may sound simplistic and mysterious, but further reading reveals that Jesus Christ becomes the Savior of those who put their faith and trust in Him and then it becomes clear and enlightening to be a follower of the Savior and maintain fellowship with “the body of Christ” by attending a Bible believing/teaching church regularly and to get involved.

Because God so loves the world (John 3:16), Black Rock Church supports a worldwide missionary outreach program and it is a great blessing to see so many unbelievers coming to know the Lord as their personal Savior when they hear the Good News of the Gospel message. —Frank Clerio

**Prayer:** *Dear blessed Lord Jesus, I thank You that I have eternal salvation. I pray for those who are lost and are searching, that they would come to know You as their personal Savior, and will also enjoy eternal salvation. I also pray for Your continuing blessing on Black Rock Church, its many ministries and the expansion program and all of the church leaders. Amen.*

## Time to Clean House

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**Key Verse:** *But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven . . . for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. (Matt. 6:20-21)*

**Meditation:** Every once in a while, I start to feel very overwhelmed with the accumulation of “stuff” I have in the house. It starts to look cluttered and unmanageable and I can’t find anything I’m looking for. It’s hard to admit that things that seemed so important when I first got them are now causing discomfort and distraction.

Whenever I get that feeling, I *have* to clean the stuff out. Get rid of it. Have a tag sale; give it to anyone who’ll take it. If all else fails, it goes to the dump. Yesterday’s treasure becomes today’s trash.

I think it’s the same when we lose our focus on Jesus. It is so easy to get distracted by the things of this world that we take our eyes off the One who saved the world. When our lives get cluttered and overfilled, there’s no room for Christ. We forget that God alone is sufficient for our every need.

When that happens, the only antidote is to “clean house.” Just as you’d judge the stuff in your attic by whether or not you really need and use it, judge the clutter in your life in the light of eternity and the relationship you desire with the Lord. Get rid of the things that are distracting you and He’ll be faithful to provide what you need.

There’s so much talk these days about “simplifying.” It’s good advice for your spiritual life as well. Clean house and let God bless your home.

—Chris Adams

**Prayer:** *Dear Lord, forgive us for allowing the things of this life to take our focus away from You. Thank you for being faithful even when we are distracted. Help us to realize that You alone are sufficient for our every need. Amen.*

## **Is it Safe?**

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**Key Verse:** *Jesus says: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it."*  
(Matthew 16:24-25)

**Meditation:** In the past year I have taken two trips to Afghanistan, my childhood home. And if I have heard one question more than any other, it is this: "Are you sure it is safe?" Actually, everyone knows the answer to that...of course it is not safe. How can it be safe when certain Islamic sects believe they will gain heaven if they can die killing an infidel (translate that ME)? How can it be safe when hundreds of thousands of unexploded land mines still litter the countryside? No, it is not safe.

I believe, however, that God has called me to help the people of Afghanistan. Which brings the next question, "When it comes to obedience to God, is safety an issue?" I'm not dumb. I don't want to die. I am chicken enough to stay away from the really dangerous areas of Afghanistan. I don't take unnecessary risks. But having said that, does the Bible permit us to use safety as a litmus test of whether or not we should do something?

I looked up the word "safe" in my NIV Study Bible and was astonished to find that it does not occur all that often. On the other hand the word "save" occurs over and over again, especially with regard to God's ability to save us from both physical and spiritual danger and death. The word "safe" gives the idea of being in a state in which nothing bad can happen. The word "save" implies that we are in a state of danger, but God is able to protect us.

As Black Rock Church enters into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, will it, and should it be "safe," or should it be "saved"?

Should we as Christians seek to always be in a safe place, or should we trust God to save us as we follow His leading even into danger?  
—Susan Fullerton

**Prayer:** *Lord Jesus, it is so easy to always take the safe road; to want plenty rather than sacrifice; to only tread the well-worn path. Help me, Lord, to be the person willing to take a risk and even be willing to lose my life for the sake of Christ. Amen.*

## Contentment

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**Key Verse:** *I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. (Philippians 4:12)*

**Meditation:** Is contentment a nice feeling you have when everything is fine, or a feeling, state of mind or security? How does it operate in the lives of believers? He praises God for all that he has and enjoys the fruit of his labor. He also trusts God during the struggles even when he doesn't know God's plan. The mature believer uses these moments for growth and ministry opportunities.

Many years ago, when Joann and I and our nine children endured financial difficulty and prayed for help, He used extraordinary means to answer. I'll name two:

In 1977 a man owed me \$3000 for two years and said he would not pay me; he paid the day before our home was to be foreclosed on.

We gave thanks for bread, peanut butter and jelly for supper one night, when our neighbor delivered a feast of pork roast, potatoes, vegetables, and a large chocolate cake for dessert with one piece cut out, because her guests did not show up for dinner and her family would not eat leftovers.

The Lord showed He cares. He provided a banquet instead of a snack. Wait on Him and He will prove trustworthy.

—Bob Chenoweth

**Prayer:** *Help us, Lord, to be content with what we have and use it for Your glory. Amen.*

## **Do You Feel Like You're Having a Power Blackout?**

**Key Verse:** *For who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ. (1 Cor. 2:16)*

**Meditation:** When we think of the apostle Paul, we tend to think of him as the great lion of God who went all over a good part of the known world preaching and teaching about salvation through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. He helped and supported the new churches sprouting up, sometimes exhorting or disciplining wayward members. He would engage intellectuals of any philosophy or religion, patiently stating his case for Christ. Sometimes he had to get in people's faces like he did to Peter (Gal. 2:11-21).

Yet, when he went to visit the church at Corinth for the first time, he felt weak and fearful, and he trembled. For he did not come as a great orator as we sometimes think of him — “not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on God's power.” (1 Cor. 2:4)

Do you find yourself in situations or with a group of people, relatives, people from work or perhaps here at church when you just don't know what to do or say? Paul reminds us that the power that sent him all over the world is also available to us right now! We have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us. (1 Cor. 2:12). —Tom Dunne

**Prayer:** *Heavenly Father, we pray that in the situations we face today we will rely on Your wisdom and not ours as we give ourselves to you. Amen.*

## Believe

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**Key Verses:** *I would have despaired unless I had believed that I would see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. Wait for the Lord: Be strong and let your heart take courage: Yes, Wait for the Lord. (Psalm 27: 13-14 NAS)*

**Meditation:** My grandmother will be ninety years old this year. Family and friends will fill a little white country church to gather around her and help blow out all those candles. Moreover, they will be gathered together to celebrate a life—a life that has made a strong impression—a life that has impacted and influenced everyone at the party! We will be celebrating a woman who does not watch life go by, but even now, makes life happen. Oh, there have been difficult times, there has been pain in those ninety years, and yet in those difficult times I saw my grandmother grab hold of powerful words from the Psalms as she chose not to despair, but believe! She believed that she would see the goodness of the Lord, that He was and is, faithful.

Reflection brings a smile to my face and I thank the Lord for my grandmother's faith. I thank Him that He showed His goodness and His faithfulness which led my mother to believe. I too wait for the Lord! I have seen His goodness. I can be strong in Him. My heart takes courage as I wait for Him. I will not despair, but believe, for I have seen the goodness of the Lord!

In the little white country church I know, my grandmother will look around at all the faces of family and friends gathered, and she'll see the goodness of the Lord. I pray that there is another in the room who catches a glimpse of His goodness, His faithfulness—just as my mother did, just as I did—my young daughter.

—Marjie McCandless

**Prayer:** *There is a simple response to Your goodness Lord, a grateful heart. Amen.*

## Can We Rejoice In Trials?

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**Key Verse:** *And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character and character, hope (Romans 5:2b-4).*

**Meditation:** Approximately two years ago my professional firm of 27 years experienced certain events that resulted in its dissolution. As the heartbreaking events began to unfold I was faced with a decisive moment; would I trust the Lord and walk through this trial in a way that would glorify Him or would I allow myself to be angry and bitter and deal with this situation accordingly. As I prayed, the answer was clear. I remember acknowledging that a trial of this magnitude might never enter my life again (or so I hoped). However, I also realized that I might never again have such a significant opportunity to trust the Lord and experience all that He would do in me and in my relationship with Him. In fact, I knew I could be excited about the future, as long as I follow my Lord Jesus step by step.

The concept of rejoicing in trials may seem unusual. But, as we surrender all to Christ and allow Him to guide us and mold us, we will understand that great truth.

I look back with thanksgiving as I see how our great God has brought me closer to Him during the past two years and how He has allowed me to grow in perseverance, faith and hope.

I also see how He has prepared me for more. This past summer my wife was diagnosed with cancer and we both knew we could approach this great challenge with full confidence that our Lord would guide and sustain us, while drawing us closer to Him. As scripture reveals, we know that all things work together for good to those who love Him and have been called according to His purposes.

In fact, as long as we stay focused on the Lord and our hope of spending eternity with Him, we really can rejoice in all He does in our lives through trials. —Rich Caporaso

**Prayer:** *Lord Jesus, we thank You that Your ways are not our ways. We thank You for using all situations in our lives, even our greatest trials, to bring us closer to You. Lord, help us today to walk by faith in You and only respond to trials in a way that would glorify You. Amen.*

## A One Step Plan for Financial Security

**Key Verse:** *Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, “Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.” (Hebrews 13:5)*

**Meditation:** The quote in the verse above is from Deuteronomy, where God was giving encouragement to the Israelites as they were about to enter the Promised Land. The fear was of death at the hands of “giants.” Fear of being financially destitute seems trivial in comparison, but the “love of money” or a desire for financial security is often a top concern in our culture.

When I put my financial security in God’s hands, I am free to fulfill His desires for me: to honor Him, love my wife, care for my family and reach out to others. When I become preoccupied with my own financial well being, it is hard to focus on others—financial security can become an obsession. Ironically, the way God made me aware of these truths was to disrupt my financial plan and wake me up so I would focus on the truly valuable things in life. In my case, a heartfelt prayer for God’s redirection in my life led to the financial disruption and the consequent dependence on Him. Sometimes we have to ask God to do whatever it takes to get us on track.

If we truly apply God’s model of trusting Him, giving becomes a joy as we no longer feel the tension between our own financial security and giving. The two become the same; simply good stewardship. God provides our security and the direction for stewardship. Again, prayer is the mechanism by which we can get this kind of Godly perspective. —John Goetz

**Prayer:** *Father, it is very easy for me to lose my perspective. Help me to remember daily that you are in control of my financial future and that my responsibility is to serve You and obey You. Help me to put You and others ahead of my financial security.*

## Great Is His Faithfulness!

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**Key Verse:** *Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. I say to myself, "The Lord is my portion; therefore I will wait for him." (Lamentations 3:22-24)*

**Meditation:** As I was cleaning out my desk recently, I came across several prayer journals, written sporadically over the years. Reading through the entries brought back the intensity of some of the "training sessions" God has used to grow our family up in Him. There have been days when we have hung on, by a seemingly fine thread, and yet God has caught us and held us, once again, in His arms. It has been those times when we least expected it that the Lord has showered us with His compassion.

The word "consumed" has many different uses: 1) to fill someone's mind or attention fully; 2) to use up in a way that it cannot be re-used or recovered; 3) to destroy somebody or something completely. There have been many times when we could have applied those meanings . . . almost! But following are these words: "for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness!" The key is waiting on the Lord. Now, to be honest, sometimes it's hard to wait on God, and what He is allowing doesn't make us feel all that blessed! We feel consumed when we try to figure out why something is happening and can't, when our lives seem to be spinning out of control—it was never in our control anyway! But God is faithful; He cannot be otherwise! As we wait on God, we begin to comprehend what His portion is, and that it is a cup filled to overflowing! —Anne Howland

**Prayer:** *Dear God, Thank You for holding each of our days in Your hands. You alone are our portion; help us to wait for You. Amen.*

## Trusting God

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**Key Verse:** *Job got up and tore his robe and shaved his head. Then he fell to the ground in worship and said: Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised. (Job 1:20-21)*

**Meditation:** While Job professed his trust in God in these verses, when walking through the worst of times he found himself desperately wanting to understand both the what and why of what God was doing. In chapter 30, verse 20 Job reaches the point of feeling like God was ignoring his pleas for understanding and restoration. Even still he reaffirms his reliance on God throughout chapter 31.

I don't know about you, but I have found that at various times I wish I knew more about what God is doing. I have not been called to walk through anything like the difficult times Job endured, but I can say that, without fail, God has been faithful to me through each of the difficult times in my life. I always desire more understanding of where He is leading, but have been learning that He is trustworthy and will reveal what I need to know of His path as I need to know it. —Rich Thompson

**Prayer:** *Lord, I always desire to know more of what You are doing. Help me to hear those directions You do tell me and to be content to walk forward with You without knowing Your entire plan. Amen.*

## How Is Your Commitment Level?

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**Key Verse:** *For the eyes of the LORD range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him.*  
(2 Chronicles 16:9)

**Meditation:** The date: July 26, 1998.

The mission: to lead a group of nine other Black Rock Church young adults on a short term missions trip to University Youth Camp near St. Petersburg, Russia.

With my personal Bible verse tucked away in my mind and heart, all ten of us boarded the plane and began our challenging adventure. From the crowded, hot airport, to the even more crowded, hotter, and bumpier van ride to our camp, to the realization that the camp rooms where we were staying couldn't even pass health or safety inspections in the US, we knew that this trip would not be easy. But we weren't there on vacation, and neither are any of the other STAMP (short term mission) team members sent out from our church. Each STAMP trip is inspired and directed by our gracious LORD, allowing each member to be used in loving service to others who are in great need.

During all the trials and challenges of that mission, I kept thinking back to the verse above. It reminded me then, and it continues to remind me today, that God is simply waiting to see our level of commitment to him. The exciting news is, that when God sees us moving deeper in our commitment, he reaches down and strengthens our hearts to more effectively serve Him, our families, our coworkers, our church, and the needy world around us. So, how is your commitment level? —Chris Weiss

**Prayer:** *Most gracious Lord, we are so thankful that You do not sleep nor slumber, but that Your eyes continually range throughout the earth, even to Fairfield County, to strengthen our hearts each moment we more fully commit ourselves to You. Let us, this day, fully commit ourselves to Your work in our lives and through our church, in Fairfield, throughout Connecticut, even to the farthest (and most uncomfortable) parts of the earth. Amen.*

## The Daily-ness of Jesus

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**Key Verse:** *Then the Lord said to Moses, “I will rain down bread from heaven for you. The people are to go out each day and gather enough for that day. In this way I will test them and see whether they will follow my instructions.” (Exodus 16:4).*

**Meditation:** I often struggle with giving all of my allegiance to Jesus. There is so much in the world that competes for my heart: my husband, my children, family, friends - not to mention, things. I long to have an undivided heart for Jesus. I find it ironic how in Exodus 16 the Lord speaks of raining down bread from heaven and tells the Israelites to gather just enough for that day. And then he says, “In this way I will test them.”

A constant dose of plenty can often be a more difficult test than a constant dose of need. We have plenty but we “need” more. Isn’t it true that we are far less likely to be obedient when we are not in need? And isn’t it tempting to store up all we can to make sure we are secure and free from worry of material things instead of trusting that God will provide for our needs every day? If the manna was stored up for more than that day, it would rot and be eaten by maggots (Exodus 16:20). I think even spiritually when we try to store up our times with Jesus for a week, a month, or maybe longer – He reminds us that we are to take up our cross daily.

We cannot store up Jesus any more than the Israelites could store up manna. Our souls will begin to rot if we don’t regularly gather the bread the Lord rains down for us – our spiritual nourishment. Exodus 16:4 finishes with “and see whether they will follow my instructions.” Oh how I long to be known by Jesus as his child who follows his instructions and in the end has passed the test – don’t you? — Beth Popadic

**Prayer:** *Father, allow me to walk in obedience and learn to trust You for everything. Thank You for Your continued faithfulness as I learn to trust You every day. Amen.*

## Testing Unto Obedience

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**Key Verse:** *He gave you manna to eat in the desert, something your fathers had never known, to humble and to test you so that in the end it might go well with you. You may say to yourself, "My power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me." But remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you the ability to produce wealth, and so confirms his covenant, which he swore to your forefathers, as it is today. (Deuteronomy 8:16-18)*

**Meditation:** Pastor Steve's announcement that a piece of land adjacent to us was on the market sent a buzz of excitement through everyone at the Elder retreat. It was an answer to prayer ... wasn't it? A single lot wouldn't provide parking, much less the place for a larger building. Finance & Property was asked to meet with us the next morning. We prayed that evening that we would know what God wanted us to do.

I had an amazing dream that night. "Read Deuteronomy 8:16" played through my mind. Why was Deuteronomy 8:16 so important?

The next morning we prayed and knew that God had a plan for BRCC and that piece of land. I believe that our simple act of obedience ... to pick up and eat the manna that God provided ... gave way to the great blessing we now are living out as a congregation. Within a short period, other land around us became available. We prayed and were obedient to God's plan for us as a congregation. We were tested with manna, just like the nation of Israel was tested; and in the end it went well with us, just as God promised.

As long as we recognize that our "power and the strength of our hands" has not produced this wealth and we "remember the Lord your God," then the covenant, which was sworn to our forefathers, will be confirmed in us today. —Steve Loomis

**Prayer:** *Lord Jesus, continue to test us and lead us. Humble us and confirm Your covenant in us today, as You did to our forefathers and lead our congregation into the promised home for Black Rock. Amen.*

## Are Real Disciples Ever Satisfied?

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**Key Verse:** *Those who accepted [Peter's] message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day. (Acts 2:41)*

**Meditation:** At Pentecost, Jerusalem witnessed the creation of world's first "mega church." From a mere 120 believers 40 days following Jesus's crucifixion, the Jerusalem church exploded to number of more than 3,000 on the basis of one Spirit-anointed sermon! Success of that magnitude might have made modern church leaders and congregations proud...satisfied...and complacent.

But Scripture reveals no such sentiments among the early disciples. On the contrary, the Lord's chosen were only humbled, emboldened and determined by the miracles God performed in their midst. Peter and John defied the threats of Jerusalem's religious establishment and revealed their compulsive evangelical urge by saying, "we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard." Nearly to a man, the disciples went to their death proclaiming the Gospel – not satisfied with the accomplishments of their past. Paul described the travails he and his companions encountered in their determination to spread the Good News throughout Asia: "we were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life." (2 Cor. 1:8).

Why did the early disciples continuously risk everything, despite the fact that churches had been planted throughout the Roman Empire? Why weren't these disciples satisfied—and what kept them from becoming complacent—by these successes?

And, what can we learn from these faithful servants' example?  
—Mike Kahmann

**Prayer:** *Lord Jesus, we thank you for all of the ways in which you have blessed Black Rock Congregational Church. Challenge us Lord: to resist being satisfied, and to never become complacent as stewards of the gifts you have given us. Instead Lord, inspire us and propel us in this mission of ministry expansion, as we seek to do your will, by your power, to reach a world that is desperately in need of the redemption that only you can offer. Amen.*

## Big Faith or Big God?

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**Key Verse:** . . . *faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things unseen. (Hebrews 11:1)*

**Meditation:** Oh that explains it; real faith means we can have what we want, when we want it, like a big church building, and You have to make it happen because, after all, you are God, right? In essence we can name it and claim it, right?

*You don't understand - I am not a vending machine that spits out the desired item when the right buttons are pushed. Faith is far more than a formula for success in life; it is the essence of a dynamic walk with Me. See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. (Matt 6:28) Remember, the righteous will live by faith. (Hab. 2:4)*

I want to live by faith, but I always thought it meant finding the right method of using my faith to get the desired results. Are You saying I don't have to do anything, and that the good stuff I want will just sort of happen?

*Please, let me elaborate. In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. (James 2:17) In other words, I have designed a partnership of sorts with humanity. In this partnership, I hold the Power, and the Master Plan. Your part is to seek Me and grow close to Me in grace. I, in turn, will honor the faith that you demonstrate by your works – works rooted in love for Me and an understanding of the finished work of my Son. Faith in Me, real faith, comes from knowing Me, trusting Me and loving Me. Again I say, have faith in Me.*

—Kevin Merritt

**Prayer:** *Dear Heavenly Father, we struggle so much to understand the real meaning of faith. Please help us to know that our faith does not exist separately from You, but rather, is wrapped up in Your incredible majesty, power and purposes. Let our faith be reflected though our actions, as we joyfully pursue a relationship with You. Amen.*

## Pulling or Pushing?

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**Key Verse:** *From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work. (Ephesians 4:16)*

**Meditation:** When I was a boy, my family vacationed in Arizona. At one point during the trip, my father pulled our car off the side of the road in the middle of a desert to look at some particularly attractive petrified rock. After admiring the colorful rock, we got back into the car to continue our journey. But the car was stuck in the sand!

My father asked my mother to sit at the steering wheel while he and my brother and I pushed the car by hand. In my young mind, I thought that this was quite exciting: stuck in the desert, late in the afternoon and being called upon to help. I was so thrilled in fact, that, while pretending to *push*, I *pulled* the car so as to prolong the excitement.

Unfortunately, isn't this too often a picture of the Church? Our heavenly Father is trying to lead us out of a dangerous place. He has lovingly assigned each member of the Church a role to play, but some pull *against* our heavenly Father, not *with* Him.

I'm thankful that this is NOT the situation at Black Rock Congregational Church. I think the Lord is blessing us because we are pulling with Him, each performing roles consistent with his or her spiritual gifts. Let's continue pulling together, basking together in His love!  
— Bill Barker

**Prayer:** *Lord, thank you for Your love – a love by which we grow and get stronger as a body. May we always pull with You, both individually and collectively. Amen.*

## Prayer Matters

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**Key Verse:** *So the Lord changed His mind about the harm which He said He would do to His people. (Ex. 32:14—NASB)*

**Meditation:** In Exodus 32:11-14 Moses entreats (asks, appeals) and seeks the Lord for His favor to not destroy the children of Israel after they had made a golden calf and worshipped it.

These verses have had a profound effect on my prayer life.

When we come into God's presense in prayer, entreating Him, crying out to Him, seeking His face and asking Him to intervene we can expect that our prayers *can* really change things. It says in verse 14 that the Lord changed His mind (NASB) after Moses prayed!

On Sunday evenings a group of us meet to pray for the Sanctuary service while it's going on and we stay afterward to pray for people who come into the room for prayer. We've seen God intervene and restore a marriage headed for divorce. A young woman came to Christ after we prayed for her salvation. A man got healed from liver disease. As we get together and ask God to intervene (when it is in His will) He does just that.

If we do not think prayer changes things then why should we continue to pray for our children, family, friends, or ask God to do anything? But if we do believe that prayer can change things and we are willing to participate, then we are in for an incredible adventure in our lives and in our church. —Mike Ragozzine

**Prayer:** *Lord, we are excited to know that You love it when your children seek Your face and pray. Please put in us individually and corporately a burning desire to seek You in prayer with all of our hearts. Amen.*

## Farsighted

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**Key Verse:** *Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see...And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him. (Hebrews 11:1,6)*

**Meditation:** I am the youngest of four sisters. We were all blessed with excellent eyesight – a perfect 20/20. During a recent visit from one of my sisters we were enjoying one of our long-standing favorite activities – drinking coffee, catching up with each other and reading the newspaper. My sister noticed, with the tact only sisters possess, that I kept moving the newspaper in and out in order to read it. Predictably, I was in complete denial. I had no idea that my eyesight had changed, let alone enough to be observed by others. Equally predictably, my sister looked upon my denial with great amusement. In reality, this development was not a big deal, but rather something that happens to nearly all of us as we grow older. My response was to contemplate the purchase of a pair of reading glasses, get over it and move on.

Many times we do not recognize the challenges to our faith that we experience on a daily basis. We expect to see God in the big challenges, the big events, and turn to Him accordingly. It is easy, however, to fall into the trap where the small, daily tests seem surmountable through our own strength and we fail to engage God's power to help us. It's as if we're saying "God, don't bother Yourself, I've got this one." But God is never bothered—in fact He delights in walking alongside us at all times, not just during those times when we know we need His strength. We often feel led to acknowledge His presence during times of trials and tribulations, but are we then farsighted in not recognizing how near God is on a daily basis, when we perceive our challenges to be trivial and mundane to God? —Denise Chrisman

**Prayer:** *Dear God, we desire to honor You as the God of all events in our lives, not just the God of "big events." May our faith be "nearsighted" enough to call on You for help during times of significant trials, yet "farsighted" enough to recognize Your fellowship in our daily lives. Amen.*

## Prayer Journal

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## Prayer Journal

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