

JULY 15-SEPTEMBER 2

GOD'S

# BLUEPRINT

FOR RELATIONSHIPS

CONNECT 7  
DAILY DEVOTIONS



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God made humans for relationships. God made Adam and Eve in His own image in order that He might have a loving, intimate relationship with them. God also made humans to be in relationships with one another. When God the Father first made Adam He said, “It is not good that the man be alone ... I will make a helpmate for him.” However since the first fall into sin our relationship with God and one another has been spoiled. But our loving God immediately set into action a plan, “God’s Blueprint” for restoring those relationships through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

Relationships touch every aspect of our lives: our relationship with God; relationships between wives and husband; relationships between children and parents; relationships between employees and employers; relationships between believers and unbelievers. God wants to restore those relationships. This summer sermon series will take a closer look at “God’s Blueprint” for restoring relationships on the basis of the Apostle Paul’s letter to the Ephesians.

## **July 15**

**Theme:** *God’s Blueprint for: Our Adoption*, Ephesians 1:3-5

**Readings:** Amos 7:7–15, Psalm 85:(1–7) 8–13, Ephesians 1:3–14, Mark 6:14–29

## **July 22**

**Theme:** *God’s Blueprint for: His Temple “Believers”*, Ephesians 2:19-22

**Readings:** Jeremiah 23:1–6, Psalm 23, Ephesians 2:11–22, Mark 6:30–44

## **July 29**

**Theme:** *God’s Blueprint for: Wives*, Ephesians 5:22-24

**Readings:** Genesis 9:8–17, Psalm 136:1–9, Ephesians 3:14–21, Mark 6:45–56

## **August 5**

**Theme:** *God’s Blueprint for: Husbands*, Ephesians 5:25-33

**Readings:** Exodus 16:2–15, Psalm 145:10–21, Ephesians 4:1–16, John 6:22–35

## **August 12**

**Theme:** *God’s Blueprint for: Children*, Ephesians 6:1-3

**Readings:** 1 Kings 19:1–8, Psalm 145:10–21, Ephesians 4:17–5:2, John 6:35–51

## **August 19**

**Theme:** *God’s Blueprint for: Parents*, Ephesians 6:4

**Readings:** Proverbs 9:1–10, Psalm 34:12–22, Ephesians 5:6–21, John 6:51–69

## **August 26**

### **Outdoor Worship**

**Theme:** *God’s Blueprint for: Employees*, Ephesians 6:5-8

**Readings:** Isaiah 29:11–19, Psalm 14, Ephesians 5:22–33, Mark 7:1–13

## **September 2**

### **Labor Day Weekend**

**Theme:** *God’s Blueprint for: Employers*, Ephesians 6:9

**Readings:** Deuteronomy 4:1–2, 6–9, Psalm 119:129–136, Ephesians 6:10–20, Mark 7:14–23

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## Connecting to Worship: July 15

**Theme: *God's Blueprint for: Our Adoption, Ephesians 1:3-5*** Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.

**Readings:** Amos 7:7–15, Psalm 85:(1–7) 8–13, Ephesians 1:3–14, Mark 6:14–29

### Monday, July 9 *Adopted*

Pastor Adrian and his wife, Antoinette, had two biological sons and then adopted baby Rosie several years ago. For most of Adrian's life, he has dealt with nose bleeds—an affliction his sons have inherited. One day, little Rosie ran into the house holding her nose and grinning from ear to ear as she said, "See, Daddy, my nose is bleeding—just like Mark and John!" For Rosie, a nosebleed was another way of identifying with her adopted family. Identifying with one's adoptive family can sometimes be a challenge—something the church in Ephesus found to be true. Coming from diverse backgrounds of ethnicity and culture, the Jews and Gentiles in the church often clashed over who was right. Through Jesus Christ, the Gentiles had been adopted into the family of God and were now legitimate heirs of God with full access to an inheritance that had previously been reserved only for the Jews. The apostle Paul reminds us that "God decided in advance to adopt us into his own family by bringing us to himself through Jesus Christ" (Ephesians 1:5). Just as a nosebleed gave Rosie another way to identify with her adopted family, there are unique traits that prove believers in Jesus are a part of God's family. Paul urges us to turn away from the destructive habits of a lifestyle without Christ and challenges us to be imitators of God by living a life of love. He also implores us to be kind and compassionate, forgiving one another, and submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ (Ephesians 4:32, 5:21).

**By the power of our loving God who has adopted us, may we reflect His light and life to a world who needs Him (Ephesians 5:8-9)!**

### Tuesday, July 10 *Divine Adoption*

Adopting two boys from Russia opened Russell Moore's eyes to the privilege of being a child of God. People would ask, "Are they really brothers?" "Have you met their real mom?" Moore simply replied, "Of course they're brothers. They're both in our family. And their *real* mom is my wife." Moore's experience with his sons mirrors how God brings us into fellowship with Himself. For every believer in Jesus enters the family by adoption and by being supernaturally reborn as a child of God (Galatians 4:6). Adoption isn't an adjective describing a second-class kind of Christian. It's a past tense verb, describing how we became part of God's diverse family. Romans 8:15-17 describes two benefits of adoption. "The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, 'Abba, Father.' . . . Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ" (NIV). If you are a believer in Jesus . . . *God is your Father*. The Creator of the universe chose you to be His child. He didn't choose you because you were special. His choice makes you special. You may talk to Him whenever you want, and He truly desires to hear from you. You've been both adopted by Him and born into His family (1 John 3:9). All believers have experienced rebirth through salvation. *You are His child*. God isn't being gender-exclusive when He says you have been adopted "to sonship." In the first century, many cultures held that only sons had the right of inheritance. Your Father wants you to know that whether you're a son or daughter you will inherit His kingdom—for you've been adopted by Him!

## Wednesday, July 11

### *God Intrudes*

When the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law.  
—Galatians 4:4

During this Christmas season, it's good to keep a firm grip on the reality of Easter. While the two events are celebrated at different times and in very different ways, they are both integral parts of God's initiative in His grand plan of salvation.

Peter Larson wrote: "Despite our efforts to keep Him out, God intrudes. The life of Jesus is bracketed by two impossibilities: a virgin's womb and an empty tomb. Jesus entered our world through a door marked 'No Entrance' and left through a door marked 'No Exit.'"

James Edwards echoes this theme in his book *The Divine Intruder*: "[God] breaks into this world, even when He is unexpected and unwelcome. God joins us in our weakest and worst moments. There is a Divine Intruder among us."

The stable in Bethlehem and the cross of Calvary remind us that "when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son . . . to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons" (Gal. 4:4-5).

The Lord did not wait for an invitation to enter our world. Clothed with humanity, He lived as our teacher, died as our sacrifice, and rose from the grave as our Savior.

Christmas is coming—and so is Easter.

*This joyous season of the year  
Should prompt us to recall  
That Jesus' death on Calvary  
Provides new life for all. —Sper*

**Jesus' earthly life is framed by two impossibilities:  
a virgin's womb and an empty tomb.**

## Thursday, July 12

### *Eulogize the Living God*

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ. —  
Ephesians 1:3

In 2005, when American civil rights hero Rosa Parks died, Oprah Winfrey counted it a privilege to eulogize her. Oprah said of the woman who refused to give up her bus seat to a white man in 1955, "I often thought about what that took—knowing the climate of the times and what could have happened to you—what it took to stay seated. You acted without concern for yourself and made life better for us all."

We often use the word *eulogy* to refer to the words spoken at a funeral. But it can also refer to other situations where we give high praise to someone. In the opening lines of Ephesians, the apostle Paul eulogized the living God. When he said, "Blessed be the God and Father," he used a word for "blessed" that means "eulogy." Paul invited the Ephesians to join him in praising God for all kinds of spiritual blessings: God had chosen and adopted them; Jesus had redeemed, forgiven, and made known to them the mystery of the gospel; and the Spirit had guaranteed and sealed them. This great salvation was purely an act of God and His grace.

Let us continue to center our thoughts on God's blessings in Christ. When we do, like Paul, we will find our hearts overflowing with a eulogy that declares: "To the praise of His glory."

*Blessed Father, I am overwhelmed by Your grace.  
My only adequate response is ceaseless praise.  
Thank You for choosing me, adopting me,  
redeeming me, forgiving me, and making known to  
me the mystery of the gospel.*

**Praise is the song of a soul set free.**

## Friday, July 13

### *So Many Blessings*

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing. —Ephesians 1:3

When disaster strikes, people are exceedingly generous in their outpouring of assistance. After the terrorist attacks in September 2001, New York City was flooded with an estimated \$75 million worth of towels, blankets, flashlights, water bottles, canned beans, shovels, toothpaste, stuffed animals, radios, rubber boots, and thousands of other items. There was so much stuff that those affected could not use it all.

This reminds me of what happens when we turn in faith to Christ as our Savior. We were facing a personal disaster. Our sins put us in danger of an eternity of separation from God. The future was dark, hopeless.

Then Jesus stepped in and offered rescue. When we trusted Him, our heavenly Father lavished us with spiritual riches. Now we have more blessings than we can possibly use up. We are part of God's family (Ephesians 1:5). We have "redemption" and "the forgiveness of sins" (v.7). We are heirs of the One who owns everything (v.11). Our inheritance is sealed by the Holy Spirit (vv.13-14).

The blessings of being a Christian just keep on coming. They'll never run out. What a generous, thoughtful God we serve! Let's praise Him for the countless blessings that overflow in our lives.

*Give me a spirit of thankfulness, Lord,  
For numberless blessings given;  
Blessings that daily come to me  
Like dewdrops falling from heaven. —Dawe*

**God's generous giving deserves thankful living.**

## Connecting to Worship, July 15

**Theme: *God's Blueprint for: Our Adoption,***  
**Ephesians 1:3-5** Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, 4even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.

**Readings:** Amos 7:7–15, Psalm 85:(1–7) 8–13, Ephesians 1:3–14, Mark 6:14–29

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## Connecting to Worship: July 22

**Theme:** *God's Blueprint for: His Temple "Believers"*, Ephesians 2:19-22 So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord.

**Readings:** Jeremiah 23:1–6, Psalm 23, Ephesians 2:11–22, Mark 6:30–44

### Monday, July 16

#### *The Dividing Wall*

He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation.

—Ephesians 2:14

November 9, 2010, marked the 21st anniversary of the fall of the Berlin wall. On that day in 1989, an announcement over East German TV informed people that they were free to travel to West Germany. A day later, East German bulldozers began to dismantle the wall that for 28 years had divided East and West Germany. Jesus Christ "has broken down the middle wall of separation" between Jew and Gentile (Eph. 2:14). But there was an even more impenetrable barrier that separated man from God. Jesus' death and resurrection made the reconciliation between man and man and between man and God possible (v.16). All believers are now "members of the household of God" (v.19). Together, we are to grow into "a holy temple in the Lord" (v.21) with God's Holy Spirit living among and within us (v.22). But sadly, Christians often re-erect walls between one another. That is why Paul urges us to "walk worthy of the calling . . . , bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (4:1-3). Rather than building walls, let's work to dismantle what separates us. Let the world see that we are indeed of the same household.

*We're members of Christ's body,  
A blessed family;  
So let's not fight or quarrel,  
But live in harmony. —Fitzhugh*

**Unity among believers comes from their union  
with Christ.**

### Tuesday, July 17

#### *Home*

You are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people. Ephesians 2:19

A young African refugee who goes by the name of Steven is a man without a country. He thinks he may have been born in Mozambique or Zimbabwe. But he never knew his father and lost his mother. She fled civil war, traveling country to country as a street vendor. Without ID and unable to prove his place of birth, Steven walked into a British police station, asking to be arrested. Jail seemed better to Steven than trying to exist on the streets without the rights and benefits of citizenship.

The plight of living without a country was on Paul's mind as he wrote his letter to the Ephesians. His non-Jewish readers knew what it was like to live as aliens and outsiders (2:12). Only since finding life and hope in Christ (1:13) had they discovered what it meant to belong to the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 5:3). In Jesus, they learned what it means to be known and cared for by the Father He came to reveal (Matt. 6:31–33). Paul realized, however, that as the past fades from view, a short memory can cause us to forget that, while hope is the new norm, despair was the old reality. May our God help us to live in security—to know each day the belonging that we have as members of His family is by faith in Jesus Christ and to understand the rights and benefits of having our home in Him.

*Lord, as we remember how hopeless we were  
before You found us, please help us not to forget  
those who are still on the street.*

**Hope means the most to those who have lived  
without it.**

## Wednesday, July 18

### *Like a Flock*

You led Your people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron. —Psalm 77:20

During a demonstration of sheep- herding using a Border Collie, the dog trainer explained that because sheep are highly vulnerable to wild animals, their main defense against predators is to stay together in a tightly knit group. “A sheep alone is a dead sheep,” the trainer said. “The dog always keeps the sheep together as it moves them.” The biblical image of God as our shepherd is a powerful reminder of how much we need each other in the community of faith. When writing about the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt, the psalmist said, “[God] made His own people go forth like sheep, and guided them in the wilderness like a flock; and He led them on safely, so that they did not fear” (Ps. 78:52-53).

As part of God’s flock, we who have trusted Christ are under His guiding, protecting hand while being surrounded by the shielding presence of others. We are part of a larger body of believers in which there is safety and accountability. While we don’t give up our personal responsibility for thought and action as members of the flock, we are to embrace the concept of “we” rather than “me” in our daily lives. With Christ as our Shepherd and fellow believers around us, we find safety in the flock.

*Blest be the tie that binds  
Our hearts in Christian love!  
The fellowship of kindred minds  
Is like to that above. —Fawcett*

**As part of God’s flock, we’re protected by Him and by each other.**

## Thursday, July 19

### *Perfect Fit*

[Christ], in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. — Ephesians 2:21

Too long. Too short. Too big. Too small. Too tight. Too loose. These words describe most of the clothes I try on. Finding the perfect fit seems impossible.

Finding a church that is a “perfect fit” poses similar problems. Every church has something that’s not quite right. Our gifts aren’t recognized. Our talents aren’t appreciated. Our sense of humor is misunderstood. Certain attitudes, beliefs, people, or programs make us uncomfortable. We feel as if we don’t fit. We struggle to find our place.

We know, however, that God wants us to fit together with one another. The apostle Paul said we are being “built together to become a dwelling in which God lives” (Eph. 2:22 NIV).

The believers in the church today, like the tabernacle in the days of Moses (Ex. 26) and the temple in the days of Solomon (1 Kings 6:1-14), are the dwelling place of God on earth. God wants us to fit together—for there to be no divisions in His church. This means that we, the building blocks, are to be “perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment” (1 Cor. 1:10).

**No church will be a perfect fit, but we can all work at fitting together more perfectly.**

## Friday, July 20

### *Something New*

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

It was only scrap wood, but Charles Hooper saw much more than that. Salvaging old timbers from a long-abandoned corncrib, he sketched some simple plans. Then he felled a few oak and poplar trees from his wooded property and painstakingly squared them with his grandfather's broadax. Piece by piece, he began to fit together the old lumber with the new.

Today you can see Charles and Shirley Hooper's postcard-perfect log cabin, tucked away in the trees on Tennessee Ridge. Part guesthouse, part museum for family heirlooms, the structure stands as an enduring tribute to Charles' vision, skill, and patience. Writing to a Gentile audience, Paul told the church at Ephesus how Jesus was creating something new by bringing together Jewish and non-Jewish believers as a single entity. Paul wrote "You who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ." (Eph. 2:13). This new structure was "built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord" (vv. 20-21).

The work continues today. God takes the brokenness of our lives, artfully fits us together with other broken and rescued people, and patiently chips away our rough edges. He loves His work, you know.

*Lord, we can't thank You enough for Your passionate love for us. Help us to see that You bring us together in this beautiful body of believers known as Your church.*

**Our rough edges must be chipped away to bring out the image of Christ.**

## Connecting to Worship: July 22

**Theme:** *God's Blueprint for: His Temple "Believers"*, Ephesians 2:19-22 So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord.

**Readings:** Jeremiah 23:1-6, Psalm 23, Ephesians 2:11-22, Mark 6:30-44

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## Connecting to Worship: July 29

**Theme:** God’s Blueprint for: Wives, Ephesians 5:22-24 22 Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. 23 For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. 24 Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands.

**Readings:** Genesis 9:8–17, Psalm 136:1–9, Ephesians 3:14–21, Mark 6:45–56

### Monday, July 23

#### *Counterpoint*

Be of one mind, having compassion for one another; love as brothers, be tenderhearted, be courteous. — 1 Peter 3:8

In a discussion about marriage, one person said, “The key to a good relationship is that ‘two shall become one.’” Another countered, “Yes, but which one?” Is it possible to be “one” without sacrificing our individuality? Consider the musical term *counterpoint* — “the combination of two or more independent melodies into a single harmonic texture in which each retains its linear character.” In Bach’s “Jesu, Joy of Man’s Desiring,” a moving piano accompaniment (which sounds like a simple finger exercise) is set against a beautiful melody. Together they form a single piece without losing their distinctiveness. After instructing wives to submit to their husbands (1 Peter 3:1) and husbands to show their wives understanding and honor (v.7), the apostle Peter said, “Finally, all of you be of one mind, having compassion for one another; love as brothers, be tenderhearted, be courteous; not returning evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary blessing” (vv.8-9). How can two become one? Only through kindness and love; never by selfishness and retaliation. In the mystery of marriage, God allows each partner to be a unique melody. And in concert together, they become a beautiful harmony in His grand song. —DCM

*Harmony is pleasing  
In music and in life;  
What beauty when it resonates  
In husband and in wife! —Hess*

**To keep harmony in your marriage, keep in tune with Christ.**

### Tuesday, July 24

#### *A Modest Proposal*

[Jesus] humbled Himself . . . to the point of death, even the death of the cross. —Philippians 2:8

As a college student, I heard countless engagement stories. My starry-eyed friends told about glitzy restaurants, mountaintop sunsets, and rides in horse-drawn carriages. I also recall one story about a young man who simply washed his girlfriend’s feet. His “modest proposal” proved he understood that humility is vital for a lifelong commitment.

The apostle Paul also understood the significance of humility and how it holds us together. This is especially important in marriage. Paul said to reject “me-first” urges: “Let nothing be done through selfish ambition” (Phil. 2:3). Instead, we should value our spouses more than ourselves, and look out for their interests. Humility in action means serving our spouse, and no act of service is too small or too great. After all, Jesus “humbled Himself . . . to the point of death, even the death of the cross” (v.8). His selflessness showed His love for us.

What can you do today to humbly serve the one you love? Maybe it’s as simple as leaving brussels sprouts off the dinner menu or as difficult as helping him or her through a long illness. Whatever it is, placing our spouse’s needs before our own confirms our commitment to each other through Christlike humility.

*In marriage, we will honor Christ  
By following His lead  
Of sacrificial love and care  
To meet the other’s need. —Sper*

**If you think it’s possible to love your spouse too much, you probably haven’t loved enough.**

## Wednesday, July 25

### *God's Devotion*

That you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend . . . the love of Christ which passes knowledge. —Ephesians 3:17-19

In 1826, the British author Thomas Carlyle married Jane Welsh, who also was an accomplished writer. She dedicated herself to his success and served him wholeheartedly.

Because of a stomach ailment and a nervous disorder, he had a rather ornery temperament. So she made special meals for him and tried to keep the house as quiet as possible so he could do his writing.

Thomas didn't often recognize Jane's helpful spirit nor did he spend much time with her. However, he wrote this about her to his mother: "I may say in my heart that she . . . loves me with a devotedness which is a mystery to me how I have ever deserved. She . . . looks with such soft cheerfulness into my gloomy countenance, that new hope passed into me every time I met her eye."

We too have Someone who loves us with a devotedness that is a mystery how we as sinners ever deserved it! He is God the Father, "who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all" (Rom. 8:32). His love is wide, long, deep, and high and exceeds our knowledge (Eph. 3:18-19).

Understanding and appreciating God's love is so vital that Paul prayed for the Ephesians to be "rooted and grounded" in it (v.17). May that be our experience as well.

*I can always count on God, my heavenly Father,  
For He changes not; He always is the same;  
Yesterday, today, forever, He is faithful,  
And I know He loves me, praise His holy name. —  
Felten*

**There is no greater joy than to know God loves you.**

## Thursday, July 26

### *Immeasurably More*

He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. —1 John 4:4

"It's not going to happen, Aunt Julie. You might as well erase that thought from your mind."  
"I know it's unlikely," I said. "But it's not impossible."  
For several years, my niece and I have had variations of that conversation regarding a situation in our family. The rest of the sentence, which I said only occasionally, was this: "I know it can happen because I hear stories all the time about how God makes impossible things happen." The part of the sentence I said only to myself was this: "But they happen only in other people's families."

Recently my pastor has been preaching from the book of Ephesians. At the end of every service we say this benediction: "Now to Him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to His power that is at work within us, to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen" (Eph. 3:20-21 niv).

This was the year God chose to do "immeasurably more" in my family. He replaced indifference with love. How did He do it? Beats me. But I saw it happen. And why should I be surprised? If Satan can turn love into indifference, certainly God can change indifference back into love.

*Lord, thank You for doing immeasurably more in  
our lives than we could ever imagine.  
I am so thankful that You are able and often  
do make impossible situations possible.*

**God's power to restore is stronger than Satan's  
power to destroy.**

## Friday, July 27

### *Surprised by God*

Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us. —Ephesians 3:20

After 10 years of renting in a charming location, we discovered that our landlord suddenly needed to sell the house. I asked God to change the circumstances and make it possible for my wife and me to stay in this place we'd made home, where we'd watched our children grow up. But God said no.

When it comes to my needs, I worry that I'm asking for the wrong thing or that I'm not worthy of the request I'm making. But God's no doesn't need to shake our faith when we're grounded—*surrounded* I like to say—in His love. In Ephesians 3, Paul understood that those who know the love of Christ intimately (vv.16-17) can trust God to have a loving reason for saying no.

Shortly after hearing “no” from God about my request, friends from church offered to rent us a home they were vacating. Our new location—with new appliances, new plumbing, new electrical wiring, and an extra bedroom—sits on the ocean, an idyllic scene of ships, sails, and sounds that daily remind us that God is bigger than any issue we face. Our loving Father used loving friends to give more than we asked.

Whether God gives us more than we imagined or far less than we desired, we can trust that His plans are much better than ours.

*Lord, we know that You are good whether Your answers to our prayers are abundantly more than we asked or much less than we desire. Help us to accept whatever comes to us from Your hand. Thank You.*

**When God says no to our request,  
we can be sure it's for the best.**

## Connecting to Worship: July 29

**Theme:** God's Blueprint for: Wives, Ephesians 5:22-24 22 Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. 23 For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. 24 Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands.

**Readings:** Genesis 9:8–17, Psalm 136:1–9, Ephesians 3:14–21, Mark 6:45–56

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## Connecting to Worship: August 5

**Theme:** *God's Blueprint for: Husbands*, Ephesians 5:25-33 Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

**Readings:** Exodus 16:2–15, Psalm 145:10–21, Ephesians 4:1–16, John 6:22–35

### Monday, July 30

#### *A Good Husband*

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church. —Ephesians 5:25

Early in their marriage, the well-known preacher W. E. Sangster (1900-1960) told his wife, "I can't be a good husband *and* a good minister. I am going to be a good minister." Sangster was in demand as a preacher and lecturer and was often away on speaking tours. When he was at home, he seldom took his wife out for dinner or an evening of entertainment. Nor did he help with household chores. His son noted these failings, yet out of respect for his father he wrote, "If a 'good husband' is a man who loves his wife absolutely . . . and dedicates himself to a cause that is greater than both of them, then my father was as good a husband as a minister." No doubt Sangster was committed to his wife, but I believe he could have been a better husband *and* a better minister if he had been more concerned for her needs than for his busy schedule. Many people in responsible positions have demands placed upon them, some that are unavoidable. But if a Christian husband takes seriously Paul's instruction to love his wife "as Christ also loved the church," he will find ways to give of himself for her, even in little things. That's how Christ, our example, loved the church.

*A marriage that's neglected*

*Brings pain and bitterness;*

*But one that's daily nurtured*

*Brings peace and happiness. —Sper*

**Nurture your marriage and you'll nourish your soul.**

### Tuesday, July 31

#### *True Love*

Let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband. —Ephesians 5:33

One day I got a call from a young man named Ewing. He and our daughter Julie had known each other for nearly a year, and they were in love. Ewing wanted to know if he could marry Julie. After asking him several questions and getting the responses I needed to hear, I gave him my approval. Then came a big surprise. I asked him when he wanted to marry Julie, and he replied, "In 2 or 3 weeks." He loved Julie so much that he wanted to be with her all the time. True love called for action. About a month later, just 2 weeks after the wedding, my new son-in-law said to me, "I just want you to know that Julie is my best friend. We have such a great time together."

Some of us who've been married a long time may think that our experience makes us experts on matrimony. But I believe we can learn from newlyweds. First, when two people are truly in love, they will deeply care for each other and cherish their time together. Second, true love means that a couple's relationship will be characterized by the good each one does for the other. How can two people with those characteristics be anything but best friends? Jesus is the ultimate source of love and respect (Ephesians 5:25-33). True love is Christlike love.

*Look upon your partner's need—*

*Love demands the loving deed;*

*Let your love be love that's true,*

*Prove it by the deeds you do. —Anon.*

**A successful marriage requires falling in love many times—with the same person.**

## Wednesday, August 1

### *True Love*

Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends. —John 15:13

During the rehearsal for my brother's wedding ceremony, my husband snapped a picture of the bride and groom as they faced each other in front of the pastor. When we looked at the photograph later, we noticed that the camera's flash had illuminated a metal cross in the background, which appeared as a glowing image above the couple. The photograph reminded me that marriage is a picture of Christ's love for the church as shown on the cross. When the Bible instructs husbands to love their wives (Eph. 5:25), God compares that kind of faithful, selfless affection to Christ's love for His followers. Because Christ sacrificed His life for the sake of love, we are all to love each other (1 John 4:10-11). He died in our place, so that our sin would not keep us separate from God for eternity. He lived out His words to the disciples: "Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends" (John 15:13).

Many of us suffer from the pain of abandonment, rejection, and betrayal. Despite all of this, through Christ we can understand the sacrificial, compassionate, and enduring nature of true love. Today, remember that you are loved by God. Jesus said so with His life.

**Nothing speaks more clearly of God's love than the cross of Jesus.**

## Thursday, August 2

### *The Power of a Promise*

In all things He had to be made like His brethren, that For this reason a man shall . . . be joined to his wife. —Matthew 19:5

I wear only two pieces of jewelry: a wedding band on my finger and a small Celtic cross on a chain around my neck. The ring represents my vow to be faithful to Carolyn, my wife, as long as I shall live. The cross reminds me that it is not for her sake alone, but for Jesus' sake that I do so. He has asked me to be faithful to her until death shall separate us.

A marriage vow is more than a contract that we can break by paying damages. It is a unique vow that is explicitly intended to be binding until death separates us (Matt. 19:6). The words "for better, for worse; for richer, for poorer; in sickness and in health" take into consideration the probability that it will not be easy to keep our vows. Circumstances may change and so may our spouses.

Marriage is hard at best; disagreements and difficult adjustments abound. While no one must live in an abusive and dangerous relationship, accepting the difficulties of poverty, hardship, and disappointment can lead to happiness. A marriage vow is a binding obligation to love, honor, and cherish one another for as long as we shall live because Jesus has asked us to do so. As a friend of mine once put it, "This is the vow that keeps us faithful even when we don't feel like keeping our vows."

*"For better or for worse," we pledge,  
Through sickness and through strife;  
And by the help and grace of God  
We'll keep these vows for life. —D. De Haan*

**Love is more than a feeling; it's a commitment.**

## Friday, August 3

### *Opening the Door*

Husbands, likewise, dwell with them with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel. —1 Peter 3:7

When my wife and I went out to lunch with some friends, I noticed that the husband went around to the passenger side of the car and opened the door for his wife. I said to him, “Some women might consider that demeaning.” “That’s right,” he said. “One woman saw me do that and remarked, ‘I’m sure she’s perfectly capable of opening the door for herself!’ I told her, ‘I don’t open the door for my wife because she’s incapable. I do it to honor her.’” Jesus treated women with the utmost respect and honor (John 4:1-38; 8:3-11; 19:25-27). Likewise, in 1 Peter 3:7, husbands are instructed to live with their wives “with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel.” Men and women both have their weaknesses, but in general, women are physically weaker than men and have unique needs and sensitivities. This in no way means they are inferior. In fact, Peter said that as Christians, men and women are “heirs together of the grace of life” (v.7). Opening a door for a woman may seem to some like an old-fashioned courtesy. But it can also be a wonderful tribute to both the man and the woman if it symbolizes the honor and respect one has for the other.

#### *THINKING IT OVER*

*Read Romans 12:10 and Philippians 2:3.*

*How can you apply the truths of these verses to male and female relationships?*

**We honor God when we honor one another.**

## Connecting to Worship: August 5

**Theme:** *God’s Blueprint for: Husbands*, Ephesians 5:25-33 Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

**Readings:** Exodus 16:2–15, Psalm 145:10–21, Ephesians 4:1–16, John 6:22–35

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## Connecting to Worship: August 12

**Theme:** *God's Blueprint for: Children*, Ephesians 6:1-3 Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. "Honor your father and mother" (this is the first commandment with a promise), "that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land."

**Readings:** 1 Kings 19:1-8, Psalm 145:10-21, Ephesians 4:17-5:2, John 6:35-51

### Monday, August 6

#### *Meaning and Purpose*

If then I am the Father, where is My honor? And if I am a Master, where is My reverence? —Malachi 1:6

When our daughter was 3 years old, my wife and I introduced her to the "fine art" of dishwashing. It amuses me that many preschoolers want to wash dishes but parents refuse to let them. Then, when they become teenagers and no longer desire to clean plates, parents insist that they do. The real issue, of course, is not doing dishes. Rather, it has to do with loving, honoring, and obeying God. As children love, honor, and obey their parents (Ephesians 6:1-3), they are showing respect for God. And when they do, they find meaning and purpose in their lives.

We are living in a world in which teen suicide is a disturbing reality. Why such despair? Too many young people have not found a reason for living. They don't know the joy of a relationship with God. In Malachi 1:6, God had to remind His people that He was their Father, because their behavior reflected that they had forgotten their relationship to Him. Not only had they forgotten that God was their Father but also that He was their Master, and they had failed to serve Him.

We can all live meaningful and purposeful lives. How? By knowing God as our heavenly Father, and obeying Him as our Master and Lord. —AL

*Grant us, Father, hearts that love You,  
Hearts that serve You day by day;  
Help us find in You our purpose  
For the things we do and say. —Fitzhugh*

**Knowing God gives meaning to life; obeying God gives purpose to life.**

### Tuesday, August 7

#### *Happy Fathers*

The father of the righteous will greatly rejoice, and he who begets a wise child will delight in him. — Proverbs 23:24

Some people have attributed to Mark Twain the statement, "When I was a boy of 14, my father was so ignorant I could hardly stand to have the old man around. But when I got to be 21, I was astonished at how much the old man had learned in 7 years." The attitude of children toward their parents changes as they grow older. Some young people show little respect for their fathers and mothers. It's disheartening to see this. But as they mature, many begin to recognize that Mom and Dad knew a lot more than they gave them credit for.

On the other hand, some young people come to realize with deep regret that if they had followed the counsel of their parents they could have avoided much heartache both for themselves and their family. The Bible says, "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 'Honor your father and mother,' which is the first commandment with promise: 'that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth'" (Ephesians 6:1-3). The book of Proverbs counsels, "Listen to your father who begot you . . . . The father of the righteous will greatly rejoice, and he who begets a wise child will delight in him" (23:22,24).

Remember—wise children make happy fathers!

*Above all else that you can do  
To make your father proud of you,  
Be diligent, be kind, be wise—  
Such traits are priceless in his eyes. —Fasick*

**Your parents brought you up; don't let them down.**

## **Wednesday, August 8** ***All Generations***

Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and your dominion endures through all generations. Psalm 145:13

My parents married in 1933 during the Great Depression. My wife and I are Baby Boomers, part of the dramatic increase in births following World War II. Our four daughters, born in the seventies and eighties, belong to Generations X and Y. Growing up in such different times, it's not surprising that we have different opinions about many things! Generations differ widely in their life experiences and values. And this is true among followers of Jesus. But no matter what we wear or the kind of music we enjoy, our spiritual connection is stronger than those differences.

Psalm 145, a mighty song of praise to God, proclaims our bond of faith. "One generation commends your works to another; they tell of your mighty acts. . . . They celebrate your abundant goodness and joyfully sing of your righteousness" (vv. 4, 7). Within a great diversity of age and experience, we come together by honoring the Lord. "They tell of the glory of your kingdom and speak of your might" (v. 11). While differences and preferences could divide us, shared faith in Jesus Christ the Lord brings us together in mutual trust, encouragement, and praise. Whatever our age and outlook, we need each other! No matter which generation we belong to, we can learn from each other and together honor the Lord—"So that all people may know of [His] mighty acts and the glorious splendor of [His] kingdom" (v. 12).

*Lord, unite Your people from all generations to honor and praise You as we bear witness of Your love.*

**God's kingdom is alive and active in all generations.**

## **Thursday, August 9** ***Honor Your Parents***

Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land. —Exodus 20:12

It was a sad, unsigned letter from an elderly mother. "I have an only son," she wrote, "who does all sorts of things for other people but hates to do anything for me. He rarely visits me although I live only 8 minutes away. He seldom even phones."

God puts a high priority on family relationships throughout life—so says the fifth commandment. On the surface it seems directed exclusively to children, but parents must set the example. Children learn to honor, respect, and obey their parents when they see Mom and Dad honoring one another, when they feel respected, affirmed, and loved by their parents, and when they observe their obedience to God. This commandment to children actually touches us all. How many of us have been as thoughtful of our parents as we could have been? And who of us as parents have been to our children all that we should have been? Although we've broken this commandment, our guilt has been removed by Jesus' death on the cross. He gives the courage to ask forgiveness of our children and our parents. And if they are not living, we can show the sincerity of our repentance by strengthening our other family relationships.

We honor our Father when we honor our parents.

*Children who honor their parents  
Are doing what's good in God's sight;  
Parents who love and admonish  
Are teaching to do what is right. —Sper*

**Honoring our parents is learned by example.**

## Friday, August 10

### *Like a Little Child*

Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them. Mark 10:14

The little girl moved joyfully and gracefully to the music of praise. She was the only one in the aisle but that didn't keep her from spinning and waving her arms and lifting her feet to the music. Her mother, a smile on her lips, didn't try to stop her. My heart lifted as I watched, and I longed to join her—but didn't. I'd long ago lost the unselfconscious expression of joy and wonder of my childhood. Even though we are meant to grow and mature and put *childish* ways behind us, we were never meant to lose the joy and wonder, especially in our relationship with God.

When Jesus lived on Earth, He welcomed little children to Him and often referred to them in His teaching (Matthew 11:25; 18:3; 21:16). On one occasion, He rebuked His disciples for attempting to keep parents from bringing their children to Him for a blessing, saying, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these" (Mark 10:14). Jesus was referring to the *childlike* characteristics that ready us to receive Christ—joy and wonder, but also simplicity, dependence, trust, and humility. Childlike wonder and joy (and more) open our hearts to be more receptive to Him. He is waiting for us to run into His arms.

*Abba (Daddy), Father, help us to be more childlike in our relationship with You. We long to be filled with wonder at all You have done.*

**Faith shines brightest in a childlike heart.**

## Connecting to Worship: August 12

**Theme:** *God's Blueprint for: Children*, Ephesians 6:1-3 Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. "Honor your father and mother" (this is the first commandment with a promise), "that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land."

**Readings:** 1 Kings 19:1–8, Psalm 145:10–21, Ephesians 4:17–5:2, John 6:35–51

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## Connecting to Worship: August 19

**Theme:** *God's Blueprint for: Parents*, Ephesians 6:4 Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord

**Readings:** Proverbs 9:1–10, Psalm 34:12–22, Ephesians 5:6–21, John 6:51–69

### Monday, August 13

#### ***A Nurturing Parent***

Do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord.  
—Ephesians 6:4

Learning a trade as an apprentice is not as involved now as it was in days gone by. Today, when someone is assigned to a department or an individual to learn a job or craft, he does so by observation, instruction, and practice. But in years past, an apprenticeship often began while the learner was still a young person. He moved right in with his teacher and lived as he lived. He was with the master carpenter or blacksmith 24 hours a day, watching his every move and following his careful and sometimes harsh instruction. He learned the skill, but he learned much more than a profession. He was being taught a whole way of life. This total-life concept is built into the word translated “training” in Ephesians 6:4. The command applies to both fathers and mothers, and it means much more than teaching the Bible and Christian belief, though those are involved. The expectation is that through word and personal example parents will nurture their children and teach them what it means to live for Christ in a practical, daily sense. Sure, children learn a lot about God in Sunday school. But only from you, Dad and Mom, will they see what it means to walk with Jesus in a total-life way.

*God gives us children for a time,  
To train them in His way,  
To love them and to show them how  
To follow and obey. —Sper*

**Train up a child in the way he should go, but be sure you go that way yourself.**

### Tuesday, August 14

#### ***Teaching by Example***

Bring [your children] up in the training and admonition of the Lord. —Ephesians 6:4

While waiting for an eye examination, I was struck by a statement I saw in the optometrist's office: “Eighty percent of everything children learn in their first 12 years is through their eyes.” I began thinking of all that children visually process through reading, television, film, events, surroundings, and observing the behavior of others, especially their families. On Father's Day, we often think about the powerful influence of a dad.

Paul urged fathers not to frustrate their children to the point of anger, but to “bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord” (Eph. 6:4). Think of the powerful example of a dad whose behavior and consistency inspire admiration from his children. He's not perfect, but he's moving in the right direction. A great power for good is at work when our actions reflect the character of God, rather than distort it.

That's challenging for any parent, so it's no coincidence that Paul urges us to “be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might” (v.10). Only through His strength can we reflect the love and patience of our heavenly Father.

We teach our children far more from how we live than by what we say.

*Heavenly Father, I need to know Your love  
in order to love others. I want to experience  
and share Your patience and kindness with  
those I care about. Fill me and use me.*

**We honor fathers who not only gave us life, but who also show us how to live.**

## Wednesday, August 15

### Space Scouts

You, fathers, . . . bring [your children] up in the training and admonition of the Lord. —Ephesians 6:4

Many of the first astronauts were once Boy Scouts. The scouts were good at capturing the imagination of young boys and instilling discipline to reach their goals—even if it meant reaching for the stars.

On July 20, 1969, the Boy Scouts were busy celebrating at a conference. During the gathering, the scouts were delighted to hear from former Eagle Scout Neil Armstrong, who sent them greetings from space. One of their own had grown up to realize a wonderful dream!

In some ways, the Christian home can be like a loving, spiritual scout camp. The Bible encourages parents to provide a positive growth environment for children in the home. Parents are exhorted to “bring [children] up in the training and admonition of the Lord” (Eph. 6:4). “To bring up” refers to nourishing children by providing resources for their physical, mental, and spiritual needs. “Training” includes concern about all aspects of a child’s development. And “admonition” speaks of providing direction by well-chosen words uniquely suited to each child.

Let’s strive to make our home a place where loving discipline enables the children in our charge to reach their potential for God’s glory.

*They are buds of hope and promise,  
Possessed by Him whose name is Love;  
Lent us here to train and nourish  
For a better life above. —Crosby*

**What you put into your children’s hearts today  
influences their character for tomorrow.**

## Thursday, August 16

### Divine Concentrate

Do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord. —Ephesians 6:4

An experienced parent said, “Before I got married, I had six theories about bringing up children; now I have six children, and no theories!”

The task of parenting can sometimes seem overwhelming. As we look for help, we find bookstores jammed with “how to” volumes by religious and secular advisors. Yet, when we search the Bible for specific guidance, we find few passages that tell us exactly what to do and how to do it. We often come back to Ephesians 6:4, which states, “Do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord.” We might wish for more instruction than what this verse tells us, but perhaps God has packed more into it than we realize. If we began to “dissolve” that verse in our thinking and ask God to help us understand how to put it into practice, we might find it to be like a packet of concentrated, flavored drink mix that makes 500 gallons.

When was the last time we thought about what we do that provokes our children to anger? How do our words and tone of voice discourage them? What simple thing can we do today to encourage their spiritual growth?

Why not start putting Ephesians 6:4, God’s concentrated plan for parenting, into practice right now!

*Your privilege is beyond all price—  
Worth more than silver, gold, or fame—  
To guide with love and sacrifice,  
And write on children’s hearts God’s name. —Anon.*

**A godly parent is a child’s best guide to God.**

**Friday, August 17**

***Little Cucumbers***

Fathers, . . . bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord. —Ephesians 6:4

When I was just a boy, I was intrigued by a large cucumber. It was no different from any other cucumber, but it was in the strangest place. My uncle kept it in a bottle on a shelf. This particular cucumber was many times too large to go through the neck of the bottle. I wondered how it got there in the first place.

I was filled with awe of my uncle who could perform such a feat. He joked about it and never told me how he did it. My mother finally explained that when the cucumber was very tiny, it had been passed through the narrow neck and allowed to grow while still attached to the vine.

My mother practiced a similar principle with her children. From my earliest memory she surrounded me with prayer and instruction and the gospel. As a result, I was brought to Christ and am now safe in the bottle of His salvation.

What a lesson for parents who have “little cucumbers” at home. Don’t let anything interfere with your first duty toward them. The person who said “Give me a child till he is 7 and I care not who gets him after that” knew the value of early training. Don’t neglect your little cucumbers. Soon they will be big.

*Our children are a gift from God  
To nurture and to love;  
They need our help in guiding them  
To turn their thoughts above. —Sper*

**A parent's life is a child's guidebook.**

**Connecting to Worship: August 19**

**Theme:** *God’s Blueprint for: Parents*, Ephesians 6:4  
Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord

**Readings:** Proverbs 9:1–10, Psalm 34:12–22,  
Ephesians 5:6–21, John 6:51–69

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## Connecting to Worship: August 26

**Theme:** *God's Blueprint for: Employees*, Ephesians 6:5-8 Bondservants, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, with a sincere heart, as you would Christ, not by the way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to man, knowing that whatever good anyone does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether he is a bondservant or is free.

**Readings:** Isaiah 29:11–19, Psalm 14, Ephesians 5:22–33, Mark 7:1–13

### Monday, August 20

#### ***Good Workers***

Do you see a man who excels in his work? He will stand before kings. —Proverbs 22:29

During the early years of our marriage, my wife and I attempted to wallpaper our dingy Chicago apartment. We completed the project, but not without a great deal of difficulty. At one point I even had to remove a poorly-hung section of paper and go to the store to buy more. I learned to appreciate someone who could do a job like wallpapering with skill. I marvel when I see a carpenter make things fit without measuring and remeasuring again and again. I admire the truckdriver who masterfully backs his big rig into a tight space more easily than I do a small trailer on a 16-foot-wide driveway. I take my hat off to the plumber who so easily and good-naturedly installed a water heater in a small, seemingly inaccessible area—especially when I think of all the frustration I experienced when trying to attach a simple water filter. We read in today's Scripture about the skilled designers and weavers who helped construct the tabernacle. Proverbs 22:29 says that a person who excels in his work "will stand before kings." And Paul wrote, "Whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord" (Colossians 3:23). God is pleased with work done well. He honors good workers, and so should we.

*O Lord, I ask for strength to do  
The task that You've assigned;  
Help me to work with diligence,  
Lest Your name be maligned. —Fasick*

**Work done well will receive God's "Well done!"**

### Tuesday, August 21

#### ***Hard Labor***

Whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men. —Colossians 3:23

It's one of life's ironies that on Labor Day in the US and Canada, most of the workers get the day off. But that's for good reason. What better way to reward a hard-working populace than to give the laborers a holiday! Labor Day seems like a good time to take a closer look at what it takes to offer our employers our best.

1. *No matter what our task, it's our duty to work for God's glory* (Colossians 3:23). In this sense, no job is better than another. Each should result in honor to God.
2. *The way we work can earn the respect of those who do not follow Christ* (1 Thessalonians 4:11-12). A boss shouldn't have to tell a Christian to use time well or to work hard.
3. *Our work is one way to fulfill our dual purpose: to love God and others. Showing love to our co-workers is a good way to show that we love God* (Matthew 22:37-40).
4. *We must work to provide for those who depend on us. Harsh words of criticism are reserved for those who don't take care of their family* (1 Timothy 5:8). Having a job can be hard work. Even for those who truly enjoy their jobs, it's nice to have a Labor Day breather. But until the day comes when our work is over, our task is to make our labor a testimony to God's glory.

*Whatever you are working on,  
Engage in it with zest,  
Because your work is for the Lord,  
And He expects your best. —Sper*

**It's not the hours you put in that count, but what you put in the hours.**

## Wednesday, August 22

### ***Better Than Your Best***

I also labor, striving according to His working which works in me mightily. —Colossians 1:29

When John became a salesman in a well-known insurance company years ago, his aim was to work effectively in his firm without compromising his Christian integrity. But there were those who considered him naive. In their view, one could possess either job security or Christian integrity—not both.

But John did not waver in his commitment to be a godly witness in the business world. Although he was in a job that required accurate calculations, he had a weakness when it came to simple arithmetic. This forced him to depend more on Christ in everything, which enhanced his witness.

John eventually became the company's top salesman, and God used him to win many colleagues to Christ. Later, as a branch manager, John and his team became the company's largest branch worldwide—all without compromising Christian integrity.

Are you striving to live and work without compromise in a tough place? Are you doing your best, but your best is not enough? Colossians 1:29 reminds us that dependence on God's mighty power within us is what makes us effective. John, the businessman, summed it up like this: "God helps me do better than I can!"

He will do the same for you.

*Savior, let me walk beside Thee,  
Let me feel my hand in Thine;  
Let me know the joy of walking  
In Thy strength and not in mine. —Sidebotham*

**Boast not in what you do for Christ, but in what Christ does for you.**

## Thursday, August 23

### ***Work Witness***

Whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord. —Colossians 3:23

When I worked in a drafting business after high school, I learned a lot from old Mr. Frantz. He was a designer of science classrooms, and he drew blueprints for the installation of lab tables and furniture.

Most people wouldn't consider drafting as Christian work, but the longer I was on that job the more I saw the impact that Mr. Frantz had on the people he worked with. A man of deep faith in Christ and a thorough knowledge of the Word of God, he witnessed by his work habits, cheerful spirit, diligence, and integrity.

Drafting rooms can be centers of dirty talk, obscene drawings, and irreverence. But it never came from Mr. Frantz. And if a newcomer mimicked his strong German accent or poked fun at his faith, his fellow workers stopped it immediately.

Why? Because they respected the faith, morality, and compassion of this man of God among them. Whenever one of them faced a major decision or personal crisis, they relied on the wisdom and support of Mr. Frantz.

I learned from this godly man that if we do our work as to the Lord, it will be a witness to our fellow employees. That can make our work truly the Lord's work.

*Our daily work is used by God  
To help us care for daily needs;  
And work that's done as to the Lord  
Gives witness to our words and deeds. —DJD*

**Do your work for Christ and your work will witness for Christ.**

## Friday, August 24

### *Shirkers or Workers*

Do not grow weary in doing good. —2 Thessalonians 3:13

The apostle Paul had some tough words for shirkers: “If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat” (2 Thessalonians 3:10). Some circumstances may make it impossible for us to work. But if we’re able-bodied and can find work, we must work with energy and diligence. This is not just good advice but a command from an inspired apostle and from our Lord Jesus Christ (v.12). Sloth is sin.

Paul also had a word for workers: “Do not grow weary in doing good” (v.13). Our work may seem mindless, offering little challenge or stimulation, but we can do it “heartily, as to the Lord” (Colossians 3:23).

We get weary in our work at times and want to give up, but we can stay the course if we understand that we’re working for our Lord and ultimately for His eyes only (Ephesians 6:7). He is an employer who sees and knows all we do, and He values what we do and why we do it. Knowing that God cares about our work gives meaning to all our actions, even those no one else notices or appreciates. Michelangelo, painting in some obscure corner of the Sistine Chapel, was asked by one of his helpers why he lavished such attention on a part of the ceiling no one would ever see. He replied, “God will see.”

*Teach me, Lord, my God and King,  
In all things Thee to see;  
And what I do in anything,  
To do it as for Thee! —Herbert*

**No matter who your boss is, you are really working  
for God.**

## Connecting to Worship: August 26

**Theme:** *God’s Blueprint for: Employees*, Ephesians 6:5-8 Bondservants, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, with a sincere heart, as you would Christ, not by the way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to man, knowing that whatever good anyone does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether he is a bondservant or is free.

**Readings:** Isaiah 29:11–19, Psalm 14, Ephesians 5:22–33, Mark 7:1–13

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## Connecting to Worship: September 2

**Theme:** *God's Blueprint for: Employers*, Ephesians 6:9 Masters, do the same to them, and stop your threatening, knowing that he who is both their Master yours is in heaven, and that there is no partiality with him.

**Readings:** Deuteronomy 4:1–2, 6–9, Psalm 119:129–136, Ephesians 6:10–20, Mark 7:14–23

### Monday, August 27

#### *What Did You Say?*

Who may dwell in Your holy hill? He who walks uprightly. — Psalm 15:1-2

At Santa Clara University in California, a researcher conducted a study of 1,500 business managers that revealed what workers value most in a supervisor. Employees said they respected a leader who shows competence, has the ability to inspire workers, and is skillful in providing direction.

But there was a fourth quality they admired even more—integrity. Above all else, workers wanted a manager whose word was good, one who was known for his honesty, and one whom they could trust.

While this finding holds special significance for Christian managers, it also says something to everyone who claims to be a follower of Jesus. Integrity should characterize all believers, no matter what their position may be.

According to Psalm 15, truth is at the heart of every word and deed of a godly person. Since the God of the Bible always keeps His word, it follows that a godly person will be known as one who does what he says he will do.

We all need to be more careful about our integrity. Do those around us admire us for our honesty? Does the Lord see us faithfully doing what we said we would do—even when it hurts? (Psalm 15:4).

*If your word is "good as gold"  
And your actions prove it true,  
Others hearing what you say  
Know they can depend on you. —Hess*

**Only by being on the level can we rise in the eyes of others.**

### Tuesday, August 28

#### *People Over Profits*

Masters, give your bondservants what is just and fair, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven. —Colossians 4:1

When Truett Cathy started his first restaurant in 1946, it was closed on Sundays to give his employees time to be with their families and to attend church. It's still true today of the more than 1,000 Chick-fil-A fast-food outlets franchised by his company.

Cathy's slogan is: "Put people and principles before profit." It's a motto each of us can make our own, whether we give orders or take them on the job.

The apostle Paul had a word for employers and employees in Colossians 3:22-4:1. He said we need to remember that we have a Master in heaven (4:1), and we are to work from our hearts to please Him, not just the person watching us (3:22-24).

Truett Cathy strives to remain true to biblical principles in his business. Larry Julian, author of *God Is My CEO*, a book about Cathy and other business leaders, says: "God doesn't promise a tangible return on investments, but He promises the fruits of the Spirit, love and peace and joy, on a personal level. Cathy is not only experiencing peace and joy and love in his life personally, but he's also making a difference to his foster children, his own children and grandchildren, and his employees. He's leaving a legacy on how you can do things the right way." That's an example we can take to work.

*Lord, teach me how to love and work,  
That everything I do  
May be to someone in its turn  
A service good and true. —Anon.*

**When people are more important than profits,  
everyone profits.**

## Wednesday, August 29

### *Beyond Just and Fair*

Masters, give your bondservants what is just and fair, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven. —Colossians 4:1

Working conditions in England during the 19th century were abysmal. Men, women, and children labored in dangerous factories during the day and went home to dirty tenement slums at night. Many of the factory owners cared little for the well-being of their employees.

But during that time, the owners of the Cadbury chocolate company were different. Quakers by conviction and business entrepreneurs by giftedness, they focused on improving the working conditions of their 200 workers. The Cadburys built a state-of-the-art factory with heated dressing rooms, a kitchen, and recreational areas. And to care for the employees' spiritual needs, the workday started with Bible study.

Colossians 4:1 tells us: "Masters, give your bondservants what is just and fair, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven." Certainly the Cadburys sought to give their employees what was just and fair. But their heavenly orientation motivated them to go a step further to meet physical and spiritual needs. Though we may not own a company, we do have regular contact with a variety of people. As believers, it is important to be ethical in our dealings. We can also, with God's enablement, care about others' well-being through prayer, encouragement, and the meeting of physical needs (Gal. 6:10).

*Lord, thank You for loving us and meeting our needs. Often You bring people into our lives who need Your love and care. Give us wisdom to creatively reach out a helping hand that we might share Your kindness.*

**God blesses us so that we can bless others.**

## Thursday, August 30

### *A People Company*

Be obedient to those who are your masters. — Ephesians 6:5

My brother worked 42 years for the Herman Miller Furniture Company. At his retirement dinner he said, "This is my company. Where else could a production worker like me participate in the management of the company?" What had instilled this kind of loyalty? In part, it was the leadership of D. J. De Pree, longtime president of the company.

One day a worker in the plant died suddenly. When Mr. De Pree visited his widow, she told him of her husband's poetry and of his witnessing to the night watchman. This impressed De Pree with the value of each of the workers in his plant. From then on, his attitude toward the business changed. "I realized," he said, "that the manufacturer's first priority was to make his product the best he could for the one who would use it; the second was the man in the factory who made it; and the third was the ownership." This attitude is rooted in Scripture. Christians in labor and in management all work for one Master. Employees must therefore serve with diligence. Management must do the same—with two additions. They must be fair and just (Col. 4:1) and must not threaten (Eph. 6:9). Integrity, concern for others, and mutual respect make any company a people company.

*Lord, teach me how to love and work,  
So every deed I do  
May be to someone in its turn  
A service fine and true. —Anon.*

**When integrity and people rate higher than pay  
and profits, everyone profits!**

**Friday, August 31**

## ***The Lamb Wins The Power of Affirmation***

I thank my God always concerning you for the grace of God which was given to you by Christ Jesus. —1 Corinthians 1:4

During a recent study, 200,000 employees were interviewed to discover the missing ingredient in their productivity. The study concluded that appreciation and affirmation topped the list of what they wanted most from their superiors. This research implies that receiving affirmation is a basic human need.

The apostle Paul seemed to realize this basic need in the Corinthian believers, so before he peppered them with firm words of discipline, he showered them with affirmation. As their spiritual leader, Paul began his letter with thanksgiving to God for the grace being displayed in their lives.

Once far from God, these believers were now participating in His grace through the death and resurrection of Christ. United with Jesus, they were drawing their spiritual life from Him, and the fruit of this union was their spiritual growth in godliness (1 Cor. 1:4-7). Paul deliberately and continually thanked God for His work in the Corinthian believers' lives. I imagine that they were better able to bear firm criticism from Paul because of his tender affirmation.

When we see people who are obeying God, let's take time to affirm them and to thank God for what He's doing through them.

*Lord, You are at work in so many ways in my life and in the people around me. Help me to encourage my brothers and sisters in Christ by telling them how I am blessed to see Your work in them.*

**Praise loudly—correct softly.**

## **Connecting to Worship: September 2**

**Theme:** *God's Blueprint for: Employers*, Ephesians 6:9 Masters, do the same to them, and stop your threatening, knowing that he who is both their Master yours is in heaven, and that there is no partiality with him.

**Readings:** Deuteronomy 4:1–2, 6–9, Psalm 119:129–136, Ephesians 6:10–20, Mark 7:14–23