

Day #1 - Prayer Focus – Praying for Pray-ers.

In the early chapters of 1 Samuel, the Hebrew people are granted their demand that they have a king to lead them. As Samuel was conceding much leadership over to the new king named Saul, he said this in his farewell speech to his people:

As for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the Lord by failing to pray for you. 1 Samuel 12:23a NIV

Samuel put it quite clearly for himself and for us: To fail to pray is a sin of omission against the Lord. Remember, Jesus quoted Isaiah 56:7 when He declared: *My house shall be a house of prayer* (Matthew 21:13 NIV).

One of the sad aspects of the current pandemic is that churches are required to suspend or scale back the way we do so many ministries. But one ministry that the pandemic cannot hinder is the ministry of prayer. Today I ask that you pray for *pray-ers*. By this, I do not mean that you are to asking God for a more significant number of individual prayers. We are asking for *Pray-ers*. That is, a greater number of individuals in our church who will covenant to pray. We seek at least 100 people to join us in this 40 Days of Prayer for our church. This booklet is designed for these elite prayer warriors. The fact that you are reading these words indicates that you already are among those who have made this covenant. Today you simply are asked to pray for others to join your ranks. If you want to go the extra mile, ask someone to join you in this 40 Day Covenant.

Pray often; for prayer is a shield for the soul, a sacrifice to God, and a scourge to Satan. – John Bunyan

Day #2 – Prayer Focus - International Missions

My home church had a motto that reflected its identity: *A Church with the World as Its Field*. Named after a martyred missionary, Dr. Bill Wallace, Wallace Memorial Baptist Church, kept mission mindedness at the forefront of all its practices. I attribute that heritage for instilling in me a devotion for missions all around the world.

While it is true that there are enough needs close to home to keep our church plenty occupied, our calling is to have a world focus. Jesus left reminders to His disciples that they must have a far-reaching vision for evangelism and discipleship. The Gospel of Matthew closes with what we know as “The Great Commission:”

19 Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: 20 Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen. Matthew 28:19-20 KJV

In the early verses of the book of Acts, Luke records Jesus' closing words before His ascension into Heaven.

But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth. Acts 1:8 KJV

My recent class on the Twelve Disciples features the legacy of Jesus' disciples. According to the New Testament and the church's history, the vast majority of the disciples carried the message of the Gospels to Europe, Asia, and Africa. They heroically sacrificed themselves for the sake of the gospel message. And devoted Christians who could not go covered these disciples in prayer. The same is true today.

Day #3 – Prayer Focus - Vision.

For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Jeremiah 29:11 NIV

Occasionally I get asked, "What is the vision for North Cleveland Baptist Church?" Articulating the answer is challenging because it has two perspectives. The Bible instructs a three-fold vision of every church: share the gospel with the lost, disciple the redeemed, and worship the Lord. Each congregation is then responsible for discovering the specific ways God has uniquely called and equipped them to carry out this calling to evangelize, disciple, and worship.

When the pandemic abruptly disrupted our schedules back in March, a strategic planning team was in their early work to develop and propose individual ministries for our church to initiate in the years ahead. Specifically, the group was studying both our congregation and our community. Naturally, the work had to be suspended with the arrival of the pandemic.

In just a matter of days, our congregation had to pivot to new ways to do some of our ministries. It was a challenging and somber task. Slowly, we now are returning to a few items that were ceased, like worship. In a sense, our "vision" now is to develop ministries throughout the immediate weeks ahead.

But one day, the pandemic will end. When that wonderful time arrives, our church will NOT be at the same place we were when it started. Still, we will be called upon to pray for God's vision to serve our present world as effectively as possible. Will you join me today in praying that God will reveal His vision for the specific ways he desires to use our church now and in the future. As the scripture states: *Where there is no vision, the people perish.* Proverbs 29:18a NIV

Vision is the very stuff of leadership – the ability to see in a way that compels others to pay attention. -Leighton Ford

Day #4- Prayer Focus- Vision Part 2

Proverbs 29:18 “Where there is no vision, the people perish.”

Baseball is a beautiful game. The sound of a bat hitting a ball is magical. The feel of the spring grass on your feet is exuberant. The joy of watching your favorite player hit a home run is exhilarating. Most people understand those things about the sport, but there are a few things that the ordinary baseball viewer will not be aware of. We baseball people call these little nuances the "game within the game." For example, if a team has a fast runner on first base with no one out, the game within the game will be to see IF that runner can steal second. This is very important because if this can happen successfully, that team will have a runner in scoring position with at least three chances to score him. An ordinary single to the outfield will score this runner almost every time, and one run will often be the difference in the ballgame. The analytics of baseball tell us that if you have a fast runner on second base with no one out, he will score a very high percentage of the time. The game within the game may very well dictate who wins the game in the end. There are many "games within the game" to be watching for, and you honestly never know which one will win you the game.

Another nuance of baseball that many people don't know about is how important vision is. A player **MUST** have good vision to hit a baseball and field a ball, and even throw a ball well. Vision is so vital in baseball, and on a much more critical scale, it's vital in our church. The vision within the church, or any organization trying to accomplish goals, must not be undervalued. It must be grappled with, prayed over, talked about, and invested deeply into to make sure your vision is clear and that the church is headed in the direction God desires.

For your prayer focus today, please pray for our church to develop a clear vision for what the Lord has in store for us. Pray that the Lord would lead us to that vision and that it wouldn't be our vision, but rather His vision that we are following.

Day #5- Prayer Focus- Teenagers

Today as we go to the Lord in prayer, I want to ask you to pray for our teenagers and specifically for their faith in the Lord. The teenage years are filled with challenging times that include peer pressures, parent pressures, choices that they have never had the freedom to make before, and SO many other challenges. As the students walk the halls of their schools, they will encounter many different types of people: different ethnicities, different backgrounds, different worldviews, and even other spiritual belief systems. The greatest thing they need as they encounter all of these differences is to have a strong sense of self-identity. A self-identity that says, "I am made in the image of God, and I am a child of the King!". When students have these strong self-identities, it's easier for them to encounter differences in the culture and recognize that it is not who they are nor who they want to be. With this strong sense of self-identity, they are less likely to make poor decisions (although they certainly aren't immune to it, I sure am not!) and more likely to reflect the God that is inside of them.

Scripture tells us in Matthew 17:20 that "if you have faith like a grain of a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, Move from here to there, and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you." Let's pray that our teenagers have faith even as small as a mustard seed, but possibly even more significant than that. Pray that as they walk the halls of their schools, play in their bands, participate on their sports teams, and wherever else they may be present, that their faith would be the most essential thing in their lives.

Day #6-Prayer Focus- Teenagers

Today we turn our prayer focus on our teenagers once again. The teen years are filled with the opportunity to make new decisions to the young person caught in between being a teen and an adult. For many teens, this will be the first time in their lives that their parents won't be right beside them, helping keep them stay inside the lines and making positive decisions. They will have the opportunity to decide who will influence them the most, where they will invest their time, and what will carry the most value in their lives. The world will be pulling at them to choose the ways of the world, but as Christian teens, their background will be calling them to fall back onto what they have been taught for so many years. The world will be telling them to "go with the flow" and "do what everyone else is doing." They will be tempted to try new things that their parents have shielded them from, and along the way, they will give in to a few of those temptations. Our teenagers need our prayers, and they need them often. Please pray that they will make wise decisions. Pray that they will consistently be pulled back toward all the teaching and training their Christian parents have provided for them over the years. Pray that the people they allow into their inner circle will positively influence their lives and that the negative influences will fade away.

Today's Scripture:

"How can a young person stay pure? By obeying your Word." Psalm 119:9

"If you need wisdom, ask our generous God, and He will give it to you."
James 1:5

Day 7: Prayer Focus- Stewardship

How much do you own? According to the Bible, you and I don't own anything. It is God who owns it all!

The earth is the LORD's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it; for he founded it upon the seas and established it upon the waters. (Ps. 24:1- 2)

Since we don't own anything, we are stewards. As Christians, we are responsible for exercising the management of God's resources wisely. Let us be found faithful.

Moreover, it is required in stewards that a man be found faithful." (1 Corinthians 4:2)

God has called us to live lives built on an eternal perspective. When we apply this to our income and possessions, then we can truly be free from the pull of culture and materialism. He has called us to be transformed in our hearts, minds, and lives. Scripture provides principles we need for wise and faithful money management.

As Christian investors, we seek to use the resources God has entrusted to us as a means of playing our role, however small it may seem, in the growth of His Kingdom and the accomplishment of His purposes.

Be conscientious. You must see yourself as a caretaker of what God has given you. Acknowledge that taking undue risks jeopardizes His wealth. You're not just in this for yourself, but to responsibly increase your assets so you can provide for your family and give more generously. You want to play your part in taking the Gospel of Christ to the millions who have never heard.

Part of our mission as a church is to bring God the glory in all we do. When we display our trust in Him by being faithful stewards of all that He has entrusted to us, we bring glory to our great God.

Let us pray that we would be content with all that we have. We are the wealthiest nation in the world. I pray that I would trust my Lord more and be more generous with the blessings he has given us stewardship over.

Day 8: Prayer Focus- Being Financial Fit

This devotion aims to provide motivation for you to make the sacrifices necessary to get debt-free. The first financial fitness test you need to pass is the "debt" test, emphasizing credit card, and other consumer-type debt. Webster's says that debt is that which one is bound to pay or perform; an obligation; the state of owing something. Using that definition, very few Americans are free of debt.

So, why place emphasis on getting debt-free as the first step toward a sound investing strategy? Because debts are obligations, and they must be honorably met no matter the circumstances.

*The rich rule over the poor, and the borrower is servant to the lender
(Proverbs 22:7)*

When we are debt-free, we owe our allegiance to Christ alone.

It requires thoughtful self-discipline not to overuse your access to credit; it's never too late to correct poor spending habits!

Aside from the practical advantages of getting debt-free—less financial stress and huge savings on interest expense—there are biblical ones as well. Here is a couple that seems compelling to me:

1. To be obedient. *"Give everyone what you owe Him: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor. Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another. . . "* (Romans 13:7-8).

2. To maintain your integrity. *"The wicked borrow and do not repay, but the righteous give generously"* (Psalm 37:21).

Most debt problems result from an excess of spending, not a lack of income. The solution is deceptively simple: You must develop a plan to assure that you spend less than you earn. Then you'll have a monthly surplus that can be used to gradually eliminate your debts.

We need to apply biblical principles to our financial lives and invest well so that we can experience the joy of giving generously to God's work (2 Corinthians 8:7).

Anyone who does not provide for their relatives, and especially for their own household, has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever. (1 Timothy 5:8)

Let us pray that we would realize that every dollar we spend belongs to God. Lord, help me to spend your money wisely. Help me save for the future that I may always be able to give generously to your work.

Day 9: Pray for our Church Leaders

26 In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. 27 And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God. Romans 8:26-27

Was it the time your spouse came home from his job only to tell you he was no longer employed? Or, was it when you received the word from your doctor that all was not well? Maybe, it happened to you when you received the gut-wrenching news that a special loved one's life had come to an end? Could it even have been the time you made that big decision, and now you are second-guessing your judgment?

We have all been there, at some point...searching, questioning, hurting, fearing, doubting, grieving, mourning, weeping. It's the point where we feel numb, unsure what the next move will be, let alone how to make it. It's the moment when you look for words to explain what you are feeling, yet you realize there is nothing left within you to muster up a single word. You are speechless; however, the one word that stirs the deep pit of your stomach, that sparks the beat of your heart, and that penetrates the inner portion of your mind is hope. Yes, hope!

The kind of hope you remember hearing about when Noah faithfully built the ark. The hope that motivated Daniel to be faithful to God even in the depths of a lion's den. Maybe, in those quiet and inaudible moments, you recall the story about Joshua, the one who patiently joined a small army of priests for seven days in the hope of conquering the city of Jericho. Then, again, it may have been that Christmas when you heard the song 'O, Holy Night' and the resounding words..."The Thrill of hope, the weary world rejoices. For yonder breaks a new and glorious morn. Fall on your knees."

Whatever it is, you know there is something significant about that one word, hope. That one word seems to resonate when nothing else can shake your wounded spirit. It's the hope only God can provide. It's the hope of Jesus rising from the dead on the third day! John 1:1 says, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. Verse 14

goes on to say, “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.”

When we find ourselves at the moment where we cannot assemble any words to express how we are feeling, we still have His Word. His very Word is dwelling among us! He’s the only Word we need to restore our mind, heart, and soul.

In your prayer time today, I pray you will take some time to remember and thank God for those Sunday School teachers, Bible Study leaders, and worship teams who shared the important stories in the Bible with you. Pray for people who continue to instill in you the hope shared within the Scriptures. We may not know when the next time will come that we are left speechless...and God’s Word will be all we have. And, if that’s the case, that will be fine because He is all we need.

Also, ask God to reveal to you where and how you can share His Word with others. Ask God to spark and stir your soul today. We must be ready to share His Word with the one who is speechless today.

Day 10: Prayer for our schools, written by an educator

Dear God our Father,

We praise you for the mighty God that you are! Father, teach us your ways. May we follow your gracious, merciful, and forgiving model you have demonstrated through your life on earth and in Heaven! Thank you for Your Word and Being Our:

- ❖ **Comforter:** “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God.” 2 Corinthians 1:3-4;
- ❖ **Caregiver:** “Come, let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the Lord our Maker; for he is our God and we are the people of his pasture, the flock under his care.” Psalm 95:6-7;
- ❖ **Teacher:** “You call me ‘Teacher’ and ‘Lord,’ and rightly so, for that is what I am.” John 13:13;
- ❖ **Counselor:** “For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.” Isaiah 9:6;
- ❖ **Provider:** “So Abraham called that place The Lord Will Provide. And to this day it is said, “On the mountain of the Lord it will be provided.” Genesis 22:14;
- ❖ **Peacemaker:** “And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” Philippians 4:7;
- ❖ **Encourager:** “You, Lord, hear the desire of the afflicted; you encourage them, and you listen to their cry.” Psalm 10:17;
- ❖ **Help:** “My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth.” Psalm 121:2
- ❖ **Loving Father:** “See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him.” I John 3:1;
- ❖ **Refuge:** “I love you, Lord, my strength. The Lord is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer; my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.” Psalm 18:1-2;

God, I pray we learn how to be more like you. May we read, study, and apply your Scriptures to our lives. Let us be willing to change so we can genuinely resemble you. We seek your wisdom and humility so we can serve others the way you have served us yesterday, today, and always.

Bless the educators in our community and land who take on characteristics of you each day when students enter their classroom. We pray these instructors will be a **comforter** to the discontent; a **caregiver** for those who hurt; a **teacher** to those with a lack of understanding; a **counselor** to the precious ones with mental fatigue; a meal **provider** to the hungry; a **maker of peace** to the conflicted; a **cheerful and encouraging** face to the disheartened; **help** to the helpless; a **loving soul** to the unlovable; and a **refuge** for the unprotected.

May our children experience You, God our Father, through the actions of their daily role models. May our church find ways to support those who seek You and seek to “train up a child in the way he should go” (Proverbs 22:6a), so “when he is old, he will not depart from it” (Proverbs 22:6b).

Amen.

Day 11: Prayer Focus- College Students

Today as we go to the Lord in prayer, I want to ask you to pray for our college students and specifically for their commitment to the local church (wherever that may be for them). For the first time, moving away from home allows these 18-20-year-olds to truly experience adulthood and the freedoms that come with that. They will be able to make every choice for themselves, including going to class, going places that grandma would or would not approve of, being involved in parachurch organizations, being involved in fraternity and sorority clubs, and even the choice of going to church on Sunday mornings or not. The rate of our students graduating from high school and then also leaving the church has been staggeringly high over the past twenty years. Long term trends have shown us that some of these students that have grown up in the church will return to the church once they are married, but this creates a gap in their discipleship that can be detrimental. As these older teenagers are transitioning into adulthood, they need the guidance of the church and older Christians to help them navigate the perils of the young adult life. They need people that love them, pointing them back to Jesus at every turn, and if they aren't "in church" during these years of life, how will they find those godly people to do this for them? Our students need our prayers and the corporate prayers of our church as much as ever before.

Scripture tells us in Proverbs 19:20: "Listen to advice and accept instruction, that you may gain wisdom in the future." Let's all pray today that our college students would stay involved in the local church. Let us pray that they remain connected to NCBC as their home church for those that stay local. Those who go away to school, or even the military or job, would make their first priority be to find a local church they can plug into. Where else will they find the kind of advice and instruction that will lead to the wisdom the Proverb above is talking about? The church is the best answer to this!

***Prayer points for our college students-**

- Pray they will stay involved in a local church.
- Pray they will only allow godly people to have influence over them.
- Pray that they will allow God to use them for His kingdom purposes on their campuses.
- Pray that they will allow God to direct their paths in all they do

Day 12: Prayer Focus: College Students (written by a college student)

What does it look like to grieve? Most commonly, we think of grieving the loss after a death. Loss can look different for each of us from illness, loss of a job, loss of a routine, going to a new school, moving to a new location, or divorce, to name a few. What is often overlooked is the fact that any change, even positive change, involves loss. Anytime your worldview is altered, or you are forced to experience a change, grief is present. While grief might be present, it is easy to push those big emotions aside or suppress uncomfortable emotions with harmful coping mechanisms by overworking, sleeping excessively or not enough, overeating food or even withholding food, binge-watching TV or technology, using substances such as drugs or alcohol, and even fighting with people. So being aware of the loss can help you become more intentional toward using healthier coping mechanisms of balanced eating, drinking more water, sleeping eight hours, exercising with moderation, balancing work and fulfilling activities, journaling, finding healthy connections, or reaching out for mental health support. Coping mechanisms will not take away the grief or loss, but over time, the pain's frequency and intensity will lessen when a person can find healthy healing methods.

During this season of COVID-19, there has been a loss on many different levels for each person. Today as you pray, acknowledge your loss and ask God to help you find healing. Also, pray for compassion to speak life over others who are experiencing loss differently. Other people will grieve differently than you, especially children. Let us pray for compassion, wisdom, renewing, and healing. May the God that renews all things help provide the strength, patience, and courage you need today.

John 14: 25-27 (Jesus Promises the Holy Spirit)

“All this I have spoken while still with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.” -John 13:34-35

Day 13: Prayer Focus- Those that are Grieving

"I give you a new command: Love on another. Just as I have loved you, you are also to love one another. By this, everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

-This way of making disciples will continue for years to come, and each new group of college leaders will want to continue to love on the students in the youth group at NCBC.

-The teens will be willing to share with the trusted adults and college leaders in the youth group

-The college students will continue to serve the youth of NCBC and friends of the youth

Prayer points:

As a Christian college student, it can be challenging to serve the church and share the gospel with other people. Every Wednesday night, you can find anywhere from six to ten college students who join in regular youth worship. These college students also serve at DNOW, fall retreat, summer camp, and many more events. They are not there to participate, but they are there because they care for the teenagers that meet there each week. These college students show up each week to check in on the students, not because they are told to come, but because they want to help guide the younger students in their walk with Christ. They all want to see the students introduce people to Christ, whether that is simply inviting friends to church to hear the gospel presentation, or seeing the student learn to present the gospel to share with other people. The college students that care for the youth have also been in the students' shoes. They have been cared for by former college students or adults that volunteer with the youth. This is a great thing that we have in our church, and it has made teenagers feel loved and valued and has helped show Christian college students how to start serving in the church. We have a great group of college students in our own church who are eager to give up time that could be doing anything else to spend time with students who look up to them more than they will ever know.

Day 14: Prayer Focus: Self-compassion

In Matthew chapter 22, Jesus was questioned about the greatest commandments. In verses 37-40, Jesus responded with, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind,” and the second greatest commandment is to, “Love your neighbor as yourself.” Self-compassion, by definition, is the ability to turn understanding, acceptance, and love inward. When a person can explore and experience healthy self-compassion, the toxic shame of not being enough, worthy, or unlovable is slowly canceled. You can reach out for healthy relationships, environments, and experiences because you notice a need from within. More often than not, if you are having difficulty loving other people, you lack self-compassion for loving yourself. Notice those unhealthy beliefs and even question if they are real.

Today, may we all pray for courage to explore what God says about who you are, such as you are loved (John 3:16), you are His (1 John 3:1), you are worthy (Zephaniah 3:17), and you have a purpose (Jeremiah 29:11-12). Next, pray for the courage to love God boldly as you learn to love others and yourself. Finally, pray for the courage to show love towards other people in our community.

Romans 5:3-5 (NIV)

“Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.”

#15 – Prayer Focus – Be Your Best

Let us lay aside every weight and the sin that so easily ensnares us. Let us run with endurance the race that lies before us, Hebrews 12:1b HCSB

In the previous chapter, the author of Hebrews featured some of God's great champions who served the Lord with great faith. With these words in chapter 12, it is as if he turns his attention back to the audience receiving this letter and challenges them to likewise do their best.

Troublesome times potentially bring out the best in people or the worst in people. When the pandemic first occurred, people stocked up on items like bathroom tissue, hand sanitizer, paper products, and cleaning supplies. I remember going to stores and seeing empty shelves that had been picked clean. Some shoppers were downright rude. At least a degree of this hoarding is motivated by self-centeredness. Such an attitude says, "I'm taking care of myself! If that means others go without, so be it." Other kindlier people check in with folks to see if they have sufficient supplies and generously share from their own means. Pray for God's people to do their best by sharing with others, especially the disadvantaged.

As you read these words, it is an election season for our country. While the exercise of voting is a highlight of our democracy, I have never liked *mudslinging* tactics in politics, even when it was just exchanged among the politicians. Today ordinary people can get downright offensive and disrespectful about candidates and their advocates. False statements are promoted, while insults and mockery are common. But the words *civics* and *civility* come from the same Latin word that means *citizen*. Pray for American citizens and citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven to do their best by demonstrating grace, courtesy, and genuine statesmanship. Remember, *Sour godliness is the devil's religion*. -John Wesley

So give your servant a discerning heart to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong. 1 Kings 3:9a NIV

Day #16: Prayer Focus – Devotion to the Lord

Back in August, Dr. Jay preached about Josiah, who overcame a poor spiritual legacy to lead God's people in much needed spiritual reforms. His impact in Hebrew history is summarized with these words:

As long as he lived, they did not fail to follow the Lord, the God of their ancestors. 2 Chronicles 34:33b NIV

The good news is that this spiritual resolve impacted a generation of God's people. The bad news is that, once Josiah died, their devotion declined. Within a few months of Josiah's death, Jehoiakim became king. The Bible says of Jehoiakim: *He did evil in the eyes of the Lord his God.* In short, it was downhill from there.

Josiah's reforms were noble and inspiring. Yet it appears that the people's devotion was more to Josiah than to the Lord. When Josiah died, the Lord was still present. Still, their faithfulness to God faltered when a less devoted king emerged.

The pandemic disrupted many of the things that fed our love for the Lord. These include gatherings for Bible Study and discipleship classes, mission trips, Vacation Bible School, church fellowships, in-person prayer circles, and more. Direct contact with spiritual mentors was eliminated or at least diminished. But the Lord did not go anywhere. Thankfully, there is no "social distancing" with Him.

Pray that this absence of Christian mentors and limited access to sanctuaries do not create a decline in our devotion. Face it, it is easy to slip into spiritual laziness. Pray that people will continue to dedicate themselves exclusively to the Lord. Pray that, when we can safely return to the ministry on a fuller scale, folks will not have fallen overly content with being away and uninvolved.

And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another, especially now that the day of his return is drawing near.
Hebrews 11:25 NLB

Day #17: Prayer Focus – Operation Christmas Child

2 He called a little child to him and placed the child among them. 3 And he said: “Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of Heaven. Matthew 18:2-3 NIV

I know of no church that embraces the simple shoebox ministry of Operation Christmas Child on a grander scale than North Cleveland Baptist Church. Not only does our church create an amazing number of boxes (1700+), we are “hands-on” throughout the entire process. I mean that literally! The hands of North Cleveland Baptist folks are engaged through it all.

Under the direction of coordinator Sonya Boring Huddleston...

- The hands of NCBC members purchase items that will go into the boxes.
- The hands of NCBC folks (primarily our students) fold 1700+ shoeboxes into shape.
- The hands of NCBC servants attend our Packing Party event and fill all the boxes with gifts.
- The hands of NCBC men deliver these boxes to a pick-up point and load them onto transport trucks.
- The hands of NCBC volunteers go to distribution centers for final packing.
- The hands of NCBC fund the price of shipping.
- And the hands of our own Mary Beth Canida went to Ukraine in 2019 to distribute Operation Christmas Child Boxes into recipient children’s hands.

Last year I was among the NCBC volunteers at the Operation Christmas Child Distribution Center in Charlotte, NC. I taped up shoeboxes after other people on our team had inspected and completed the boxes for much of that time. After I taped a box closed, the next hands to opened it would belong a child somewhere in the world for whom the gift would be received. It inspired us to pray one last blessing for the little boy or girl whose name only God knew at that moment.

As you read these words, we are the season where Operation Christmas Child is promoted strongly. Will you offer your hands to help in one or more of the ways mentioned above? And while our hands do a lot of work to prepare, send, and distribute these boxes, will you also take time to fold your hands in fervent prayer on this excellent ministry and the blessings of grace that flow through these gifts.

Day #18 – Prayer Focus – Health Care Providers

Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. Matthew 9:25 NIV

My wife is a Health Care Provider for a Family Medical Practice. Each day she works, I am privileged to hear her share about the patients who come to see her. Some are routine checkups or minor incidents. But many are folks who are severely ailing. To care for the sick, she and her co-workers must spend hours wearing full Personal Protective Equipment. It gives me profound thanks and appreciation for medical personnel on the “front lines” directly helping sick people. I am incredibly grateful for those in our congregation who go about this good work.

All healing is divine healing and ordained by God Himself. Therefore, medical providers are doing holy work, often at great personal risk. In His compassion, Jesus ministered to the heart (preaching), the mind (teaching), AND the body (healing).

During the time of the initial lockdown, we were checking in with our neighbors. One lady assured us that she and her son were well, adding the line, “We are just waiting for the world to heal.” We live in a broken world, and physical sickness is part of our fallenness. Today, pray for God to restore physical wellness to the world and to bless the servants assisting in this ordained work. Follow up your prayers by telling these folks that you are interceding for them to the Lord. By sending a text, making a call, or writing a note, you empower your prayer even more.

The most eloquent prayer is the prayer through hands that heal and bless. -
Billy Graham

Day #19 – Prayer Focus – Our Local Partner Ministries

There will always be some in the land who are poor. That is why I am commanding you to share freely with the poor and with other Israelites in need. Deuteronomy 15:11 NLT

Compassion for the disadvantaged is a constant commission to God's people in the scriptures. Therefore, the people touched by God's grace naturally should feel compelled to show grace to others. North Cleveland Baptist is privileged to be in partnerships with numerous faith-based organizations that minister to our neighbors in hardship.

- Cleveland Emergency Shelter provides overnight accommodations for the homeless.
- New Hope Crisis Pregnancy Center serves young ladies through unplanned pregnancies.
- Foundation House helps single mothers transition to permanent housing.
- The Caring Place provides our community's best food bank and clothes closet.
- Family Promise of Bradley County coordinates temporary housing for families in transition, enabling them time to secure a fitting residence.
- The 4 C's program assists disadvantaged students at Cleveland Middle School.

During the pandemic, the demands for services provided by these ministries increases while financial resources become more scarce. We are proud that our congregation's support continues with anticipation for even greater assistance in the months ahead. Take time today to pray for the staff, volunteers, and clients of these ministries.

Look deeper into these ministries, and I promise you will be impressed with what they are doing. As you feel led, you can even contribute to one or more of these good organizations. Many require the assistance of volunteers. And if you want to make a designated financial gift, simply bring it to the church, noting the designated ministry you are contributing to. We will proudly channel it along.

The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.' Matthew 25:40 NIV

Day #20 – Prayer Focus – Workers to Take the Gospel to the Lost

The supreme ambition for every church and for every individual Christian should be to bring somebody to Christ. -George W. Truett

The questions vary. The heartaches differ. The brokenness is diverse. But the answer is the same: JESUS. Time and again, when I note a problem in people, families, and society, I say the same thing: *They need Jesus*. Jesus gives the grace to heal the disease of our sin. He teaches love to restore broken relationships. He advocates charity over hatred and mercy to overcome injustice. He inspires compassion for the sick and impoverished. Our world, our neighborhoods, our families, and our individual lives are far better when people trust Jesus as Savior and follow Him as Lord.

As Christians, we experience the Gospel, the Great News about Jesus that brings healing, enlightenment, purpose, and hope. The plan of salvation through Jesus is the most significant and most unique offering the church has to give to the world. Join in praying for these things:

- Pray that our church will keep the message of the Gospel in the forefront of all we do.
- Pray that we will be aware of the opportunities the Lord gives us to share the Good News.
- Pray that we will utilize effective evangelism methods.
- Pray for people to be aware of their need for spiritual healing.
- Pray for hearts to be open, hearing the truth that Jesus Saves.
- Pray to be a more effective witness for Christ.

Usually, sharing what we possess with another person reduces the amount we have. But sharing Jesus with others does just the opposite. Rather than experiencing Him LESS, we actually GROW in our love for Him when we share Him with others. It is in giving that we receive. It is in pouring out that we are filled.

But in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you, yet do it with gentleness and respect 1 Peter 3:15 ESV.

Day #21 – Prayers Focus – Leadership

As a seminary student in my mid 20's, I was asked to go serve as pastor for a 5-day children's camp sponsored by a local congregation. On Monday, we loaded all the kids up in a school bus in the church parking lot and drove a couple of hours to "Camp Judson." The camp was named after Adoniram Judson, who served 40 years as a pioneer Baptist missionary to Burma in the early 1800s. Reaching Camp Judson took us so far off the main highway, the simple, steep, gravel road reminded me of something constructed in the 1800s.

It was like an all-week Vacation Bible School that included songs, Bible stories, crafts, plus plenty of outdoor recreational activities. However, about mid-week, the minister directing the camp stepped into an armadillo hole and injured his ankle. He toughed it out a couple of days. But when it came time to return, it was too painful for him to push his foot down on the school bus's heavy-duty clutch. So, the driving responsibility suddenly fell to me.

It took serious effort to shift through the gears on the long yellow vehicle and navigate down that winding, rocky road back to the narrow, two-lane highway. When we finally arrived back at the church, I stopped the bus and made this announcement: I HAD NEVER DRIVEN A SCHOOL BUS BEFORE IN MY LIFE! (For the record, I did have a commercial driver's license because of a previous job that required me to drive a passenger van).

My point is that I had to do something I had never done before, and I prayed I would navigate the responsibility well. After all, the safety of a busload of kids was on the line.

Today's leaders are required to do what they have never done before: lead through a pandemic. Our church staff has never navigated a pandemic. Our school administrators have never made decisions through a pandemic. Business leaders have never marketed during a pandemic. Government officials have never served in a pandemic. People's lives are affected by the decisions made. So, we want to get it right. Thank you for your faithful prayers for leaders in the days past. Continue with them into the days ahead.

If any of you does not know how to meet any particular problem, he has only to ask God—who gives generously to all men without making them feel foolish or guilty—and he may be quite sure that the necessary wisdom will be given him. James 1:5 Phillips

Day 22: Prayer Focus- Pray without ceasing

¹⁶ Rejoice always, ¹⁷ pray without ceasing, ¹⁸ give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

Those are big ideas and big shoes to fill. I don't know about you, but I don't always rejoice. It's easy to find things to complain about and to be negative about. But, I'm sure that I'm the only one who does that, right? Pray without ceasing, really? I have a life. I have things to do. I have places to go, I don't have time to sit and pray about everything. "Give thanks in all...." wait, have you seen the state of our world today? There's not a lot to give thanks about. It is easy in our world today to get cynical really quickly. Life is not always easy, and we may have to search for things to give thanks about, but it doesn't change the fact that God is admonishing us to give thanks in everything. It also doesn't change the fact that no matter what is going on in our world that God is still Holy, Sovereign, in control, and deserves our thanks and praise. It's not even for His sake; it is for our own. When we find joy and reasons to give thanks in everything, it changes us and our outlook and perspective. It makes us happier people.

I know that you are probably reading this thinking, wow, that's a little much, or you may be thinking that is exactly how I feel. No matter what side you find yourself in, it is ok, but I would like to share a few truths. When Paul wrote these words, he was not living his best life ever. Paul never had an easy road as God's missionary. He was thrown into prison multiple times. Run out of towns for preaching the gospel. Threatened with death on many occasions. If there was someone who had a reason to have a sour attitude and feel like he had been abandoned, it was Paul. But, he didn't because he relied on the Lord for the source of his joy. He found things to be thankful for. He was doing the Lord's work. His viewpoint changed the rest of his circumstances. With his friend Barnabas, Paul gave thanks and sang in prison, and God shook the foundations of that prison and released them. Prayer, thanksgiving, and Praise are potent weapons. Paul once again encourages us in *Ephesians 6:18*, "*And pray in the spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people.*"

I will encourage you if you are not spending daily time in prayer to change that and make prayer a priority. We don't have to sit and pray all day long, but it is an instruction to keep an open line of communication with the Lord and

take everything to Him in prayer. We can pray about anything at any given time. When it pops into our heads. When someone asks for prayer, we don't have to wait until our "prayer time" to do it. When we are in a crisis and need guidance and help, we can pray right then. Prayer is our direct line of communication with our heavenly father. It will change your day. It will change your perspective. It will change your countenance. Prayer is essential to the Christian life. I would also like to encourage you if you are not praying for revival in your life, in our community, in our nation, please add it to your prayer list. Let's storm Heaven with our praise, thanksgiving, and prayers today.

Day 23: Prayer Focus- Prayer has power

“Therefore, confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayers of a righteous man are powerful and effective.”

James 5:16

“Prayer changes things.” I know that many of us had this statement on a plaque, or it was cross-stitched on a hanging display in our grandmothers’ home, but it’s not a new phrase to us. Prayer has power, and that is why we can say with confidence and certainty that prayer indeed changes things. Prayer is an underutilized weapon in the church today. We wait till everything is falling apart, and then we turn to God and pray. We wait till we have no other options before we call on God. In fact, prayer should be the first place that we turn for wisdom and directions, and connection to the Father. The more we pray, the stronger they are, and the more confidence we feel in being able to come to His throne boldly and with confidence. We have a better, healthier relationship the more time that we spend with our friends and family because we have worked to create a stronger connection. We understand each other better. The more time we spend with God, the stronger our relationship is with Him and the confidence we will feel when we come to Him with our petitions.

We pray in power when we pray in faith. Faith is a key component to having power in prayer. They go hand in hand. Also, in James 5, verse 14, *“Is anyone of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well;”*. Faith and belief are key components to prayer if you are wanting power in your prayer. The more we exercise and build on faith, the easier it is used, and the stronger it is. Let’s pray in faith and pray for the healing of the sick. Let’s pray that God would release His power in us through the Holy Spirit to see the sick healed and lost won to Christ.

Day 24: Prayer Focus- Pray for Freedom in Worship

“Now the Lord is Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.”

2 Corinthians 3:17

"It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery."

Galatians 5:1

Do we really understand and grasp what it means to live in total freedom in Jesus' name? Do we fully understand what these scriptures are telling us about the freedom that we have in Jesus? As Americans, we talk about freedom and being free, but many of us live in bondage to sin. We live in captivity to tradition. We live in bondage to our past, but Jesus whipped all of that out on the cross, so we need to stop making ourselves slaves. He didn't save us for us to live like slaves to our pasts. We are not bound by others' thoughts and opinions, for he is the only judgment that matters. When we stand before Him on the day of judgment, will we be able to honestly say I lived in your freedom? I didn't take on the bonds of slavery again after you freed me. What does freedom in worship look like? In Chronicles, David danced right out of his clothes as the Arc of the covenant was being brought into Jerusalem. He received ridicule and judgment. Saying that he wasn't acting very kingly and making a fool of himself. You see, man's approval can stop us from being and living in freedom in worship, but David didn't let those discouraging words stop him. He says to his critics, *“It was before the Lord, who chose me instead of your father and all his house, to appoint me ruler over the people of the Lord, over Israel. Therefore I will play music before the Lord. ²² And I will be even more undignified than this, and will be humble in my own sight.”* David didn't forget his place. More to the point is he remembered who gave him that place, and that was his God, and he knew that He deserved everything that David had to offer in worship. As you pray today, pray that the spirit of the Lord will come upon you and that you will be free to worship God in Spirit and in Truth as David did. Without the worry of who's watching and what the critics may say because God has chosen you, He has appointed you, and He has called you His own, and for that, he deserves our unhindered praise. Let's pray for freedom in our worship.

Day 25: Prayer Focus- Pray for Revival

"In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my spirit in these days, and they will prophesy... And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

Acts 2:17-18, 21

This is the message that Peter preached that added 3000 to the kingdom on the day of Pentecost. What were the disciples and followers of Jesus doing before this day? They were together praying and fasting and studying the words of scripture and the teachings of Jesus. Acts 1:14 tells us, "*they all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary, the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers.*" They weren't sitting around, hoping that the spirit would come. They didn't sit and complain that Jesus didn't come like they had expected him to come and that he had just left them there. No, they prayed and called out and came together. They joined their hearts in unity and waited and expected to see something happen, and it did. They had to wait about 40 days, but then God sent His gift the Holy Spirit as he had promised, and a great revival started in the land. After the message was done and three thousand new souls were added to the church on one day, they didn't stop there. They weren't satisfied with that one experience and said that was good enough for me. Acts 2:42 tells us, "*They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.*" They continued to do what they did before the outpouring of the Spirit came on the day of Pentecost. Let this become a part of our daily lives. Oh, that we would see another outpouring of the Holy Spirit in our world today and see a great awakening. Let's pray for God's revival to sweep over our nation and us today and each day after. Let's also pray for the lost. Each has friends and family that need to hear the gospel today.

Day 26: Prayer Focus- Prayer is Worship

“Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name.” Hebrews 13:15

In this past 6 months, if there is anything that we have realized, it is that we were made for community. We were created to be in fellowship together. One of those ways that we do that is through our corporate worship times together. But also through our times of corporate prayer together. In our prayer groups that can't meet together and also for our Wednesday night prayer and bible study meeting. We have all missed our times of worship together and look forward to them being back to normal. Yes, we pray as part of our worship time together, but it usually gets put in as a place holder or transition. Prayer is so much more than this. It is worship! The word worship is traditionally used as a word to describe the music portion of our gatherings together, but worship is so much more than just singing. Worship is defined as showing the feeling or expression of reverence and adoration for a deity. Prayer can be worship and should be. Prayer is not just about asking God for things that we want or need. Prayer is not just treating God like a vending machine where we put in our order and wait for it to be delivered. Prayer is also worship because while we are talking to God in prayer, we should also be exhorting Him in praise and thanking Him for his blessings and mercy. In prayer, we should be drawing into Him and becoming closer to our God. Today let's pray for our corporate times of worship together and that we would experience God in His fullness as we sing, pray, and hear the word delivered.

Day 27: Prayer Focus: Pray for our Enemies

"But I say Love your enemies! Pray for those who persecute you! In that way, you will be acting as true children of your Father in Heaven."

Matthew 5:44-45a NLT

This passage comes out of Matthew, where Jesus was teaching the disciples, and He had just shared the beatitudes. He was really teaching and expounding on some of the foundational teachings from Moses's law in Leviticus 19. It is echoed again in the Luke 6:27-28 *"But to you who are willing to listen, I say, love your enemies! Do good to those who hate you. Bless those who curse you. Pray for those who hurt you."* As Jesus begins his teaching here, he reminds us not to just love our neighbors and the people who are friendly to us, because even the pagans do that. He is calling us to a higher calling, and that is to love and pray for our enemies and the people who mistreat us. That is very counter-intuitive to our nature for all of us. Luke even takes it a step further and says when they slap you to turn the other cheek and let them slap that one too. I don't know about you, but my first response when someone is hurting me is not grace and prayer. It is action and reaction. My flesh man rises up, and I want to get my revenge and hurt them back. We see this a lot in our world today in our "me" driven society. How different would our world and community look if we, as followers of Christ, reacted with more grace and less rage? The word love here is the Greek word Agape. One place that I've read defines Agape love like this "This is the love that wishes well. It is a love that demonstrates kindness, benevolence, and esteem. It is the love of the mind, reason, and choice. It is sacrificial love, that is a love that cares, gives, and works for another person's good- no matter how the person may respond or treat you." If we demonstrated more of Agape love's principles, we would see more people being won to the gospel, and we would see a revival in our nation. Let's pray for forgiveness for our reactions and for our enemies today. Let's pray for peace between our enemies and us. Let's pray for their salvation or if they profess to be Christians, for the Lord to soften their hearts and correct their behavior.

Day 28: Prayer Focus- Pray for our Worship Leaders

When Solomon finished praying, fire flashed down from Heaven and burned up the burnt offerings and sacrifices, and the glorious presence of the Lord filled the Temple. The priests could not enter the Temple of the Lord because the glorious presence of the Lord filled it. When all the people of Israel saw fire coming down and the glorious presence of the Lord filling the Temple, they fell face down on the ground and worshiped and praised the Lord, saying, "He is good! His faithful love endures forever!"

2 Chronicles 7:1-3

Each and every week, we pray for the power and the presence of the Lord to show up and to fill the sanctuary as we gather together in worship, and that the Lord would move and work in the hearts and lives of His people. In this passage of scripture, they had been preparing for this moment not just for weeks but for years. Decades if you want to know the truth. The people of Israel began preparing material for this new Temple while David was king. He desperately wanted to build the Temple for the Lord, but God told him no because he had too much blood on his hands, but God promised that his descendant would be able to build the Temple. So, David began gathering materials so that Solomon (his descendant) could build the Temple for the Lord. Then there were the years of building the Temple, and once completion was getting close, the worship leaders spent weeks preparing their music, sacrifices, and prayers for the dedication. It didn't just happen. It took gathering materials, plans, and preparing their hearts for the presence of the Lord. It takes the same for each of us as well. If we want to see God invade our worship services and change us, we will have to do some work and preparation for that to happen.

Pray for your worship leaders as they pour out week in and week out, and as they prepare, they will be refilled by the spirit during their times of personal worship and devotion. Your worship leaders must get filled to be able to continue to encourage and lead others in worship and pouring out in ministry.

Day 29: Prayer Focus: Connectivity

When we meet someone for the first time, things can seem a little strained. But ANY great relationship begins with just learning the basics about the other person. As more time is spent together, we begin to open up about our struggles and experiences and celebrate victories and unforgettable moments. Love and trust are developed as we consistently share our time and energy. Just like any other relationship, we don't establish personal intimacy with the Lord overnight!

But, unlike ANY human relationship, Jesus is a friend that sticks closer than a brother (Prov. 18:24). He truly wants to (and WILL be) your best friend, confidant, counselor, and advisor. He is available 24/7 and never slumbers or sleeps (Psalm 121:1).

Developing a spiritual discipline like prayer is a miracle in itself!! The more time we spend reading His Word and talking with Him through prayer, the closer we feel to Him, and the more we enjoy the time spent together. He promises us that as we draw near to Him, He will draw near to us (James 4:8). We can go to Him at any time, anywhere we are!!!

With all the current events surrounding us, we can quickly feel disconnected from the church or our Sunday School class. Choose one person and begin to pray for him/her. Better yet, contact that person and ask if there is a specific need for which to pray. We will be developing our relationship with our AWESOME God AND tenderizing our hearts to the needs of someone else while strengthening our wonderful church body. May we experience a MIGHTY Move of God through this prayer initiative!!!!

Day 30: Prayer Focus- Seeking God

“May I have your attention, please?” We know when we hear those words, our undivided attention should be given to whatever news is about to follow.

Isn't it AMAZING to fathom that THE GOD of the ENTIRE Universe is **waiting** to give US

HIS UNDIVIDED attention through prayer??!!

Isaiah 65:24 says, “Before they call, I will answer; while they are still speaking, I will hear!”

Zechariah 13:9 says, “They will call on my name, and I will answer them; I will say, They are my people, and they will say, The Lord is our God.”

Psalm 107:28-30.... “Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble, and He delivered them from their distress.” Psalm 10:17...”O, Lord, You have heard the desire of the humble; You will strengthen their heart, You will incline Your ear.”

If your heart is heavy from all that's going on right now, lift your eyes and ponder the Greatness of our Mighty God!!! Begin by praising Him for who He is (Creator of the Universe, Lover of Your Soul, Redeemer, Mighty Sustainer, Provider, Healer) and thanking Him for all the blessings He has given you (health, family, job, home, freedoms in this country, church, talents, abilities). Then, humbly pour out your heart's concerns for others and your need for repentance, wisdom, and direction.

As we seek the Lord, He promises He will be found (1 Chronicles 28:9), and He rewards those who diligently seek Him (Hebrews 11:6). Let's approach these last few days of our prayer journey with joy and expectancy, believing God for miraculous interventions!!!

Day 31: Prayer Focus – Parents

I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth. 3 John 1:4

Parenting is not for the faint of heart. New parents are excited about helping their child learn ABC's, numbers, animal sounds, etc. in the early years. However, late elementary through high school can be overwhelming for parents. Each passing day seems to bring with it more responsibilities that parents may not feel inadequate taking on. Households are being bombarded with things that parents need to filter to ensure their children's physical and spiritual safety.

- ✓ Pray for our parents with young children that they are teaching their children and laying that foundation so that their little ones will come to know Christ early.
- ✓ Pray for parents of upper elementary and middle school students that they will continue to use every moment to continue to teach their children in the ways of the Lord.
- ✓ Pray for those high school parents who are beginning to let up on the reins and allow their children to have more independence. Pray that their children will rely on all that they have been taught at home and church, so they can strong for Christ in life's storms and walk with Him daily.

⁵Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. ⁶These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. ⁷Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. ⁸Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. ⁹Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.

Deuteronomy 6:5-9

Day 32: Prayer Focus – Preschool and Children

All children are gifts from God and grow up to become the church of tomorrow. It is during these very formative years that children are introduced to Jesus and are more likely to accept and follow Him as their Lord and Savior. Please pray today for our children and their families. Pray for parents as they teach about Jesus and live out their faith in front of their children each day. Pray for the children as they learn, grow, and come to the age of accountability to follow our risen Savior. Pray for healthy family units that love, support, cherish each other, and put God above all. Keep in prayer the children who may not have this type of Christian family influence on their lives, and that God sends a loving, Christian adult to model this for them and pour into their lives.

*“Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord,
The fruit of the womb is a reward.”*

Psalm 127:3

Day 33: Prayer Focus – Teachers and Leaders of Children and Youth

A parent is a child's first and most important teacher. While this is definitely true, God gave us extended families, friends, and the church to also love, teach, and help guide our children and youth. We are truly blessed with a church family who values young people and sees the importance of teaching and guiding them toward a relationship with Jesus Christ. In our world today, we as teachers and leaders must be focused on creating lifelong, resilient disciples who have both spine and heart. They need spine to follow and defend the Bible while having a heart of love for others and a desire to spread the gospel of Jesus to a lost world. Pray for those who teach and lead in our children and youth ministry areas. Pray that our teachers and leaders are modeling proper Christian behaviors and directing our young people to read the Bible and live by God's word.

*“Train up a child in the way he should go, and when
he is old he will not depart from it.”*

Proverbs 22:6

Day 34: Prayer Focus – NCBC Child Development Center

Today as you enter into your time of prayer, please remember our Child Development Center. This ministry provides quality, loving childcare for working families who rely upon the staff each day, all year long. The weekday childcare ministry is an extension of our church, and we, as a church family, can offer much help and support to the staff and families that are serviced each day. Pray for Ms. Liz Wells as she leads and directs the teachers and children and provides a warm, caring atmosphere. Please pray for the teachers, staff, cook, custodian, and all involved with the loving care and education of these precious children. Remember the children and their families and pray that our church uses every opportunity to reach out and minister to them.

*Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me,
and do not hinder them,
for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these."
Matthew 19:14*

Day 35: Prayer Focus – Big City University

Each Monday-Thursday during the regular school year and following the Bradley County Schools calendar, approximately 180, or more, elementary-age students are bused to our church campus to participate in a wonderful afterschool program called Big City University. This marks the seventeenth year BCU has been in existence, the third year at NCBC, and they serve children from each of Bradley County's elementary schools. Mrs. Stephanie Reffner leads a dedicated, loving staff in providing homework help, enrichment programs, movement and exercise, and afternoon snacks for children whose parents need quality afterschool childcare. Please be in prayer for BCU as they teach and care for these children. Pray for Mrs. Stephanie as she leads, and each worker as they teach. Most of them are college students who balance their own class schedules with their work at BCU.

We are truly blessed as a church to have all these children in our building regularly. We have a mission field right here on our church campus, so pray that we don't miss any opportunity to minister to the teachers, the students, and families.

*“In the same way, let your light shine before others,
that they may see your good deeds and
glorify your Father in Heaven.”*

Matthew 5:16

Day 36: Prayer Focus – Schools: Staff, Students, and Families

The start of a new school year is always an exciting time. However, nothing was normal about the beginning of this school year. We began with such fear and so many uncertainties, it was hard to be excited. Families were having to make many choices in which none of the options seemed to hold the right answers. Of course, we know that God has been faithful through this challenging time and will continue to be faithful as the school year progresses. Today, please pray specifically for our schools: the administration, staff, students, and families. Remember the administration as they continue to make academic decisions while providing a safe environment amid ever-changing information. Remember the teachers, support staff, cooks, janitors, bus drivers, and all involved as they interact with the students daily. Pray for their safety and health as they strive to provide a positive atmosphere for learning in traditional and non-traditional ways. Pray for the students and families who are both learning in buildings and at home. We pray for peace, health, rest, and strength for a successful school year.

*“The Lord gives strength to his people;
the Lord blesses his people with peace.”*

Psalm 29:11

Day 37: Prayer Focus- Senior Adults:

As we move closer to our senior years, we often fear the changes and years ahead. It is easy to look behind us and think of the health and strength we once had while fearing the future and the limitations ahead. As younger people, we tend to dismiss our parents when they express such fears until facing some of those same challenges ourselves. We begin to lose parents, friends, and for many of us, spouses.

I have often said that it is easy to have faith until we face life issues that leave us totally dependent on God and the scripture verses we learned when we are younger. Having taught Bible Drill, I am often reminded of verses that speak to my need even when I am too “low” to look up scripture.

No matter what your circumstances, your pain, or your sadness, God has the answers. We cannot change what is ahead for us or stop the aging process, but we can live each day to the fullest without fear of the future.

Psalms 56:3 “When I am afraid, I will trust in you,” reminds me not to fear the future, even when it looks very fearful. Psalms 46:1 “God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble,” tells us where to find our strength. 2 Thessalonians 3:16 “Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times and in every way. The Lord be with all of you,” reminds me where to find my comfort. 2 Corinthians 4:16 “Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day.”

As you pray today, pray for the senior adults in your circle. Find a way to reach out to those that are hurting from pain and loss. May you bring the comfort God calls us to share.

Day 38: Prayer Focus- Church Staff

Today as we go to the Lord in prayer, let us remember each of our church staff members at North Cleveland Baptist Church. God tells us that it takes everyone using our gifts to work together to best serve the Kingdom. Each staff member has a unique set of skills, abilities, and viewpoints. The differences that our staff has separately create a broader perspective when all are working together as one. This is a microcosm of the church! We all bring different traits, strengths, and viewpoints to our church, but when used together well, it creates something beautiful! But sometimes, working together can be a challenge, and as church members, we often forget that the staff has to work through those differences and personalities in an attempt to filter everything through the lens of God's Word. Once ideas are filtered through, the discovery should be God's will for the given situation.

As you pray for the staff, please pray for cohesiveness within the group and the ability to convey what the Lord lays on each heart. Pray for them individually, by name and position from caretaker to Daycare workers, office support, ministerial staff and musicians, camera, and computer operators.

"Two people are better off than one, for they can help each other succeed. If one person falls, the other can reach out and help. But someone who falls alone is in real trouble. Likewise, two people lying close together can keep each other warm. But how can one be warm alone? A person standing alone can be attacked and defeated, but two can stand back-to-back and conquer. Three are even better, for a triple-braided cord is not easily broken."

-Ecclesiastes 4:9-12

Day 39: Prayer Focus- A House of Prayer

"The Scriptures declare, 'My Temple will be called a house of prayer,'"

Matthew 21:13

I will bring them to my holy mountain of Jerusalem and will fill them with joy in my house of prayer. I will accept their burnt offerings and sacrifices, because my Temple will be called a house of prayer for all nations. Isaiah 56:7

These words were spoken to the people of Israel through the prophet Isaiah, and then Jesus quoted these words on the day of His triumphal entry into Jerusalem as He went into the Temple and turned over the money changers tables. To give you a picture of how the temple was set up, it was divided into three sections. The Outer Courts, where everyone came and prayed, brought their offerings and sacrifices. The second section was called the Holy Place. This section was reserved for the priests, and in this section of the temple is where the altar was, and where the sacrifices were made. The last section was inside the Holy Place called the Holy of Holies, and this is where the Arc of the Covenant resided. The Arc was where the presence of the Lord sat. Only once a year could one priest enter the Holy of Holies to offer a sacrifice before the Lord. In the Jewish tradition, the sacrifice was of utmost importance, and they would go to atone for their sins and give offerings unto the Lord. But I find it interesting that in Isaiah and then repeated by Jesus, they didn't say that it was a house of sacrifice or offering but that it was called a house of prayer. Not only was it to be a house of prayer for the Jewish people, but for all nations. Even though offering sacrifices were important, it sounds like God's focus is on prayer. On communing with His children, prayer is how we talk to God and spend time with Him. How we express our needs and concerns, but also our praises and victories and thanksgiving to Him. If you think back to the beginning when God created the world, what does Genesis tell us about God's relationship with man? God formed Adam and Eve. He communicated with them, and evidence would show that He walked with them in the garden. He desires to commune with us. He wants closeness with His people, and we accomplish that through prayer. Prayer and communion with God are important. Prayer was important enough that Jesus spent time teaching the disciples how to pray. Today, for our prayer focus, let us pray that God would stir the hearts of His people, we find the importance in prayer and that His house would become a house of worship and communion with our Father.

Day 40: Prayer Focus- The Lost

This is good and pleases God our Savior, who wants everyone to be saved and to understand the truth. For there is only one God and one Mediator who can reconcile God and humanity- the man Christ Jesus". -1 Timothy 2:4-5

We have lots of information today, so much so that this time period has been called the "information age." We have the internet, which we call the information superhighway". We no longer need encyclopedias that are very quickly out of date, because we have the latest information right at the tip of our fingers- our smartphones! Information certainly abounds!

Despite having all of this information so available, the most essential information we have and will ever have is in our Bibles. This is the fact that we are all sinners, and Christ died for us. He took our sin and shame upon himself and took the punishment we all deserved, which was death. But it doesn't stop there! On the third day, Jesus came up out of that tomb to defeat death, hell, and the grave! Because of all of this, if I accept Christ as my Lord and Savior, ask Him to forgive me of my sins, I WILL be saved from my sins and the consequences of them. I get to experience abundant life here on Earth and one day live with Him forever in Heaven! Halleluiah! We call it The Gospel Message, and it is summed up in 4 words: JESUS IN MY PLACE!

I'm going to make an assumption that I probably shouldn't make: If you have made it to Day 40 of this prayer guide, you probably already knew all that and have had Jesus as your Lord for a while now. Therefore, this day of prayer is not about you, although you are needed to pray. It's about those BILLIONS of people around the world that don't know Jesus as their Savior. It's for the people that have rejected Him and for those who have never heard the Good News of the Gospel. The Bible tells us that God desires for ALL people to know him and Christ as Lord, but we also know that God granted humanity freewill. With free will comes the option to reject Jesus as Lord and go against God's desire for humanity. Today, in our final day of prayer together, let us focus on the following prayer points:

- (1) Pray that ALL would come to know Christ as Savior.
- (2) Pray that people would be open to hearing the Gospel.
- (3) Pray that ALL people groups of the world would gain access to the Gospel.
- (4) Pray that God would use NCBC and its people to get the Message to the lost.