



SEASONS

PRAYER

*Pray then like this:
Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name.
Your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread,
and forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.*

MATTHEW 6:9-13

*Rejoice always,
pray without ceasing,
give thanks in all circumstances;
for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.
Do not quench the Spirit.
Do not despise prophecies, but test everything;
hold fast what is good.
Abstain from every form of evil.*

1 THESSALONIANS 5:16-22

*Humble yourselves, therefore,
under the mighty hand of God
so that at the proper time he may exalt you,
casting all your anxieties on him,
because he cares for you.*

1 PETER 5:6-7

INTRODUCTION TO THE SEASONS

Seasons have distinct feelings and distinguishing characteristics. We can know with relative certainty the time of year by simply feeling, smelling, tasting, hearing and seeing the fresh cut grass, shortened days, icy roads, Christmas carols, homemade ice cream and budding flowers. Each season is uniquely marked by shared experiences and traditions.

As the seasons change, the passing of time is evident. The changing leaves of autumn fall and are swept away to the chill of winter, which in turn gives way to spring, which eventually and surely gives birth to the blazing heat of summer. The cycle begins again. The sun rises and sets, and seasons come and go.

Like there are particular seasons in nature, there are also particular seasons in the life of the Church. Seasons at The Village is an attempt to enter into these historical traditions and experience their distinct sights and sounds. As we do so, we enter into tradition and the historic shared experiences of the Church of Jesus Christ, awaiting His return in glory.

The three primary seasons we celebrate are Advent, Prayer Month and Lent. The anxious anticipation of Advent gives way to the hopeful response of God's people in prayer and eventually to a sustained season of reflection upon the cross and resurrection of our Lord. During these seasons, we hope to leverage the opportunity we have to disengage from noise and distraction in our lives to corporately and individually engage the Lord, each other and the world.

THE SEASON OF PRAYER

Prayer has been called “the breath of the Christian.” As a body cannot live long without oxygen, so a child of God cannot thrive without communion with the Father. Without prayer, we grow sluggish, self-centered, lazy and apathetic.

January is a month of renewed interest in prayer at The Village. It is a time for us to replenish our passion for God and His word, the church, the lost, needy and broken. It is a time to reconsider our responsibilities and opportunities to engage the world with the good news of the glorious triune God Who has loved and lavishes grace upon us. The season of Prayer is our opportunity to repent of past prayerlessness and to turn again in humility to our Father, Who delights in hearing and responding to our requests.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

This guide is intended to lead us through weekly prayer topics for the month of January. Each weekend the sermon will introduce a particular topic for prayer, and the topic will be further expounded in this guide. Additionally, we will corporately respond to each week's topic at Elder-led Prayer.

Throughout January, we will host weekly prayer services according to the schedule below:

Week 1: A Call to Pray

January 4: Elder-led Prayer at Bent Tree Bible Church
(all campuses together)

Week 2: Racial Reconciliation

January 11: Elder-led Prayer at each campus

Week 3: The Nations

January 18: Elder-led Prayer at each campus

Week 4: Sanctity of Life

January 25: Elder-led Prayer at each campus

Week 5: Now What?

February 1: Elder-led Prayer at each campus

You are encouraged to listen to the weekend sermon on the topic, read through the provided material on the topic and begin to pray individually, as a family and with friends. The church will then gather corporately each Wednesday to engage the Lord together. Each day of the week, the hope is that you would continue to dwell upon and pray about the topic at hand. As you do so, it will hopefully create a clearer rhythm in your life and a greater awareness of the greatness and majesty of our good and gracious Father.

As we begin to corporately consider the opportunity and responsibility, the delight, duty and discipline of prayer, let us allow this sustained emphasis on prayer to encourage us to examine our hearts. Ask yourself the following questions over the next few weeks:

- 1. *How is your prayer life?***
- 2. *Is your prayer life marked more by duty or delight?***
- 3. *Is your approach to the Lord one of grateful communion or mere rigid formality?***
- 4. *Why don't you pray more consistently, earnestly, passionately and expectantly?***
- 5. *What steps can and will you take to be more prayerful in this next year?***

/PRAYER

A Call to Pray

→ WEEK 1: JANUARY 1-7

For this reason, because I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might that he worked in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

Ephesians 1:15–23

For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

Ephesians 3:14–21

/ REFLECTION

As we enter into this season of prayer, let us consider these two prayers of Paul. Notice how the prayers are so spacious and spectacular. He is not praying primarily for a new job, better sleep, counsel regarding stress at work, the perfect parking spot, etc. Now, such prayers are good and commendable, but they are not what we need most. Paul petitioned the Lord to draw the hearts of the beloved to Himself, to expand our vision, to increase our affections.

In both prayers, the apostle asks for understanding for the people he shepherds. He wants them to know the hope of the gospel, the inheritance of the saints through the gospel, the power of God in the gospel and the grandeur of Christ's love displayed in the gospel. Paul's greatest concern is for the people of God to understand, know and comprehend the gospel of Jesus Christ.

More than anything else, we need the gospel of Jesus Christ. The life, death, resurrection and future return of Christ is our greatest good and treasure. It influences how we give, think, study, play, work, rest, eat and drink. We never outgrow it. We never graduate from it.

The knowledge of the gospel is not merely cognitive but indeed pierces into the very hearts of the people of God so that our love for Christ expands and grows as we come to know Him more fully. Being rooted and grounded in love, we come to understand this love lavished upon us in Christ, and so our capacity to receive and extend that love expands.

As you pray this week, ask yourself the following questions:

- Are you passionate for prayer? If not, why?

- Do you ever pray such spacious prayers or all your prayers consistently small and safe?
- When you pray for yourself, your family and your friends, do you pray explicitly to understand and embrace the gospel or for temporary comfort and happiness?

/ RESPONSE

- Confess and repent of any indifference to and neglect of the gift of prayer.
- Praise God for allowing us access to Himself through His Son and for loving to hear and answer our prayers. Meditate on some of the promises of God and pray those back to Him.
- Spend some time praying prayers similar to those of Paul. Pray for your own heart, the hearts of your family and friends, The Village and the Church universal – that we might:
 - *Be granted a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Christ*
 - *Be granted eyes which are enlightened through the work of the Holy Spirit*
 - *Be granted the knowledge of our hope and His glorious inheritance and immeasurably great power in the gospel*
 - *Be strengthened with power through the Spirit within us*
 - *Be rooted and grounded in love*
 - *Be strengthened to comprehend the length, breadth, width and depth of the gospel*
 - *Be granted the knowledge of the love of Christ which surpasses all understanding*
 - *Be filled with all the fullness of God*

/PRAYER

Racial Reconciliation

→ WEEK 2: JANUARY 8-14

Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called “the uncircumcision” by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands— remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. 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. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

Ephesians 2:11–22

/ REFLECTION

In these verses, Paul mentions a “dividing wall of hostility” which once separated two peoples. All people were categorized into one of two groups, Jews and Gentiles. To be a Jew was to be circumcised and clean. To be a Gentile was to be uncircumcised and unclean.

In the gospel, this wall, which was erected by the Mosaic Law, has forever been broken down. There is now no longer an essential distinction between ethnic groups and races (see also Galatians 3:28 and Colossians 3:11). In Christ, all are one body and have access to one Father through one Spirit. Christ Himself “is our peace.”

The racial walls that exist in American churches today are not typically those between Jews and Gentiles, but rather between blacks and whites, citizens and immigrants, English speakers and Spanish speakers, etc. All who are in Christ are our brothers and sisters regardless of skin tone or spoken tongue. If the wall between Jews and Gentiles – a wall originally established by God Himself – was broken down, what does that mean for the walls that we have built? If the hostility between Jews and Gentiles was crucified at the cross, what right do we have to maintain enmity and treat other races as enemies?

Those reconciled to Christ have been called into a ministry of peacemaking (2 Corinthians 5:11-21). We carry a banner of reconciliation as we implore the world to be reconciled first to God and second to each other. Racial reconciliation is not optional but instead an essential implication of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Racial walls are founded upon pride – both individual and collective.

The peoples boast in their unique distinctives rather than in the unifying message of Christ crucified and raised to create one new nation of all colors and cultures. Will we be humble enough to pursue God's desire for racial reconciliation?

As you pray for racial reconciliation this week, ask yourself the following questions:

- Are you passionate for the work of racial reconciliation? If not, why?
- What walls of pride and prejudice have you built or perhaps inherited from various elements of your culture?
- What are the implications of this passage for how you view those of different ethnicities, races and languages?

/ **RESPONSE**

- Confess and repent of any pride and indifference to the injustices and oppression leading to racial discord.
- Praise God that He has broken down the dividing wall and has called all races to Himself in Christ. Consider the fact that you, too, were once a foreigner, alien, stranger and outcast to the promises of God and that He reconciled you purely by grace.
- Pray for a spirit of peace and love toward all races, tribes and tongues.
- Pray for opportunities to engage as a minister of reconciliation and for courage to do so when opportunities arise.

/PRAYER

The Nations

→ WEEK 3: JANUARY 15-21

Oh sing to the LORD a new song; sing to the LORD, all the earth! Sing to the LORD, bless his name; tell of his salvation from day to day. Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous works among all the peoples! For great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised; he is to be feared above all gods. For all the gods of the peoples are worthless idols, but the LORD made the heavens. Splendor and majesty are before him; strength and beauty are in his sanctuary. Ascribe to the LORD, O families of the peoples, ascribe to the LORD glory and strength! Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; bring an offering, and come into his courts! Worship the LORD in the splendor of holiness; tremble before him, all the earth! Say among the nations, "The LORD reigns! Yes, the world is established; it shall never be moved; he will judge the peoples with equity." Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice; let the sea roar, and all that fills it; let the field exult, and everything in it! Then shall all the trees of the forest sing for joy before the LORD, for he comes, for he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness, and the peoples in his faithfulness.

Psalm 96

/ REFLECTION

Psalm 96 is about the glory of the LORD. It is about singing to Him, blessing Him, telling of Him, declaring Who He is and what He has done, praising and fearing Him, ascribing to Him those attributes which are true of Him, worshipping Him and trembling before Him. This is the proper response of all creation. We are to rejoice in our great God.

The Psalm tells us to “declare His glory among the nations, His marvelous works among all the peoples!” Elsewhere we read of making “disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:19). This will surely be accomplished as we read of “a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb...” (Revelation 7:9).

God is passionate for His glory and intends for it to be displayed among all nations, tongues, tribes and peoples. This was always His desire as even the first promise to Abraham included the assurance that in him “all the nations of the earth shall be blessed” (Genesis 12:3). God’s glory will be spread over the entire earth, and all nations will see it.

As the Church, we have the opportunity and responsibility to enter into the mission of God by declaring His glory to the nations. We do so primarily through the proclamation of the gospel but also, as a consequence of the gospel, by our good works toward the nations. World hunger, sexual slavery, and injustice and oppression of every kind are not merely the problems of others. As those reconciled to God through Christ, we have an opportunity to extend the grace of God and push back the darkness of the world as ambassadors of righteousness.

As you pray for the nations this week, ask yourself the following questions:

- Are you passionate for the glory of God to be declared among the nations? If not, why?
- Is any failure on your part to care for the nations related to a failure to love those of other tribes and tongues?
- Are you concerned about the injustice and oppression evident in the world? If not, why?

/ **RESPONSE**

- Confess and repent of any indifference to the injustice and oppression among the nations.
- Praise God that He is pleased to display the glory of the gospel among the nations.
- Spend some time praying for direction and guidance from the Lord in how you can minister to the nations.
- Choose a particular people group or nation this week and commit yourself to praying daily for them.

/PRAYER

Sanctity of Life

→ WEEK 4: JANUARY 22-28

TO THE CHOIRMASTER. A PSALM OF DAVID. O LORD, you have searched me and known me! You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from afar. You search out my path and my lying down and are acquainted with all my ways. Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, O LORD, you know it altogether. You hem me in, behind and before, and lay your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high; I cannot attain it. Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence? If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there! If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me. If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light about me be night," even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is bright as the day, for darkness is as light with you. For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well. My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them. How precious to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them! If I would count them, they are more than the sand. I awake, and I am still with you. Oh that you would slay the wicked, O God! O men of blood, depart from me! They speak against you with malicious intent; your enemies take your name in vain! Do I not hate those who hate you, O LORD? And do I not loathe those who rise up against you? I hate them with complete hatred; I count them my enemies. Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!

Psalm 139

/ REFLECTION

The Bible speaks of God's creative activity not as some cosmic assembly line but, rather, as the work of a skilled and loving craftsman. Distinct from the rest of creation, the personal attention of the Creator (Genesis 2:7) is emphasized in the formation of mankind. Consider the words used to describe how God creates man within this Psalm. The Psalmist knows that God has formed, knitted, made and woven him together. We are called His workmanship, the artistry of a heavenly poet (Ephesians 2:10) created to display His splendor (Isaiah 43:6-7).

Man is made in the image of God (Genesis 1:27). Because of that, all human life is precious to Him, and He alone has the ultimate right to take it. The relationship between the image of God and the prohibition against murder is made explicit in the Scriptures (Genesis 9:6) even after the Fall when the image was marred by the diverse effects of sin. The destruction of human life is immoral and sinful.

Genocide, homicide, infanticide and other expressions of murder are tragic and sinful demonstrations of pride and hatred. Abortion, suicide and various forms of euthanasia are all sinful precisely because our Creator alone has the ultimate right to give and take life. Arguments which justify such actions on the basis of the exaltation of personal choice, racial superiority or anything else ultimately fall short.

Man was created in the image of His Creator; therefore, life is to be cherished and celebrated as a good gift from a good God.

As you pray about the sanctity of human life this week, ask yourself the following questions:

- Are you passionate for the preservation of human life? If not, why?
- What opportunities do you have to champion the preservation of human life?

/ **RESPONSE**

- Confess and repent of any indifference to the injustice and oppression that condones the destruction of human life.
- Praise God for His wonderful and personal gift of life.
- Pray for the unborn, starved and persecuted.
- Pray for a global awakening to systemic injustice and oppression that champions the destruction of human life.

/ NOW WHAT?

→ WEEK 5: JANUARY 29 - FEBRUARY 4

With the renewed emphasis on these topics, we might ask ourselves “what’s next?” Below are a few thoughts on how you might begin to grow in each of the areas that we have covered over the past month of prayer.

PRAYER

Get Informed

Check out recommended resources for prayer available at www.thevillagechurch.net/the-village-blog/resources-on-prayer/

Get Involved

In order to pursue a greater rhythm and awareness, you must create space into your life. Just as no one simply stumbles into holiness, it is unlikely that you will simply stumble into a consistent and delightful prayer life. Below are some helpful hints for growing in this area:

Tips for Prayer:

1. Pray Scripture back to God. Take a passage and simply pray through it.
2. Find a particular time and place that is consistently available for you to pray.
3. Experiment with different postures: sitting down, laying prostrate, kneeling, standing with arms raised, etc.
4. Make sure you include time for grateful praise and silent listening in addition to your requests.

5. Read through all the prayers of Scripture to see how our brothers and sisters in the faith approached the Lord.
6. Dwell upon the glory of God and, in particular, the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

RACIAL RECONCILIATION

Get Informed

1. Read "Bloodlines" by John Piper.
2. Take a college course on a different language or culture.

Get Involved

1. Volunteer in community outreach programs.
2. Go out of your way to act as an ambassador of reconciliation in your workplace, neighborhood, social engagements, etc.
3. Visit a church or ministry serving other races and cultures.

THE NATIONS

Get Informed

1. Read "Let the Nations be Glad" by John Piper.
2. Check out www.operationworld.com for information and prayer needs for every country in the world.

Get Involved

1. Take a mission trip.
2. Support an international missionary or mission.
3. Sponsor a child (Compassion International and Naomi's Village are two options).

SANCTITY OF LIFE

Get Informed

Check out the various resources available at www.abort73.com, www.love146.org and www.ijm.org.

Get Involved

1. Volunteer at a local health clinic or a pregnancy advocacy center.
2. Consider foster care or adoption. For more information, check out the Foster Care and Adoption Ministry (FAM) at The Village.



©2012 The Village Church. All Rights Reserved.
THEVILLAGECHURCH.NET