

the way
FORWARD
DEVOTIONALS

Written By: *Our Century Baptist Church Family*



Devotionals available online at centurybaptist.org/the-way-forward/

the way **FORWARD** **DEVOTIONALS**

About the Devotionals:

The Way Forward is a five-week series preparing us for and moving us toward our Sacred Assembly on September 20, 2026. A Sacred Assembly is not simply a special service or a church event. It is a gathered moment before God where His people slow down, reflect honestly, confess humbly, receive His forgiveness, and turn together toward His ways. The tone of this series is not condemnation, but invitation. We are moving toward repentance, but repentance rooted in hope — the hope that the Father receives returning children, the Spirit reveals what needs healing, and Jesus leads His church into renewal.

Throughout this series, we will consider the pathway God often uses to restore His people: joy, unity, reflection, repentance, and sacred assembly. We will ask where we have drifted from the Father, where our unity has weakened, where our hearts need honest reflection, and where godly sorrow must lead to real repentance. The goal is not shame, but restored communion with God and one another. We are asking the Lord to prepare CBC not merely for a service, but for a holy encounter that helps us move forward together in humility, forgiveness, renewed mission, and joy.



ESV used for scripture references



Devotionals available online at centurybaptist.org/the-way-forward/

Wanting the Gift Without the Giver

Monday, August 17, 2026

Dave Young

Essential Truth: *Self-rule begins when we want the Father's gifts without the Father's presence.*

Scripture: Luke 15: 11-12

11 And he said, "There was a man who had two sons. 12 And the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me.' And he divided his property between them.

Observations:

- Jesus begins the parable by locating the younger son within a family: "There was a man who had two sons."
- The younger son asks for the father's property, but not the father's presence.
- His request treats the father more like a resource to be used than a relationship to be cherished.
- The father allows the son to receive what he asks for, even though the request is dishonoring.
- The son's self-rule begins before he leaves home; it begins in the heart that says, "Give me what is mine."
- The deeper issue is not only rebellion, but relational distance from the father.

Application: Self-rule often begins quietly. It may not start with obvious rebellion, but with a heart that wants God's gifts without God Himself. We want provision, comfort, control, blessing, success, ministry fruit, restored relationships, or answered prayers — but we may not always want the Father's presence, authority, correction, or love.

The younger son reminds us that sin's deeper problem is distance. We can be near religious activity and still far from the Father in our desires. As we move toward Sacred Assembly, we are invited to ask: Where have we wanted what God gives more than God Himself? Where have we treated His blessings as possessions to manage rather than gifts that draw us back to Him? The way forward begins by returning to the Father, not merely trying to fix our behavior.

Prayer: *Father, forgive us for the ways we have wanted Your gifts without wanting You. Forgive us for treating Your blessings as things we can control, consume, or use for ourselves. Show us where self-rule has taken root in our hearts. Lead us out of distance and back into communion with You. Teach us to desire Your presence more than Your provision, Your love more than our comfort, and Your will more than our own way. Draw us home to You with humility, honesty, and joy. In Jesus' name. Amen.*



The Far Country

Tuesday, August 18, 2026

Derek Kost

Essential Truth: *Sin promises freedom but leads us to distance, isolation, and hunger.*

Scripture: Luke 15:13-16

“¹³Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took a journey into a far country, and there he squandered his property in reckless living. ¹⁴And when he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in that country, and he began to be in need. ¹⁵So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs. ¹⁶And he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate, and no one gave him anything.”

Observations:

- The younger son leaves a life of blessing under his father's provision to seek out new desires for himself.
- He takes all he has with him but does not value these things as he squanders it all away in careless fashion.
- When hard times arrive, he finds his needs are no longer met as he relies on himself and has nobody around him that cares for him.
- He becomes willing to take a lowly job tending to pigs, which were considered unclean animals in his own culture, and was even envious of what little they had.
- Being alone to examine his own heart and circumstances may have opened his eyes to his self-absorbed reality.

Application:

The younger son followed the desires of his own heart, separating himself from his father, which led to an isolated life of deprivation. In a field all alone, he seemed to realize how he had surrounded himself with unholy living and had become willing to indulge in that same lifestyle. His heart was far removed from what his father had desired for him.

When we step out of the noise of our own life and listen intently to what God may have to say about our true focus on this earth, what comes to light in us? What desires do we see in our own hearts during honest reflection that draws us towards self-seeking and further away from the Father?

Prayer:

Lord, may our hearts be softened so that we can be honest with ourselves about what we put ahead of you. May we humble ourselves and live content with what you have given us and with faith that you will always provide more than enough. Amen.



Wednesday, August 19, 2026
Will MacDonald

Essential Truth: *Repentance begins when we stop hiding and turn back toward the Father.*

Scripture: Luke 15:17-20a

¹⁷ “But when he came to himself, he said, ‘How many of my father's hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger! ¹⁸ I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. ¹⁹ I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants.”’ ²⁰ And he arose and came to his father.

Observations:

- The son came to a clear place of self-awareness. In the past his vision was clouded by selfishness, entitlement, greed and pride but his time in self-inflicted destitution and hunger brought him to his senses.
- He began to remember what life was like back at his home with his family and father and contrasted it with his current situation. Even his father's servants had plenty to eat in contrast with the starvation he was now facing.
- The son changed his course. He realized how deluded his thinking had been and he was ashamed of his actions which had brought him to his current situation. He admitted his sin before his father and before God. The son had come to a place of true repentance.
- Completely broken, the son no longer felt worthy to be called the father's son. He would be happy just to be one of the hired servants and alleviate his destitution.
- Reversing course, the son returned to his father

Application: Self-evaluation is not something that we as human beings are naturally very good at. Others can see things in us very clearly that we are completely unable to see in ourselves. Pride leads to rationalization which seems to lead to delusion. What does it take for us to see ourselves clearly? What does it take for clarity to overcome the underlying pride and bring us to a place of repentance? It may come through intense suffering like that experienced by the the son in the parable or it may come from God speaking to us through his Word. No matter how it comes, it will require submitting to the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

Prayer: *Father, search me and know my heart. Convict me of sin that lurks there in the deep recesses. By the power of your Spirit, overcome my pride and enable me to see my sin for what it is. Give me the humility and courage to honestly repent before you. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.*



Thursday, August 20, 2026

Vaughn Rhodes

Essential Truth: *The Father meets returning sinners with compassion before they can finish their speech.*

Scripture: Luke 15:20b-21

“But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.

²¹“The son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’

Observations:

- Jesus tells the parable of the Prodigal Son in response to the religious ‘elite’s’ criticism of His practice of eating and gathering with lowest of society, tax collectors and sinners.
- There are three main characters in this parable. First there is the father, who represents God. The youngest son, who represents those who are sinners. Then finally there is the oldest son, who represents the ‘religious elite’.
- The youngest sought the things of this earth. When this young man is at his lowest point, he could finally see how wonderful it was to be even the lowest part of the father’s house.
- While the youngest son is out living in the world and partaking in all it has to offer, the father longs for his lost son to return to him.
- When the father ‘sees’ his son, he does not wait for the son to come to him, he goes to his child. Not a dignified walk, but out of true love for his returning son, he runs and lovingly embraces the repentant son.

Application:

This is the same desire God has for all his children ensnared in desire for the things of this world. Jesus did not seek the approval of this world. Jesus “ran” after the those devoured by earthly wants, to show them the forgiving love of his Father. The Lord above all things, that wants all to accept salvation. As Christians we have repented of sins and the Most High God has forgiven us. He has embraced us back to our intended created position with Him. Jesus instructed to seek out the lost. Those who have strayed from the Father’s House. Run and lead others to eternal embrace found through our Savior Jesus Christ!

Prayer: *Father you are an amazing God, filled with love for your creation. You are redemption. All we need to do is turn back to You. Through Jesus there is salvation. So may we let you run to us with open arms. May our thankfulness of you embrace be renew each day and overwhelm us with the desire to pull others out of the darkness and into the house You have built for us. Let us not see their past, but the new brother or sister standing before us. Amen.*



Friday August 21, 2026
Nathan Seibel

Essential Truth: *The Father is always able and willing to restore His children.*

Scripture: Luke 15:22-24

But the father said to his servants, 'Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet.' ²³ And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate. ²⁴ For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.' And they began to celebrate.

Observations:

- The father has already sacrificed so much in the giving of wealth to the son who spent it all, and still he wants to bring the best things for his wayward son.
- The level of rejoicing for the father is as if his son has come back to life from the dead!
- There is no lecture or disappointment talk, just relief – joy – celebration.

Application:

It is interesting how your age affects how you look at a story like this. As a young boy going to SS, this was one of those Bible stories that I learned well. And as a boy I naturally put myself in the spot of the son. I imagined if I had done all that the son did in the story, just like the son I would wonder..."how would my father ever forgive me?" Now as an adult and a father to three sons, I naturally put myself more into the father role. And as I imagine if my son came to me in the same situation my thought would be "of course I would welcome him back." Of course I would run to him and weep with joy. I think most parents would feel the same.

God has placed this in our hearts. If we have that general desire to welcome our children back and want to restore them, imagine how much more it is with our perfect heavenly Father. Restoring joy is what God wants for us when we stray from him. His invitation is to come; to come back; to rest. If there is apprehension to come back to God – why?! Like the song says, "Your goodness is running after me!"

Prayer: *Thank you for your goodness and love. Thank you for the picture from Luke 15 of the father celebrating his son who has come back. Help us to see/know/feel the depth of your love. In whatever way we need to "come back" to You, help us not hesitate, because we are confident in your amazing ability to forgive and restore. Help us also to live that same picture out in our daily lives with those around us. Amen.*



Monday, August 24, 2026

Angela Brown

Essential Truth: *The way we live together should reflect the grace by which God has called us.*

Scripture: Ephesians 4:1

“I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called,”

Observations:

- Therefore – end of the doctrines given in the first 3 chapters and begins the duties Christians should do in the remaining chapters.
- A prisoner for the Lord – the Christian way can be costly, however, even with 4 years in prison, Paul knew he has always been in the Lord’s hand never forgotten.
- Walk – means your daily conduct.
- Worthy – be everything the Lord desires you to be.
- Calling – God’s sovereign call to salvation.

Application:

Because of the reasons given in Ephesians 1-3, we should live worthy of being called a Christian in every part of our life. Since all things are owned by God, we must respond by offering ourselves – our physical things, our family, our body, our time, and even our thoughts – for the purpose of God’s glory. We are told that life will not be easy, but God can use all things for the good of those who love Him.

Prayer:

Lord God, You are worthy of all praise! You have called us to shake off our old, corrupted, deceitful self and instead be renewed, created in the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness. Help us to live every moment worthy of being called a Christ follower. Help us to work on the plank in our own eye and not focus on what speck we notice in others. Holy Spirit, bring to my mind how I can better honor the Lord in all situations and make me yearn to follow through with what You desire for today and all the days that follow. In Jesus holy name I pray, amen.



Tuesday, August 25, 2026
Josh Schlichenmayer

Essential Truth: *Forbearance begins when humility, gentleness, and patience shape how we treat one another.*

Scripture: Ephesians 4:2

“With all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love.”

Observations:

- With all, not just some effort or when it's convenient, but always and with 100% effort.
- Humility - Not thinking less of yourself, but thinking of yourself less. This frees you to value others above your own interests without denying your own worth in Christ.
- Gentleness - Responding with kindness and restraint, even in difficult situations
- Patience - giving people time to grow, change, and be understood
- Bearing with one another in love – choosing grace, forgiveness, and steadfast love when relationships are strained.

Application:

This one verse gives us a clear picture of how God desires us to treat one another. Although we will never do this perfectly, we are called to pursue it faithfully. Imagine the difference it would make if we consistently placed others before ourselves, responded to conflict with gentleness instead of anger, patiently allowed one another to grow, and chose grace, forgiveness, and love even when it was difficult. When these qualities define our relationships, unity grows, Christ is honored, and the church is strengthened to accomplish His work together.

Prayer:

Gracious Heavenly Father, I praise You for the work You have done, are doing, and will continue to do within me. Increase my awareness of how I treat others. Help me to walk in humility, gentleness, and patience, especially when relationships are strained. Teach me to bear with others in love, extending the same grace and forgiveness You have shown me. May my words, attitudes, and actions reflect Christ in every interaction. In Your holy name I pray, Amen.



Wednesday, August 26, 2026

Paul Ewing

Essential Truth: *God calls His children to pursue peace so that they might have unity in the Spirit.*

Scripture: Ephesians 4:3

“Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.”

Observations:

- As Paul continues his discussion of how the church is to live worthy of their calling, he builds on the idea of living together in patience and love by calling the Ephesians to pursue unity.
- The Spirit is the one who enables this unity to happen but the part the church is to play is to pursue peace with each other.
- This peace, which in Greek (eirene) and Hebrew (shalom) has a strong meaning of completeness, wholeness, or harmony, acts as a bond holding the body together in unity of the Spirit.

Application:

How are we relying on the Holy Spirit to establish peace in our lives and in the life of our church? Romans 12:18 tells us to be at peace with others as much as it relies on us. We are called to act in love and patience toward others, relying on the Holy Spirit to work in us to keep peace with each other. This involves seeking the best of others not just our own, having patience when things do not go the way we would like, and acting to preserve harmony, so that we can pursue unity in faith and practice. May we rely on the Spirit to bind us together in peace even today.

Prayer:

Gracious Father, help us to lean on you and your Spirit to establish a bond of peace among us, so that we might move forward in unity. Help me to understand how I can act in this way even today. In Jesus name, Amen.



Thursday, August 27, 2026

Andrew Hershey

Essential Truth: *Our shared allegiance to one Lord is stronger than the differences that strain us.*

Scripture: Ephesians 4:4-6

⁴ There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call— ⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism, ⁶ one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

Observations:

- The Holy Spirit works through the body (us) for God's purpose
- We are called to hope and put our hope in the One who redeems us
- We are one in Christ and when we focus on Him and His plan, we go the same direction together
- Though individuals, God works through all of us to accomplish His purpose
- God is our authority and He works in us together and He lives in us.

Application:

As you think about unity and being one in Christ, it's easier said than done. Often times, our flesh and our ways of thinking can lead to conflict, feelings of discouragement, and hardship. We can get discouraged as our relationships with others get hard through misunderstandings or unintentional acts of hurt. All of this is meant to take our eyes off of Jesus. As we put the focus back on Jesus- "one Lord, one faith, one baptism..." when we choose to view His words and submit to Him, our sinful flesh begins to die and our life with Christ and the love He gives us overcomes all fear and division.

Being unified with the body of Christ looks like following Jesus even above our own way of thinking. It looks like following Him as the authority with humility of considering others as better than ourselves and simply being willing to do as Jesus says and asks us to do.

So what is Jesus asking you to do to put your focus back on him? How are you supposed to yield to others? How can you see the body and recognize God's heart for unity in purpose?

Prayer: *Lord help me to follow you as Lord of my life. Help me to yield to you and submit to Your authority. Help me to see my brothers and sisters as members of your body and part of your purpose. Help us to focus on you and fill us with love that may overflow with love and grace for each other. Amen.*



Friday, August 28, 2026

Zach Kost

Essential Truth: *We forbear one another because Christ has made us one, forgiven us, and bound us together in love.*

Scripture: Colossians 3:11-15 We forbear one another because Christ has made us one, forgiven us, and bound us together in love. Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all. Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful.

Observations:

- Here we are focused on our new identity in Christ, not our origin, family background, or other earthly demographics
- This begins to show the unifying power the fruit of the Spirit (covered later in Colossians) can have when Christians live into them, rather than following earthly desires
- We are called to forgive others, even those we disagree with. Period. It is our duty to forgive one another, imitating the forgiveness through which we are saved
- Above all, LOVE rises to the top. Those who follow Jesus should be “marked” by the love they show to others, which leads to peaceful unity
- There is a clear ending of thanksgiving. This can remind us that a person who is reigned over by Jesus Christ is a grateful person. Gratitude marks their life, because they understand that they’re going to heaven

Application: May we make sure that we let others, including those in Christ's body and especially those who are yet to believe, see our “new clothes” (covered in the verses preceding this passage) and that what they see on the outside matches the change we claim Jesus did on the inside. Even when it is difficult and disagreements arise, let's remember that as Christ's body we are called to let GOD's peace guide our relationships and His truth fill our community. Thus, helping us not follow our own earthly desires, but, rather, doing what is in the best interest of everyone around us and taking care of each other. Let's allow this free and life-changing gift of salvation to overflow out of our hearts, through our words and actions, even when differences arise, binding us together in unity through your great love.

Prayer: *Father, I know that I often pursue the things of this world. May I flee from my earthly desires, and work towards loving one another in all that I do. Help me to put on love first, love those I disagree with, and boldly imitate the forgiveness you have given me to those around me. Help me to take care of others first and use your example of love and forgiveness as a guide towards unity within Century Baptist Church, the larger body of Christ, and the greater world full of all of your children. Thank you for all you have done and do. In Jesus' name, Amen.*



Monday, August 31, 2026

Ryne Jungling

Scripture: Joel 1:1-4

1 The word of the Lord that came to Joel, the son of Pethuel:

An Invasion of Locusts

2 Hear this, you elders;

give ear, all inhabitants of the land!

Has such a thing happened in your days,
or in the days of your fathers?

3 Tell your children of it,

and let your children tell their children,
and their children to another generation.

4 What the cutting locust left,

the swarming locust has eaten.

What the swarming locust left,

the hopping locust has eaten,

and what the hopping locust left,

the destroying locust has eaten.

Essential Truth:

God sometimes uses disruption to get His people's attention.

Observations:

- Joel is calling out to the elders and all the inhabitants of the land to listen to his warning.
- What Joel is warning people about is so great that people will tell the next generation that they survived the disruption.
- The destruction of the locusts was overwhelming. The four swarms destroyed everything of sustenance for God's people.
- God used the disruption to get His people's attention.

Application: While I've never experienced a swarm of locusts, there have been times in my life where God has used disruption to get my attention. Sometimes disruption comes in the form of a broken appliance, an issue at work, or a medical diagnosis. Sometimes it comes through the words of a friend. God uses disruption to draw our eyes and our hearts back to him.

When Joel described a land stripped bare by locusts, he wasn't reporting a natural disaster, he was delivering a message from God to his people whose focus had drifted from him. The swarm of locusts that caused the famine was so great that the people who survived told the story to many generations. So the question for us all today is this: How is God using disruption to get our attention today?

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, Creator of the heavens and the earth. Lord, your majesty is evident in all that you have created. You have created all things to glorify you, to honor you, and to give you praise. However, our sin nature causes us to put ourselves at the center of creation and take your place on the throne of our life. Give me eyes and ears to see and hear when you are trying to get my attention. May my gaze be always be focused on you. Amen.*



Tuesday, September 1, 2026
Will MacDonald

Essential Truth: *Spiritual barrenness should lead us to honest reflection before God.*

Scripture: Joel 1:9-13

⁹ The grain offering and the drink offering are cut off from the house of the Lord. The priests mourn, the ministers of the Lord. ¹⁰ The fields are destroyed, the ground mourns, because the grain is destroyed, the wine dries up, the oil languishes. ¹¹ Be ashamed, O tillers of the soil; wail, O vinedressers, for the wheat and the barley, because the harvest of the field has perished. ¹² The vine dries up; the fig tree languishes. Pomegranate, palm and apple, all the trees of the field are dried up, and gladness dries up from the children of man. ¹³ Put on sackcloth and lament, O priests; wail, O ministers of the altar. Go in, pass the night in sackcloth, O ministers of my God! Because grain offering and drink offering are withheld from the house of your God.

Observations:

- The priests in the temple mourn because the locust plague and drought have destroyed the grain crops and vineyards to the point that there is neither grain nor wine for the grain offerings and drink offerings.
- The severity of the locust plague has caused severe destruction to all crops. There is no grain, no wine and no oil.
- As all their sources of food dry up, joy becomes impossible to find.
- Coming full circle to where the passage begins, the priests of the temple are instructed to mourn in sackcloth because there is no grain or wine for the grain offering and drink offering.

Application: Like the locust plague we read of in Joel, the drought of 1988-1990 was legendary in North Dakota. Many farm families would leave the farm forever because of the drought and resulting economic hardship. There was discouragement and sadness. The barrenness of the land stripped the people of joy. For the Christian, growing distant from Jesus will bring a spiritual barrenness that will strip us of our spiritual joy. The busyness of our lives, often doing very important things, can make it difficult to spend time daily with the Lord. Days can turn into weeks which can very easily and unintentionally turn into months without spending meaningful and important time in the presence of the Father. But He is always there, ready and waiting for us to return.

Prayer:

Father, forgive me for not giving you the place in my life that is rightly yours. You have promised to draw near to me if I will draw near to you. By the power of your Spirit, please help me to make spending time with you a daily priority in my life.



Wednesday, September 2, 2026

Dave Axt

Essential Truth: *True repentance is not outward performance but a heart turned back to God.*

Scripture: Joel 2:12-13

12 “Yet even now,” declares the Lord,
“return to me with all your heart,
with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning;
13 and rend your hearts and not your garments.”
Return to the Lord your God,
for he is gracious and merciful,
slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love;
and he relents over disaster.

Observations:

- God calls us to fully return to him, with humility and true sorrow for what we’ve done
- God wants a pure heart, not just clean appearance
- God is loving and wants His people to return to Him
- True Repentance stirs God to withhold the judgement we deserve

Application:

Rend your hearts. Many times in the Old Testament we read of rulers, prophets, and people of God tearing (or rending) their clothes and mourning. Tearing of clothing was an outward symbol to show everyone around you that you were in deep sorrow over a situation. But God wants us to rend our hearts! We can’t physically tear our heart. But we can, in the deepest seat of our emotion, feel great sorrow for something we’ve done. This is necessary for repentance. A turning from our sin, asking forgiveness, and not desiring to go down that road again. To truly reject the ways of this world and to cling to what God has called us to. Each time we fall for the enemy’s tricks, God is calling us to repent. He called us to that when we turned to Him for the first time, and He’s calling out to us again.

Prayer:

Heavenly Father,

Thank you for calling us unto you. We cannot do this life alone; we need You present in our lives every day. Help us to let go of the things we cling to that may be holding us back from fully turning back to you. Help us return to you, with a spirit of mourning, and renewal. Thank you for your unfailing love. Even though we fall short, you still accept us with open arms. Give us a deeper desire to follow you wholeheartedly, and Holy Spirit guide us to walk in your ways.

Amen



the way **FORWARD**

DEVOTIONALS

Gather the People

Thursday, September 3, 2026

Rod Zimmerman

Essential Truth: *We humbly commit ourselves to seeking God together "United we stand, divided we fall"*

Scripture: Joel 2:15-17

¹⁵ Blow the trumpet in Zion;

consecrate a fast;

call a solemn assembly;

¹⁶ gather the people.

Consecrate the congregation;

assemble the elders;

gather the children,

even nursing infants.

Let the bridegroom leave his room,

and the bride her chamber.

¹⁷ Between the vestibule and the altar

let the priests, the ministers of the Lord,

weep and say, "Spare your people, O Lord,

and make not your heritage a reproach,

a byword among the nations.

Why should they say among the peoples,

"Where is their God?"

Observations:

- Get the peoples' attention! In biblical times the trumpet was blown for two occasions:
 - to call the people together ie. for war, or
 - to gather people for an important message or meeting
 - it was to signal to them to set out, to move out for action (Numbers 10:2)
- This was an announcement:
 - to declare a holy fast Jeremiah 36:9
 - for a sacred assembly 2 Chronicles 20:3-4 (Jehoshaphat)
- Specific and inclusive: all the people: old, young, newlyweds, engaged. NO ONE excluded
- Leaders (priests): weeping and crying out to the Lord on behalf of the people, leading by example to confession and repentance and forgiveness— both seeking forgiveness and giving forgiveness.
- The focus is on bringing glory to God's name, not shame and ridicule

Application: We have become so busy and preoccupied with duties and actives and getting things done that we have lost our connection with the Master. We have become dull of hearing His voice. We have also lost sensitivity to the needs and hurts and struggles of others, even those with whom we serve. Our conversations have been superficial, even hurtful. Have I listened to the words coming out of my mouth? In my busy pre-occupation, I've missed the gentle soft voice of the Spirit, coaxing me to go near that brother and sister, and connect with them. At this juncture, we are called to stop, interrupt our pattern of daily routine. Humble ourselves through fasting and individually preparing for coming together in unity of heart and mind and purpose, to seek our Lord's face, to listen for his precious words to us. Even now, as in ancient times, our community/ church family is essential!

Prayer: *Dear God our Father, we bow before You, humbly seeking your Presence, Forgive us for pretending to be self-sufficient in our personal lives. Forgive me for my pride in knowing Your precepts in my head, but not being deeply committed in my heart in complete surrender, to attend to others, my brothers and sisters, those hurting silently, painfully invisible to my eyes and ears. LORD, let me not be oblivious to those in need, but use me as Your instrument of encouragement and comfort. Let me be a willing vessel daily to carry forth Your good news, Your balm of healing and hope, and may they see You as the trustworthy Giver of all good things. In Jesus' Name, Amen*



Devotionals available online at centurybaptist.org/the-way-forward/

Friday, September 4, 2026
Rod Zimmerman

Essential Truth: *The Lord cares, He responds! (HE acts)*

Scripture:

Joel 2:18 Then the Lord became jealous for his land and had pity on his people.
Zechariah 1:14b This is what the Lord Almighty says: 'I am very jealous for Jerusalem and Zion,
Psalm 72:13 He will take pity on the weak and needy and save the needy from death.

Observations:

Jealous: fiercely protective or vigilant of one's rights or possessions (Of God): demanding faithfulness and exclusive worship

Zealous: fervent partisanship for a person, a cause or an ideal

- The land and crops are ravaged, resulting in the very real risk of imminent famine
- The Lord still is very engaged and caring for His creation - yes, the land and the people "Jealous for us" or "zealous"
- His heart overflows to us and aches when we seek our own answers or independent devices to solve our problems, our idolatry.
- He takes pity, not just sympathetic to our prayers, but is ready and able to act in our lives
- There is no doubt about the Lord's zeal for his people; rather, am I truly willing for Him to act.

Application:

When I feel hopeless in my circumstances, I am tempted to believe that God has abandoned me, that He doesn't care. If I call out to Him, do I believe He will hear and answer? Lord, increase my faith! Does my pride obstruct me from seeking God's help? Let me seek Him humbly, willing to surrender myself to His loving care, willing to respond to the Spirit's moving in my heart. Joel 2:18 is truth and assurance for me; He will do what I cannot. "Let go and let God"

Prayer:

Dear Lord, who am I, a mere fleeting shadow, that You should take notice of me? Please forgive my pride, my "self-sufficiency" and take me to Yourself. I find rest and comfort in Your loving welcoming arms. Under Your wings I find healing and refuge. You restore my soul and so let me see Your face — may You be glorified and receive praise for Your intervention and lovingkindness to me. Thank You for having pity on me, and for being my strong rock, as in the past, even more so now, and moving forward in Your way in the future. You are unchanging and sure. In Jesus' Name, Amen



Monday, September 7, 2026

Mark Isaacs

Essential Truth: *God often brings comfort through honest reports of repentance and renewed affection.*

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 7:5-7

5 “For when we came into Macedonia, we had no rest, but we were harassed at every turn—conflicts on the outside, fears within”. 6 But God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus, 7 and not only by his coming but also by the comfort you had given him. He told us about your longing for me, your deep sorrow, your ardent concern for me, so that my joy was greater than ever.

Observations:

- Paul recounts the difficulties he faced in Macedonia, describing both external conflicts and internal fears, highlighting the pressures of his ministry and the challenges of travel and opposition.
- Despite these hardships, he emphasizes that God provided comfort through the arrival of Titus, a trusted companion and fellow minister, who brought encouraging news from the Corinthians.
- The passage also underscores the mutual care and affection between Paul and the Corinthian church. The Corinthians’ concern for Paul, their sorrow over any offense, and their eagerness to reconcile brought Paul profound joy.
- Paul’s life in ministry was a life of great blessing but also a life of many conflicts and fears. On the outside, Paul was constantly in conflict with enemies of the gospel and worldly-minded Christians. On the inside, Paul daily battled with the stress and anxiety of ministry.

Application:

- Encouragement in trials: Even in moments of stress and fear, God provides comfort through people and circumstances.
- Value of community: The concern and support of fellow believers can strengthen and uplift those in ministry or facing difficulties.
- Joy through reconciliation: Paul’s joy was amplified by the Corinthians’ godly response, showing that spiritual growth and heartfelt concern for others can bring deep satisfaction and encouragement.

Prayer:

Father God, forgive us for the times we don’t practice love, comfort, and encouragement in times of trial. Teach us to listen to one another in all situations and circumstances, so that we can be a unified body of Christ to serve and promote the gospel as a church. In Jesus’ name. Amen.



Tuesday, September 8, 2026

Angie Gallagher

Essential Truth: *Godly sorrow hurts for a time but becomes life-giving when it leads us toward repentance.*

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 7:8-9

For even if I made you grieve with my letter, I do not regret it —though I did regret it, for I see that that letter grieved you, though only for a while. As it is, I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because you were grieved into repenting. For you felt a godly grief, so that you suffered no loss through us.

Observations:

- Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ had spent 2 years with the Corinthian church teaching them the Word.
- After Paul's departure, false teachers from outside the church began attacking Paul's character to discredit his apostolic authority so they could teach a false gospel within the church.
- Paul had already had a painful encounter with the Corinthian church earlier and was not looking forward to another, fearing it would drive them farther away from him.
- Previously, Paul had admonished regarding unrepentant impurity, immorality and sensuality. Now Paul's second letter had to address the church allowing false teachers within their midst and turning their back on him.
- Paul was greatly troubled to the point he was unable to minister in Troas grieving over the letter he wrote to the church to defend his apostolic authority and after some time Titus was able to share with him the repentant heart of the church after they received Paul's letter.

Application: The church of Corinth was besieged with problems. Paul was broken hearted because he loved them dearly and did not want to grieve them any further with another letter of correction. However, he was more grieved over the church allowing false teachers within their midst and turning away from their loyalty to him and instead believing the lies of the false teachers. The bigger danger within their midst were the wolves they were letting in to devour the sheep with lies and eventually, as sin will do, it would destroy them. Honest correction is never a pleasant experience but with that loving correction comes a repentant heart and restoration can then be restored. The Corinthian church received that correction from Paul, repented of their lack of loyalty to him and their sin against God. They were eagerly awaiting to see him again and restore the broken relationship. Paul was overcome with joy as now the church would be able to experience the blessings that would follow through his ministry to them.

Prayer: *Father God, forgive us for the times we don't practice love, comfort, and encouragement in times of trial. Teach us to listen to one another in all situations and circumstances, so that we can be a unified body of Christ to serve and promote the gospel as a church. In Jesus' name. Amen.*



Wednesday, September 9, 2026
Derek Kost

Essential Truth: *Godly sorrow turns us toward salvation, while worldly sorrow leaves us trapped in regret.*

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 7:10

“For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death.”

Observations:

- Sorrow from past actions tells us that relationships have been broken and sin is present.
- Sorrow with inward focus on oneself (worldly sorrow) can lead to ongoing despair.
- Sorrow with outward focus on your relationship with God and others (godly sorrow) results in repentance and transformation.
- Worldly sorrow pulls us towards ourselves and our sinful nature. Godly sorrow draws us closer to God and his salvation.

Application:

Grief and sorrow leave us with hearts full of regret that can lead to despair and shame. Peeling back the layers of this sorrow and examining the core of why we feel this way will often reveal personal desires for how things should be instead of submission to God's sovereignty over these concerns.

Looking through a lens of God's love reveals how the Father works in the sorrow to mold and shape our character over time and bring us to repentance. Ask God to transform continued personal regret into consistent reminders that He is working for our good, to sanctify us through sorrow and perseverance.

Prayer:

Heavenly Father, may our hearts be tuned to your will so that we can better understand your love for us. Help us to let go of our worldly sorrows and regrets and give them to you so that we may instead be reminded, through godly sorrow, that there is purpose in pain and hope in you.



Wednesday, September 10, 2026
Danelle Schlichenmayer

Essential Truth: *Real repentance does not merely feel sorry; it moves with urgency to make things right.*

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 7:11

11 For see what earnestness this godly grief has produced in you, but also what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what longing, what zeal, what punishment! At every point you have proved yourselves innocent in the matter.

Observations:

- Paul doesn't commend the Corinthians for feeling bad. He commends them for what the sorrow produced.
- Every word in this verse is an action word: earnestness, eagerness, zeal, readiness to see wrong made right.
- The church didn't just apologize to Paul... their conduct changed and the whole congregation could see it.
- Godly grief has a direction. It moves toward visible correction, not just private feeling.
- Repentance is relational. It shapes how a whole church deals honestly when individuals repent and restore relationships. with what dishonors God among them.

Application: It's easy to mistake feeling convicted for actual repentance. We can sit in a sermon, feel the Spirit's prompting, and still walk out looking exactly the same as we did walking in. But real repentance doesn't stay invisible. It shows up in how we treat each other, what we stop excusing, and what we start doing differently.

North Dakotans are tough by nature. We can certainly handle a lot. That same toughness can also be a roadblock to repentance. We'd rather look unbothered and tough than actually be transformed. But Paul points to a church that let its repentance be seen — not performed, but proven, in restored relationships and corrected behavior the whole congregation could witness.

That's our call too. Repentance that stays hidden hasn't finished its work. Silence in the face of known sin is its own kind of participation — if you see something and don't address it, you accept it. But the reverse is also true: when we address it, the change becomes visible, and the whole body is strengthened. It starts with us.

Prayer: *Father, forgive us for hiding behind toughness instead of showing real change. Give us courage to let our repentance be seen in our words, our relationships, our actions. Let our congregation bear visible fruit of turning back to You. Let it start with us. In Jesus' name. Amen.*



Friday, September 11, 2026
Brent Bogar

Essential Truth: *Repentance restores clarity, strengthens love, and brings joy to the body of Christ.*

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 7:12-13a

"So although I wrote to you, it was not for the sake of the one who did the wrong, nor for the sake of the one who suffered the wrong, but in order that your earnestness for us might be revealed to you in the sight of God. Therefore we are comforted."

Observations:

- God often uses conviction to reveal what is truly in our hearts.
- Repentance is not merely feeling sorry; it is responding to God's correction with humble obedience.
- When believers respond to correction, relationships are strengthened rather than weakened.
- The health of the whole body of Christ matters more than the comfort of avoiding hard conversations.
- Joy often comes on the other side of repentance, reconciliation, and renewed fellowship.

Application: Most of us do not enjoy being corrected. Whether it comes through Scripture, a trusted friend, a spouse, a coach, or the prompting of the Holy Spirit, our first instinct is often to defend ourselves. Yet Paul reminds us that loving correction is not about winning an argument or proving someone wrong. It is about restoration. God's purpose is not condemnation but transformation. He desires to remove the things that cloud our vision so we can see Him, ourselves, and one another more clearly.

When we humbly acknowledge our sin, receive God's grace, and make things right with others, joy returns. The burden of pride is lifted, the power of shame is destroyed, relationships are healed, and the body of Christ becomes stronger. The path of repentance may be uncomfortable, but it always leads to something better on the other side.

Prayer: *Father, thank You for loving me enough to correct me when I stray. Give me a humble heart that is quick to listen, quick to repent, and eager to follow Your ways. Remove any pride, bitterness, or defensiveness that keeps me from receiving Your truth. Help me to pursue reconciliation where relationships need healing and to encourage my brothers with both grace and truth. May our lives reflect the joy that comes from walking closely with You. In Jesus' name, amen.*



Monday, September 14, 2026
Graham Kern

Essential Truth: *Renewal begins when God's people gather with hunger to hear God's Word.*

Scripture: Nehemiah 8:1-3

And all the people gathered as one man into the square before the Water Gate. And they told Ezra the scribe to bring the Book of the Law of Moses that the Lord had commanded Israel. ² So Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly, both men and women and all who could understand what they heard, on the first day of the seventh month. ³ And he read from it facing the square before the Water Gate from early morning until midday, in the presence of the men and the women and those who could understand. And the ears of all the people were attentive to the Book of the Law.

Observations:

- The people were settled and life was somewhat normal once more.
- The people all gathered together as one in a common place and asked for the Word of God to be read.
- An assembly (church) of men and women and others who could understand (children) gathered to hear God's Word read.
- This assembly listened attentively for a long time as the priest (pastor) read the Word of God.

Application:

Life often gets in the way of reading and studying God's Word. So we need to develop a habit of doing so, even when life is not normal. So I believe it is important for us as disciples of Jesus to come together in a common place to read and study God's Word. This is most often at a Sunday worship service, but it could also happen in a small group. And it's important that the whole family - mom, dad & kids or whatever your family looks like today - is part of that worship time. How long should this be? That depends on the day. It might be 4-6 hours, but it could turn out to be only 4-6 minutes. We have God's Word readily available. Let's open it up and read it.

Prayer:

O God, we ask that our Pastor would be faithful in reading your Word to us, your disciples. It is living and active, so it can guide us today and every day as we work, play and live together in community and as families. In Jesus' name, AMEN.



Wednesday, September 15, 2026

Danelle Schlichenmayer

Essential Truth: *God's Word must not only be heard; it must be understood and received.*

Scripture: Nehemiah 8:4-8 4 And Ezra the scribe stood on a wooden platform that they had made for the purpose. And beside him stood Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiah, Uriah, Hilkiah, and Maaseiah on his right hand, and Pedaiah, Mishael, Malchijah, Hashum, Hashbaddanah, Zechariah, and Meshullam on his left hand. 5 And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people, for he was above all the people, and as he opened it all the people stood. 6 And Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God, and all the people answered, "Amen, Amen," lifting up their hands. And they bowed their heads and worshiped the Lord with their faces to the ground. 7 Also Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, the Levites, helped the people to understand the Law, while the people remained in their places. 8 They read from the book, from the Law of God, clearly, and they gave the sense, so that the people understood the reading.

Observations:

- Ezra first praises God and then reads God's law, in the sight & hearing of all the people.
- The people's first response is worship — hands lifted, faces to the ground, just like Ezra's.
- The Levites moved through the crowd, making sure everyone understood what was read, so nobody was left out.

Application: It's possible to sit under God's Word for years and still not understand it. We can know the verses, sing the songs, nod along in a sermon, and still feel lost when we actually open our Bibles. Here's the good news: the secret to understanding Scripture isn't cracking every detail or mystery. It's knowing and trusting God's character first. If your goal is to master the Bible so you can be seen as better or to win an argument, that's the wrong posture. If your goal is to know God and love Him more so others will know God and love God, then you're on the right track. Scripture exists to help us know God and love people well. When we read Scripture, our eyes are to be focused on God and then we take what we've read and apply it to our daily lives.

Nehemiah shows the full pattern: Ezra reads, the people worship, and then the Levites disperse among the crowd to make sure everyone understands. All three matter. Read, worship, and make sure there's understanding. This week, strive to keep a posture of worship and surround yourself with people who love God and His Word. Don't let the learning stop when you're done reading. Take something from God's Word and apply it to your life today.

Prayer: *Lord, don't let Your Word pass over us unnoticed. Give us hearts that worship and minds that understand. Send people to help us see what we're missing and help us notice those who need understanding. God, let your Word take root in our hearts and change how we live. In Jesus' name. Amen.*



Wednesday, September 16, 2026

Lindsey Brew

Essential Truth: *Conviction is real, but the joy of the Lord is the strength that carries repentance forward.*

Scripture: Nehemiah 8:9–12

“And Nehemiah, who was the governor, and Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who taught the people said to all the people, ‘This day is holy to the LORD your God; do not mourn or weep.’ For all the people wept as they heard the words of the Law. Then he said to them, ‘Go your way. Eat the fat and drink sweet wine and send portions to anyone who has nothing ready, for this day is holy to our Lord. And do not be grieved, for the joy of the LORD is your strength.’ ... And all the people went their way to eat and drink and to send portions and to make great rejoicing, because they had understood the words that were declared to them.”

Observations:

- God’s Word brought genuine conviction, and the people wept over their sin.
- The leaders reminded the people that a holy day was meant to be marked by worship and rejoicing.
- The joy of the Lord became the strength that carried the people from conviction into renewed obedience.
- Understanding God’s Word transformed mourning into holy joy, generosity, and celebration.
- True joy is rooted in God’s character and faithfulness, not in changing circumstances.

Application: Conviction is a gift of God’s grace because it exposes what separates us from Him and calls us back into fellowship. Yet conviction was never meant to become a place where we remain. After the people understood God’s Word, Nehemiah and Ezra directed them away from lingering sorrow and toward holy joy because God delights in restoring His people. The phrase, “The joy of the LORD is your strength,” carries rich meaning in Hebrew. The word for joy is *chedvah* (חֵדְוָה), meaning gladness, rejoicing, or delight. The word for strength is *ma’oz* (מִצְעָד), meaning a refuge, fortress, or place of safety. God’s joy is more than an emotion—it is the refuge that steadies us. Holy joy doesn’t ignore conviction; it receives God’s forgiveness, delights in His faithfulness, and gives us strength to continue walking in repentance.

Prayer: *Father, thank You for the conviction of Your Word that leads me back to You. Help me receive conviction as an invitation to repentance rather than a reason to remain in shame. Lord, thank You for joy that does not depend on circumstances. Remind me that the joy of the Lord is my strength, carrying me forward in repentance, obedience, and trust in Your unfailing grace. In Jesus’ name, Amen.*



Thursday, September 17, 2026

Brandt Dick

Essential Truth: *Spiritual leaders must keep returning to Scripture so they can guide the people faithfully.*

Scripture: Nehemiah 8:13–14

"On the second day the heads of fathers' houses of all the people, with the priests and the Levites, came together to Ezra the scribe in order to study the words of the Law. And they found it written in the Law that the LORD had commanded by Moses that the people of Israel should dwell in booths during the feast of the seventh month."

Observations:

- The leaders intentionally gathered to gain a deeper understanding of the Law.
- All the heads of households, along with priest and Levites gathered to study.
- Careful study of Scripture revealed a command that had been neglected.
- God's Word not only informs but also calls us to specific acts of obedience.
- The Word commanded by Moses hundreds of years earlier was still relevant during the time of Ezra.

Application:

Godly leadership is rooted in a teachable spirit. The leaders in Nehemiah's day understood that their responsibility was not merely to lead others but to first place themselves under the authority of Scripture. Their willingness to study God's Word carefully enabled them to discover His will and respond in obedience.

The same principle applies today. Wherever God has placed us to serve, we must regularly return to God's Word with humble hearts. As we study Scripture, the Holy Spirit reveals areas where we need to grow and submit to the truths of God's Word. Lasting influence begins when we humble ourselves to the truth of Scripture.

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, thank You for giving us Your Word as our light for our paths. Give me a humble and teachable heart that eagerly seeks to know Your truth. Help me never to rely on my own wisdom or experience, but to submit myself daily to Your authority. Reveal areas where I need to obey You more fully, forgive me where I have failed to obey, and give me the courage to respond with faithful action. May my life reflect Your truth and point others to You. In Jesus' name, Amen.*



Friday, September 18, 2026
Vernel and Rochelle Schneider

Essential Truth: *Sacred Assembly moves God's people from hearing the truth to confessing sin and worshipping Him.*

Scripture: Nehemiah 9:1-3

Now on the twenty-fourth day of this month the people of Israel were assembled with fasting and in sackcloth, and with earth on their heads. ² And the Israelites separated themselves from all foreigners and stood and confessed their sins and the iniquities of their fathers. ³ And they stood up in their place and read from the Book of the Law of the Lord their God for a quarter of the day; for another quarter of it they made confession and worshiped the Lord their God.

Observations:

Throughout this past week, we have seen the children of Israel come before the Lord in assembly while Ezra reads from the book of the law. Through the hearing of the law, the Holy Spirit convicts the assembly of their transgressions. In our devotional today we will focus on three aspects of the Scripture Reading of Nehemiah 9:1-3. These are Honesty, Humility, and Honor.

Application:

- **Honesty:** As a body of believers, it is essential that we are honest with ourselves as to our guilt before a Holy and Righteous God. This will occur only with the daily reading of the Scriptures and a desire to know Him through the movement of the Holy Spirit within our hearts.
- **Humility:** From an honest evaluation of our hearts, we are moved to a posture of humility, leading to repentance which brings us into a righteous relationship with our God. (1 John 1:9, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.") As the psalmist David confessed in Psalm 51:4, "Against You, You only, have I sinned..." David realized what every believer must - that although we sin greatly against others, our greatest sin is against a Holy God and His Word.
- **Honor:** Following honesty, humility, and the confession of our sins, our hearts have a desire to honor and worship God the Father, Jesus the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Prayer: Most Gracious and Holy God, Sovereign in all things, we come before You with repentant hearts, realizing that it is only in the righteousness imputed to us through Your Son, Jesus Christ, that we can stand righteous before You. Grant us the ability to be honest about our sins, the humility to repent and turn from them, and an attitude in our hearts that gives you all the honor, praise, and glory. May we so steadfastly and joyfully abide in You that this is our daily conviction and prayer. Amen.



