

## ARBC VISION 2023 – 40 DAYS OF PRAYER

### Week 4

Dear Ashley River Family,

Welcome to Week 4 of our 40 Days of Prayer! We are now in the second half of our journey. As a church family, may we continue to seek God's direction and guidance for ARBC this year and next!

Please notice that beginning with the last week's line of the Lord's Prayer – *Give us this day our daily bread* – Jesus transitions from "Father" to "Us," ostensibly not "ME." This was an "AH-HA" moment for me many years ago and it has fundamentally changed my perspective in prayer. While I may not need daily bread, others of us may. The Lord's Prayer sets our priorities for us – God and Others before me. Do you see the connection to our Church Vision, which incorporates the two greatest commandments: Love God and Love Others?

This week's portion of the Lord's Prayer focuses on confession: *Forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors*. Forgiveness is a unique principle of Christianity. The Bible makes it clear that *"without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness."* (Heb. 9:22) Therefore, we must forgive even as God in Christ forgave us (Eph. 4:32). Do you have a heart of forgiveness?

#### **Day 22 – May 17 – HELP US TO CONFESS (1 JOHN 1:9)**

Confession is crucial to the Christian life, both as repentance before God and as forgiveness between one another. Our Scripture taken from 1 John comes with a condition and a promise. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." (1 Jn. 1:9) The condition is based on the "If" and the promise is based on God's character. In this one verse we see the difference between fickle people and a faithful God. Your faith in Him will turn the "If" into "When."

*Spend time with God in prayer, asking Him to show you the areas of your life that need real confession and to also reveal to you who you need to extend forgiveness.*

#### **DAY 23 – MAY 18 - HELP US TO FORGIVE (EPHESIANS 4:32; COLOSSIANS 3:13)**

"Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. Follow God's example, therefore, as dearly loved children and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God." (Eph. 4:32 – 5:2)

Have you been dressed in Christ's forgiveness through His sacrifice? Jesus isn't a friend telling us to button up when we are a moment away from being exposed. Instead, He has shown us the immense forgiveness He has offered on our behalf so that such truth will change us from the inside out. This amazing demonstration of forgiveness on the cross compels us to forgive others in return.

*Spend time with God in prayer, asking Him to uncover whatever grudges or unforgiveness we still harbor in our hearts toward others. Now ask Him to remove them from you completely!*

#### **DAY 24 – MAY 19 – HELP US TO EXTEND MERCY (MICAH 6:8; MATTHEW 5:7; JAMES 2:13)**

Ashley River is a giving church. We extend mercy and love to our community. We actively participate in the Lowcountry Food Bank; we have repurposed and opened up our new Pickleball courts to our community; we partner with Gideons International to provide Bibles to the world; we give regularly to global, national, and local mission organizations in cooperation with other Southern Baptist Churches; we annually give to the Lottie Moon Christmas offering, the Annie Armstrong Easter offering (recently exceeding our goal by over \$2,000!), the Janie Chapman offering, and World Hunger. Our generous giving is having a Kingdom impact on Charleston and throughout the world!

An undeserving humanity has been offered a lavish gift: deliverance from the penalty, power, and presence of sin by the Son in whom God is well pleased. Jesus said, "Blessed are the merciful." (Mt. 5:7) If we make it about our Lord, and not ourselves, we can extend mercy to those who need deliverance by bringing people to Jesus, like Andrew and Philip. (Jn. 1:41-46) God endures the varied responses of humans, whether it is skepticism, misunderstanding, avoidance, or outright rejection: "Yet to all who did receive Him, to those who believed in His Name, He gave the right to become children of God." (Jn. 1:12).

*Spend time with God in prayer, asking Him to take you to the next level in your giving and your mercy toward those far from God.*

#### **DAY 25 – MAY 20 – HELP US TO RELEASE OUR BURDENS AND BITTERNESS (PROVERBS 10:12; EPHESIANS 4:31-32; HEBREWS 12:15)**

Simon was famous. As the local sorcerer, many people knew him and were amazed at his work. But once Jesus' disciples came onto the scene, Simon's fame was in jeopardy. In his mind, the only way to win back the favor of the people was to buy the gift of the Holy Spirit. And in that moment, we see a glimpse of a heart that is burdened with the weight of bitterness.

How does your heart do when you see others succeed? How do you respond when people no longer come to you for answers? This was a hard reality for Simon, one that greatly impacted his heart towards God. And if we are not careful, it will affect our hearts as well.

The writer of Hebrews implores us to not allow any root of bitterness to grow up in us (Heb. 12:15). Likewise, the Apostle Paul instructs the church of Ephesus to "get rid of all bitterness" (Eph. 4:31). Like the stubborn root of the most pervasive weed, we must suffocate bitterness completely so that it doesn't have any place in our lives.

Even though Simon was "full of bitterness and captive to sin" (Acts 8:23), he was not too far gone from God's grace. The instructions for his restoration are still true for us today. If you find yourself captive to bitterness, heed the voice of the apostles: repent from that wickedness and commit yourself to loving your neighbor because "love covers a multitude of sins" (1 Pet. 4:8).

*Spend time with God in prayer, asking Him to reveal and remove any and all burdens and bitterness from your heart.*

## **DAY 26 – MAY 21 – HELP US TO BE FREE FROM GUILT AND SHAME (PSALM 103:8-14; ROMANS 8:1-2)**

If we struggle with living free from guilt and shame, it's not uncommon for us to also struggle with believing in the goodness of God. In His goodness, Jesus died, was buried, and rose from the dead – according to the Scripture – to set you free not only from sin and death but also from guilt and shame. However, the enemy will ride guilt and shame on the back of conviction in the form of false claims: "You are so \_\_\_\_\_. I can't believe you would \_\_\_\_\_. You never \_\_\_\_\_. Then, with a subtle shift, "you" turns to "they": They think you're so \_\_\_\_\_. They can't believe you would \_\_\_\_\_. They think you'll never \_\_\_\_\_.

Conviction does not equal condemnation. Conviction is the feeling of having done something wrong; condemnation is the impending punishment for what you did wrong. In His goodness, Jesus received your punishment; therefore, you are no longer condemned. (Rom. 8:1)

Living free from guilt and shame doesn't come without practice. Being able to recognize the enemy's false claims only comes after having realized you've believed a lie. Once you've learned how to identify the voice of the enemy, you can extinguish false claims with the truth of God's goodness: God has declared you "Not Guilty" and has pardoned you. Hallelujah, what a Savior!

*Spend time with God in prayer, asking Him to rebuke the devil's lies and to release all remnants of our guilt and shame by the power of His goodness.*

## **DAY 27 – MAY 22 – HELP US TO CONFESS INDIVIDUALLY (PSALM 139; 32:5; PROVERBS 28:13; ACTS 3:19)**

Could anyone claim to know you better than the One who created you? Take some time to meditate on the whole of Psalm 139. This Psalm starts by declaring that the Lord God has searched and known our every thought, action, and circumstance, indeed our very soul. When we're at our best or our

worst, when we're feeling distant or close, there's nowhere to flee from His presence. Does that comfort you or make you shudder? Maybe both?

This leads us to the second half of the passage – a plea. It's a heartfelt longing to know Him as He has known us; a profound yearning to be as righteous as He is just. But no matter how well we think we've managed our own thoughts and ways, we don't know what we don't know. "Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me and lead me in the way everlasting." (Ps. 139:23-24)

You believe God answers prayers, right? Are you willing to be obedient when He reveals His response? Do you understand the gravity and power of this confession? Are you willing to go there? Confessing brings refreshing!

*Spend time with God in prayer and have the courage to go there, asking Him to reveal any offensive way in your heart and mind, and soul.*

#### **DAY 28 – MAY 23 – HELP US TO CONFESS CORPORATELY (2 CHRONICLES 7:14; JAMES 5:16)**

The Bible consistently positions repentance before revival, whether it's spiritual awakening, national healing, or cultural renewal. Throughout the Scriptures, we see God's kings and prophets alike who are led to confess and repent of their peoples' sin. Each time the Lord answered with healing and renewal, just like He promised (2 Chron. 7:11-14). When Jesus teaches us to seek forgiveness for sin, His prayer assumes a corporate nature: "... forgive us our debts ..." (Matt. 6:12). Of "the prayers" to which the Early Church was devoted, corporate confession would have been vital. A culture of repentance was at the heart of the New Testament Church and it must be at the heart of Ashley River Baptist Church!

Our churches ought to be marked by the perpetual practice of confession and repentance. It's how the people of God reorient themselves from the powers and patterns of the world to the presence and purposes of God. The Lord responds by breaking the chains of cultural and institutional patterns of sin. If we want revival, let us begin with repentance.

*Spend time with God in prayer, asking Him to:*

- 1. Reveal practices or patterns in our church lacking in love (thoughts, words, deeds).*
- 2. Reveal to you anyone who has been wounded by your sin, and how you might seek forgiveness.*