



Week 4

Dear Ashley River Family,

Welcome to the next 7 days 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 – MARCH 18 – Confess

Read 1 John 1:8-10.

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.

DAY 23 – MARCH 19 – Forgive

Read Colossians 3:12-17.

This passage calls us to holy living and harmony among our brothers and sisters in Christ. Paul echoed this same ethic in his letter to the Ephesians: *"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)

These two passages embody Jesus' incredible forgiveness even as He hung on the cross: *"Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing."* 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 – Mar. 20 – Show Mercy

Read Micah 6:6-8; Matthew 5:7; and James 2:12-13.

As Christ's local body of believers, we are called to be merciful. God's mercy is not giving us what we deserve and His grace is giving us what we do not deserve! Therefore, we can claim with Jeremiah that God's *"mercies are new every morning."* (Lam. 2:23) extend mercy and love to our community.

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 extending mercy toward those far from God.

DAY 25 – Mar. 21 – Let Go and Let God

Read 1 Peter 5:6-11.

Casting our anxiety before the Lord is quite literally letting go of all the weight we feel. When we carry our burdens, we suffer under the load. That is why Jesus implored us: *"Come to Me all of you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."* (Mt. 11:28-30)



In addition to letting go of our burdens, we are also called to let go of our bitterness. The writer of Hebrews exhorts 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 the Sorcerer 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 of this wickedness and pray to the Lord in the hope that He may forgive you for having such a thought in your heart."*

Spend time with God in prayer, asking Him to reveal and remove every burden and root of bitterness from your heart.

DAY 26 – Mar. 22 – Bury Guilt and Shame

Psalm 103:1-12 and Romans 8:1-2.

Many of us struggle with guilt and shame; however, our faith demands that we trust 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 (Satan) 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 your guilt and shame by the power of His goodness and forgiveness.

DAY 27 – Mar. 23 – Confess Individually

Read Psalm 139.

Could anyone claim to know you better than the One who created you? 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 convict you, or 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, asking Him to reveal any offensive way in your heart, mind, and soul.

DAY 28 – Mar. 24 – Confess Corporately

Read 2 Chronicles 7:14.

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 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 then seek forgiveness.*