

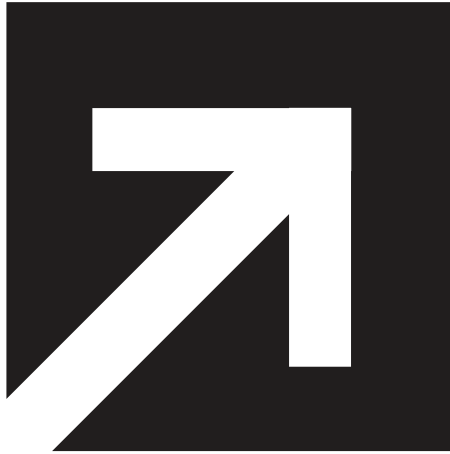
**GOING**



**BEYOND**



**GOING**



**BEYOND**

Sermon Series and Small Group Study  
Fall 2018

*Going Beyond*

David Holcomb

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1855 Lewisville-Clemmons Road

Clemmons, NC 27012

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# INTRODUCTION



Beyond. A word we don't often associate with the study of Scripture or the life of a believer. Yet the Bible attests to over 117 uses of the word. While many are geographical or directional uses, the word is also attributed to both God and man in describing the condition of having reached, or exceeded, a particular limit.

Beyond measure. Beyond our means. Beyond understanding. Beyond our strength. Beyond number. Beyond our ability. Beyond limits. Beyond dispute. Beyond blessing. Beyond reproach. Beyond all we ask. Beyond comparison.

In this season when we are prayerfully seeking the Lord's guidance to fulfill the vision of *building followers of Jesus who are sent to reach others*, the idea of **Going Beyond** seems especially appropriate.

As we prepare for a time of both physical and spiritual growth at River Oaks, it became an important connection with the scriptural inspiration of the original church plant that affirmed this study's title. On the walls of our church facility is inscribed the passage in Ephesians 3:20-21, which reads:

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.

The implication of this passage is that the Lord is able to go beyond all that we ask or think. In fact, in several translations "beyond" is used.

Of course, going beyond can challenge us. In this study, the challenge will not be the learning; it will be the living out. Going Beyond is an action, not a static phrase. If we are truly desiring to experience all that God has for us in him, a life lived to the fullest, on mission, with purpose and hope and joy, then we will be called to go beyond many of the limits we once saw as barriers. But when we do, the view will be worth the climb. Going beyond almost always leads to a greater experience. That is our prayer for you through this teaching series and study.

As to the format of this guide: First, you are encouraged to follow along on Sunday morning. The teaching will align with the units, and your notes will help you reflect on the Scripture and study questions. Then each week, begin with the Scripture that is included with the unit. It is concise enough to meditate and reflect on daily. Following the Scripture are short commentaries on the biblical context and unit emphasis for that particular week and a brief, mostly extra-biblical thought that might help you put the topic into better perspective.

Take your time working through the questions. Many of them are intended to encourage you to reflect on the application and the reality of that question in today's world. If you are in a group, make notes, write down your questions, and be prepared to share.

Included in this study guide, following the discussion questions, are prayer guides. The first is a member prayer that we encourage you to pray along with, either in private or as a group. The second is a short prompt that leads into a space for you to record your own prayer for the week.

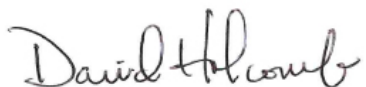
Lastly, and importantly, our congregation recently completed an assessment on the marks of a believer, as outlined by our **We Are** study this past spring. The results were utilized to indicate the areas of application where we are seeking more teaching and encouragement. Across the board, from leaders to members



to non-members, the area of Christian living where we have a wonderful opportunity to grow is in that of living a life on mission. It is the call to be mission-minded in all that we do, at all the times we do it, and in all of the places it is done. Because of this, each unit will conclude with thoughts on Missional Living. It would be helpful if you would discuss them with your family, friends, or small group members. However you decide to use this section, we are prayerful that each of us might continue to grow in this important area of living our faith.

I am excited to join you as we *Go Beyond*, and am especially grateful to serve a local body where going beyond is a desirable pursuit.

Because He lives,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "David Holcomb".

David Holcomb  
Minister of Discipleship, River Oaks Community Church



**UNIT**



**ONE**

# UNIT ONE

## GOING BEYOND ... OUR IMAGINATION



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

#### **Biblical Context**

The letter to the Ephesians is one of four letters commonly referred to as Prison Epistles, along with letters to Philemon, the Philippians, and the Colossians. It was authored by the apostle Paul during his first imprisonment in Rome between the years AD 60 - 62. Interestingly, because the name Ephesus is not consistent among early manuscripts, many commentators believe that this letter was intended to be circulated among many churches in Asia Minor, beginning with the Ephesian church.

As to the theme of this letter, the first three chapters offer theological truths of a Christian faith, mostly centering on the purpose, fullness, and faithfulness of the church. In the final three chapters, Paul writes of the practical ways we can live out that faith in the world, in our home, and against the spiritual battles we face.

One of the verses in view this week provides that transition from theology to practical. In Ephesians 3:18-20, Paul writes of his desire that we might know the extent (the breadth, length, height, and depth) of the love of Christ and might live out the fullness of God. For truly, they exist in the power at work within us, a power that **goes beyond our imagination**, enabling God to do more than all we can ask or think.

Finally, an important message to the Ephesian believers, is what Paul refers to as the "mystery." He goes on to explain that this mystery is the revelation that "Gentiles are fellow heirs and members of the same body of Christ." For that we say, praise God!

## Emphasis

One of the primary emphases for our time of study this week comes from the prayer that Paul offers in vv. 14-21. Many consider this prayer to be one of the most significant prayers in the New Testament. A few observations that you might want to reflect on as you read this passage:

First, typically Jews prayed standing up; yet Paul makes a point of identifying his posture before the Lord as "bowing my knees." This is no ordinary prayer. Much as Jesus prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane, Paul's prayer of humility provides his reader with a sense of how urgently and desperately he pleads on their behalf. Whether we bow physically or in our hearts, coming before the throne of God in prayer should be done with a humble heart and in a similar spirit of submission.

Dr. David Jeremiah speaks to the four internal P's of Paul's prayer: an **inward power** through the Holy Spirit (3:16), an **inward presence** of Christ (3:17), an **inward perception** of Christ's love and God's fullness (3:17-19), and an **inward provision** of this love and fullness (3:19).<sup>1</sup>

May we bow before the Lord in prayer, seeking to be filled with the Spirit, and see others experience Christ in these ways, acknowledging that we often limit God's power, strength, and love by the constraints of our own imagination. May we know that he is able to go beyond our imagination. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> David Jeremiah, ed., *The Jeremiah Study Bible*, NKJV (Nashville, TN: Worthy Publishing, 2013), 321.

## Going Beyond the Text

Charles Spurgeon (1834 - 1892), the London-based student and teacher of the Bible—known affectionately as the “Prince of Preachers”—wrote specifically of the “beyond imagination” closing in the apostle Paul’s prayer in Ephesians 3:

What we have here is adoration, not prayer. Adoration, including both the full sense of praise that is due and far more of it than we often render. Adoration, full of awe and peace. Adoration in seeking the fullness, the height, and depth, the length and breadth of praise. Adoration that is to prostrate oneself in the dust of humility and yet still soar aloft in sublime thought - to sink into nothing and yet to be so enlarged as to be filled with all the fullness of God.<sup>2</sup>

May we adore our God and come before him with great adoration.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Have you ever thought: “There is no way God will ever call me to be a small group leader”? If you currently are a leader, have you ever wondered how and why that happened! God has determined a specific kingdom-calling for each of us, according to our spiritual gifts. It may be teaching; it may hospitality or service. The point is, we should never rule out how God can change our lives and use our experiences in ways that go beyond our imagination. What does Paul say about himself in Ephesians 3:8 and 1 Timothy 1:12-17? Can you relate? Do you think Paul ever imagined what God could do through him? What is God calling you to right now?

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<sup>2</sup> Alistair Begg, ed., *CSB Spurgeon Study Bible*, CSB (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017), 1589.

2. In Ephesians 3:11, Paul writes of "the eternal purpose that God has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord." What eternal purpose? How does Paul say this purpose is fulfilled? What is your understanding of "the church" and her primary role?

3. Paul begins his prayer passage with, "For this reason ...". What is the reason that Paul bows his knees and prays? Hint: See Ephesians 2:8-9 and 2:13-16. Have you ever felt segregated by a "dividing wall of hostility," and then later witnessed that wall come down? How did it impact you?

4. There are four dimensions used to describe the immensity of God's love and fullness in Ephesians 3:17-19. What are those four dimensions, and what do each of them imply about God's love? In your own words, how do you explain the vastness of God's love?

5. The final verses (3:20-21) are referred to as a doxology, meaning “a prayer of praise.” Often, the early church prayers concluded with a doxology as a reminder of whom they were directing their prayers to. As you close out your personal or group prayers this week, recite the Ephesians 3:20-21 doxology to practice expressing your praise to the One to whom you pray. What does it mean to say that your life is a doxology?

6. In your own words, what practical application comes to your mind from this unit on “Going Beyond Our Imagination”? What one big idea will you take with you?

# PRAYER PAGE

## Member Prayer (by George Crew)

Father,

You tell us you can do way beyond anything we can ever imagine, and you do this through your Holy Spirit at work in us. Lord, help us to act in accordance with that promise as we face the challenges before us, both the challenges of today and those we will face in the future. And help us to act in accordance with that promise as we face the opportunities you set before us, both the opportunities of today and those we will face in the future. May all that we do be done for your glory.

And we pray Ephesians 3:20 and 21 ... Father, to You who are able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to Your power that is at work within us, to You, Father, be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.

## A Personal Prayer

In consideration of those areas where I might be limiting God's power in me and through me, where I am deeply desiring greater knowledge of Christ and a life in Christ, I pray that he might do more than I can ask or think, that he goes beyond my imagination.

Lord,

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# MISSION-MINDED FOR MISSIONAL LIVING

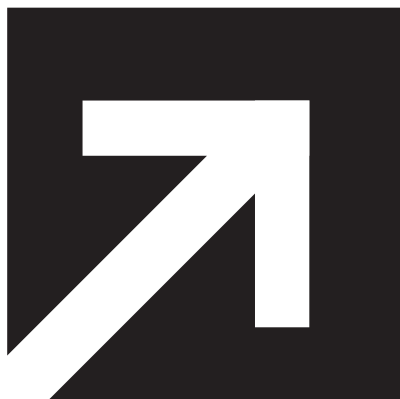
In week one, let's simply refresh ourselves with a description of what it means to live life on mission. You are encouraged to pray over the various ways we can grow in our mission-mindedness, reaching beyond our imagination when it comes to living out our faith in our home, in our church, our community, and the world.

**Missional Living: As you reflect on your current faith walk, how are you doing as a follower who is "on-mission"? This is someone who is equipped and active in personally sharing the gospel, intentional in building relationships that enable the sharing of one's life and love for Jesus, and engaged in the work of dedicated mission service—inside the church, within our local community, or around the globe. Missional living requires a blurring of the secular and sacred as distinct areas of our lives; seeing, rather, the sacred in all areas of life. Missional living affects our priorities, our behaviors, our words, our desires, and our heart's attitude toward others, seeing all as image bearers of God.**

After reading through this definition a few times, record your thoughts below. Share them with your group and refer to them throughout the study.



**UNIT**



**TWO**

# UNIT TWO

## GOING BEYOND ... OUR STATUS QUO



For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.

### ROMANS 8:5-11

#### **Biblical Context**

Unlike some of Paul's other letters, the purpose for writing to the church in Rome was not to correct theology or to rebuke the behavior of believers. Rather, it was written in order that Paul might introduce himself to a church he had not yet visited, to teach them the deeper meanings of the gospel of grace.

Romans was written by Paul while in Corinth, toward the end of his third missionary journey. It was the result of Paul having to make a choice between returning to Jerusalem—in order to help out a "suffering" church—or continuing on to join the believers in Rome for the first time. Paul elected to serve the suffering and delay his visit. Because of this decision, we have available to us what many consider to be Paul's most inspired masterpiece of gospel truth.

In this rich work of doctrinal and practical instruction, there is evidence of Paul's passion for disciple-making. The reality of coming alongside a congregation of believers who desired to **go beyond the status quo** (to grow in gospel literacy and devote themselves to godly living) comes through in Paul's eagerness to dig deep with the Roman believers and to "*be mutually encouraged by each other's faith*" (1:12).

Many believe that had Paul not been arrested in Rome, he would have conducted his fourth missionary journey to Spain (Romans 15:28). There is little doubt that the Roman church would have been significantly involved in that westward expansion of gospel.

## Emphasis

This week, our study will focus on chapter 8 of Romans, a passage within Paul's letter that screams out, "VICTORY!" It begins with "no condemnation," ends with "no separation," and in-between there is "no defeat."

One of the primary reasons there is victory in the life of one who follows Jesus as Lord is because there is life in the Spirit. In this chapter, the Holy Spirit is mentioned twenty times as one who frees us from our sin (2-3), enables us to fulfill God's law (4), changes our nature and grants us strength for victory over the flesh (5-13), confirms our adoption as God's children (14-16), and guarantees our ultimate glory (17-30).

We are called to grow in our faith and to become spiritually mature, but we can only advance in this calling when we rely on the Holy Spirit to help us. First is to acknowledge the Spirit's presence and place in our lives. God in us must be a daily recognition. In this regular acknowledgement, we can then face the world and the many temptations of the flesh, knowing that the Spirit brings us victory.

May we call on the Holy Spirit to guide us, instruct us, and convict us each day. May we fully recognize that in our flesh we are dead spiritually, but that the Spirit brings us abundant life, that even in the present sufferings, the Spirit is present in us, protecting us and preparing us for a greater glory, a final victory. We are grateful for the freedom that we have over the bondage of sin as we walk in the Spirit. Finally, may we be passionate about a life that goes beyond the status quo. Amen.

## Going Beyond the Text

Referring to Holy Spirit's intercession for believers that Paul notes in Romans 8:27, John Bunyan (1628 - 1688)—the Puritan preacher and writer best remembered for *The Pilgrim's Progress*—wrote specifically of the “beyond status quo” posture of our heart when in prayer through the Spirit:

To pray in the Spirit is to pray sincerely, sensibly, and with affection by the working of God's Spirit. No one can truly pray without His assistance. While prayer is in the making, God is searching the heart to see from what root and spirit it comes. That which is according to His will he hears, and nothing else. O, to pray by the Spirit, in great faith and pure motive, but this one word: “Father.” Spoken in faith, with the Spirit's intercession, it is better than a thousand formal, cold, and lukewarm prayers.<sup>3</sup>

When we come before the Father, may the Spirit intercede from the sincerity of our hearts.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Have you ever thought, “I just can't do this on my own. Between the temptations, my past experiences, and the influences around me, how do I keep from setting my mind on the things of the flesh or the desires of the world?” What are the practical ways to keep from walking in the flesh as you move through your week?

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<sup>3</sup> Richard Rushing, ed., *Voices from the Past: Puritan Devotional Readings*, (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1990, repr., 2010), 364.

2. Romans 8:7-8 is a critical truth to how we relate to an unbelieving world. Why would that be the case? As a result of this, and in consideration of Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians 2:14, how does that impact the expectation of—or the heart attitude toward—someone who is not a follower of Jesus?

3. The Holy Spirit is often referred to as the "Comforter." What does Romans 8:18-25 tell us about why we should expect the need of a Comforter? How do you reconcile suffering in your own life against the future hope and glory for which we wait? Bigger question: How do you explain suffering to those who use it to deny God?

4. "Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness" (Romans 8:26). In what ways have you experienced the Spirit's strength? Weakness might also be considered as being young in the faith, immature, and lacking knowledge. How does the Spirit enable us to become more spiritually mature? In what areas of your walk are you calling on the Spirit's strength and guidance? (Consider John 14:26.)

5. Passages of Scripture like Romans 8:28 and 8:31-32 are often used out of context, missing a much grander truth. What is the subject of these verses? Why is Paul's implication much more significant than any other we might mistakenly apply to it? (Note: There seems to be a similar train of thought in Philippians 1:6.) How often do we worship God for the fact that he has saved us?

6. In your own words, what practical application comes to your mind from this unit on "Going Beyond Our Status Quo"? What one big idea will you take with you?

# PRAYER PAGE

## Member Prayer (by Gena Near)

Most Powerful Heavenly Father,

We humbly pray to thank You for giving us the power of the Holy Spirit, who is dwelling within us and is our "Helper" in everything we do. We pray in awe that the same power that resurrected Jesus from the dead lives in us today.

God, we understand that our spiritual growth depends on reading, studying, knowing and applying Your Word to our lives, enabling us to become more and more Christ-like every day. Lord, we understand that You work in different people in different ways, believers and unbelievers alike. We know we shouldn't be (as we often are) comparing ourselves with other people, but with Your Word.

Father, we pray and ask for replenishment of the Holy Spirit so that we are empowered to do Your will (not ours). We pray that as we grow, our works are most pleasing to You in furthering Your kingdom. You are such an awesome God! When we pray, we desire to let You hear that we love You and we need You now and forever! Amen.

## A Personal Prayer

In consideration of those areas where I might be limiting the Spirit's power in me and through me, where I am deeply desiring greater victory over the flesh, I pray that the Spirit might strengthen my life in Him, that all I say and do and think goes beyond the status quo of this world, to reflect the hope and glory of the world to come.

Lord,

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# MISSION-MINDED FOR MISSIONAL LIVING

In this unit, let's consider what it means to be equipped for the active, personal sharing of the gospel. In other words, when you are in conversation and the question of what it means to be saved is asked, (or any variation of "What do you believe?" or "How do I become a Christian?"), what is your response?

Here are some suggestions to consider:

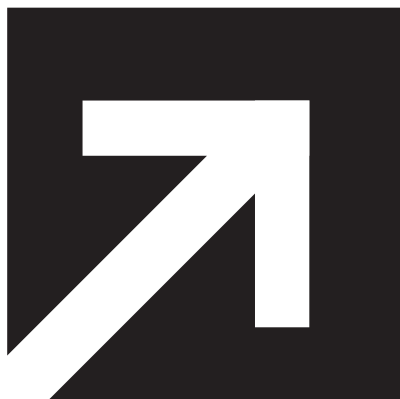
1. **Know the gospel.** Be confident in your understanding of the "good news," or the New Testament meaning of *gospel*.

In short, sin has separated us from a holy God. Because of this separation, God put into place a plan of redemption, or of drawing us back to himself. Jesus was the redeemer in this plan, atoning for—or making right—the sin that separates. Being fully God and fully man, Jesus was the only one holy enough to make atonement complete and yet human enough to make atonement the payment of the offending party. In life, death, and resurrection, Jesus completed this plan of redemption and defeated sin as the element of eternal separation. Deliverance—or salvation—from sin is now available to all who confess Jesus as Lord and believe God raised him from the dead (Romans 10:9). There is nothing else we can do to receive salvation (Ephesians 2:8-9).

2. **Practice sharing the gospel.** Ask your small group members and those sitting around your family dinner table, these "How to" questions of faith, then have them ask you. Be curious about learning the various ways others summarize the gospel message in order to cover the main points and not overwhelm. What Scripture do they use? What resources?
3. **Share the gospel.** Ask a believer if you can share with them. Next, ask a close friend or family member who will be receptive, but for whose salvation you are not certain. Finally, when the Spirit convicts and the opportunities to be a relational witness present themselves, be prepared to share with anyone.



**UNIT**



**THREE**

# UNIT THREE

## GOING BEYOND ... OUR SELF-CENTEREDNESS



Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.

In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!

Therefore, God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

### PHILIPPIANS 2:3-11

#### **Biblical Context**

The church in Philippi had an especially memorable and divinely choreographed beginning. As the apostle Paul had been visiting churches, preaching in synagogues, and traveling throughout Asia Minor during his second missionary journey, he had been prevented on more than one occasion from going any further west. However, one night a vision came to Paul of a man pleading for help in Macedonia (Acts 16). It was so clear, that Paul and his team planned to go immediately.

When they arrived in this region, they came to Philippi. The Jews were few in number, and therefore had no synagogue—so they worshiped along the river. This is where Paul preached Christ to them, and where the wealthy Gentile by the name of Lydia responded with faith. This became the core gathering for the church in Philippi; it was the first “European” city to receive the gospel of Christ from Paul.

Years later, Paul writes to the believers in Philippi, praying for them and giving thanks for the gift they had provided him while in prison. It is an especially intimate letter, his most personal, with over one hundred uses of “I,” “me,” and “my,”—mostly expressing affection for this church that exhibited great joy and unity.

While updating the Philippians on his condition, Paul provides the well-known reason for how he **goes beyond self-centeredness**, and remains content and joy-filled despite circumstances: “I can do all (these) things through Christ who strengthens me.”

## Emphasis

From this letter of encouragement and joy, unit three will focus on the instruction from Paul for how we are to remain in our joy—we are to be selfless, thinking of others first. And if we are uncertain as to what this might look like, Paul has written that we should desire to have the mind of Christ (sort of a first-century version of WWJD).

Much of what Paul emphasizes in this second chapter could be summarized as living a Sermon-on-the-Mount life in our relationships with one another. We are to be grounded in humility, compassion, kindness, mercy, and peacemaking. He would go on to write that we are to “do all things without grumbling or disputing” (Ouch. We could probably spend a full unit on this one, huh?).

Ultimately, Paul is reinforcing the very thing that is at the heart of many of his letters, “Church, be different!” He says that we are to shine as lights in the world, because against the dark, the light of Christ through us will show the way and light up those around us. We do this, importantly, by “holding fast to the word of life.” By pursuing Christ-likeness, holding tightly to the gospel, engaging in Scripture, we can also find the contentment and joy that Paul writes of in Philippians 4:11-13.

May we look to Jesus as the model of our relationships with others. In his example, may we find great humility and the absence of conceit. May we do nothing out of selfish ambition. May our interests not be of our own matters only, but may we serve the interests of others as well. In all of this, because selflessness runs counter to the world of self-absorption, may our life be a reflection of Christ that brings light “in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation,” so that he might be praised. Amen.

## Going Beyond the Text

French pastor, theologian, and reformer John Calvin (1509 - 1564), who many consider to be the father of the Presbyterian and Reformed churches, wrote often on the subject of self-denial in the Christian life. Calvin's biblical worldview spoke to the believer's imitation of Christ's humility, going beyond our self-centeredness as a true life of obedience. With Philippians 2:1-18 in view, Calvin wrote:

The remedy of all. There is no end and no limit to the obstacles of the one who wants to pursue what is right and at the same time shrinks back from self-denial. It is an ancient and true observation that there is a world of vices hidden in the soul, but Christian self-denial is the remedy of them all. There is deliverance in store for the one who gives up selfishness.<sup>4</sup>

In our aim to please the Lord, may we give up selfishness and learn to deny self.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Have you ever thought about self-centeredness as being one of the most detrimental marks of a believer in their witness to the world? Why would that be the case? What are the most tempting acts of selfishness that you face daily?

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<sup>4</sup> Richard J. Foster and James Bryan Smith, eds., *Devotional Classics: Selected Readings for Individuals and Groups* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, rev. 2005), 138.

2. Philippians 2:1-18 provides us with several ways we can become less self-centered. What are the two or three ways throughout this passage that most resonate with you? What does Paul say is the qualifier, or the reason, for our wanting to incorporate these Christ-like traits into our life?

3. The idea of humility (Philippians 2:3) was a controversial idea in the Greco-Roman world of Jesus and Paul. It was a term of derision, lowliness, or insignificance. Yet Jesus exhibited and taught humility as foundational to the life of a follower. Likewise, Paul insisted on humility as the basis for church unity and for being different from the world. How do you define humility? What does it look like for a Christian to be humble? These verses may help: 1 Peter 5:5, Romans 12:10, Galatians 5:13.

4. There is sometimes misunderstanding regarding Philippians 2:12 and the “working out of your own salvation with fear and trembling.” This is not a call to earning our salvation. Rather, Paul uses a play on words with the understanding that the original word for “work out” comes from the mining industry. In other words, miners bring into light—or work out—the riches that already exist. Likewise, we are called to *work out* what God has already *worked in*. To mine out the riches and bring them into light is a process often referred to as *sanctification*. This is a continual process to bring about fulfillment of the salvation we have been gifted. What, then, does that look like in a practical application? How do you work out your own salvation? And what does “fear and trembling” have to do with it?

5. In the “easier-said-than-done” category come Paul’s words in Philippians 2: 14: “Do all things without grumbling or disputing.” Not a few things, not most things, not the things that are easy to do without grumbling, but “ALL” things. Where is this the most challenging in your life? What are you going to do about it?

6. In your own words, what practical application comes to your mind from this unit on “Going Beyond Our Self-Centeredness”? What one big idea will you take with you?

# PRAYER PAGE

## Member Prayer (by Faye Brendle)

Father,

You are our God and are greatly to be praised. We come to you wanting to honor and bless your name. You are an awesome God, who we trust, for You are the same yesterday, today, and forever. We glorify Your Name.

We know that Your love is the reason for our being and we are called to seek to grow in the likeness of Your Son, Jesus. Lord give us a desire to “seek your kingdom and His righteousness” daily. We confess that we have been guilty of doing things out of self-ambition and vain conceit; we have failed to humble ourselves and have put our own interests far above You and others.

Father, we humbly seek that You would, by Your Holy Spirit, create in us an attitude that would be the same as that of Jesus Christ. That we would take the very nature of a servant--and humble ourselves and be obedient to your call to serve and love others in the same manner as Jesus. Amen.

## A Personal Prayer

In consideration of those areas where I might be living a life that is defined by selfishness, rather than selflessness, where my witness is lacking joy, compassion, and kindness, I pray for the Christ-like love and humility to value others above myself in order that Jesus might receive all glory and honor.

Lord,

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# MISSION-MINDED FOR MISSIONAL LIVING

As we continue to consider the sharing of the gospel as an element of Missional Living, let's look at some possible roadmaps to go along with last unit's suggestions for becoming ready to share the Good News - *Know it, Practice it, Share it.*

One outline of Scripture that has been used for centuries to share the gospel of Jesus is referred to as the *Romans Road*, named for the fact that all of the Scripture comes from the Book of Romans. These verses can help provide structure in explaining our separation from God and his plan to redeem us unto himself.

## The Romans Road

Romans 3:23 - "For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God" - We have all sinned. There is no one innocent.

Romans 6:23 - "For the wages of sin is death" - The consequences of our fallen nature is eternal death. We are "lost" in our sin.

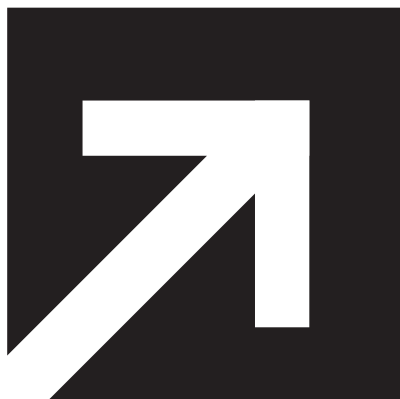
Romans 5:8 - "But God demonstrates his own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." - God's plan to reconcile us back to himself was made complete in the life, death, and resurrection of his only Son, Jesus.

Romans 10:9 - "That if you confess with your mouth Jesus is Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." - We are "saved" by placing our faith in the Lordship of Jesus and the gift of God's grace. We can't work ourselves into eternity with God; we can believe with our heart.

Romans 5:1 - "Therefore since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." - The Good News of the Gospel.



**UNIT**



**FOUR**

# UNIT FOUR

## GOING BEYOND ... OUR ABILITY



When our enemies heard that it was known to us and that God had frustrated their plan, we all returned to the wall, each to his work. From that day on, half of my servants worked on construction, and half held the spears, shields, bows, and coats of mail. And the leaders stood behind the whole house of Judah, who were building on the wall. Those who carried burdens were loaded in such a way that each labored on the work with one hand and held his weapon with the other. And each of the builders had his sword strapped at his side while he built. The man who sounded the trumpet was beside me. And I said to the nobles and to the officials and to the rest of the people, "The work is great and widely spread, and we are separated on the wall, far from one another. In the place where you hear the sound of the trumpet, rally to us there. Our God will fight for us."

### NEHEMIAH 4:15-22

#### **Biblical Context**

The book of Nehemiah is a continuation of the historical record in Ezra. In fact, Nehemiah is authored by Ezra, thus the Hebrew Scriptures keep the books together as a single book. Nehemiah details the Jews' return from exile in Babylon to their home in Jerusalem, where we find restoration and renewal as primary themes.

As background, Jerusalem had fallen to the Babylonian armies in 586 BC, and almost all the Jews (particularly those deemed of value to the Jewish society) were taken captive to Babylon. Few remained in the rubble that once was a mighty city. In 539 BC, Persia defeated Babylon and God ordained the Persian King Cyrus the Great to have favor on the exiled Jews. The Bible records three large waves of exiles who would return to Jerusalem beginning in 538 BC, followed by the Ezra-led wave in 458 BC, and concluding with Nehemiah 445 BC.

But the opening of the book reveals a problem. The Jewish people had returned and restored the temple in 516 BC, but they now lay exposed to continued attacks by enemies. The walls had not been rebuilt. This is the charge that Nehemiah, serving as cupbearer to King Artaxerxes in Babylon, volunteers to return and lead. Nehemiah answers God's calling on his life to return to a place where he has never lived, giving up his trusted and comparably cushy lifestyle in Babylon, and **goes beyond his ability**.

One of the more interesting aspects of this book, much like Ezra, is the number of extra-biblical sources that exist with details confirming the biblical account of the dates, the festivals, the settings (i.e., Susa has been confirmed by archeological work), and the historical accuracy of the persons mentioned (i.e., King Artaxerxes, Sanballet).

### **Emphasis**

When we pick up the account of Nehemiah in chapter four, the emphasis has turned from motivating the people of the plan to rebuild a wall to the threat of opposition as the work is underway.

The newly-reinforced and re-energized citizens of Jerusalem had come together under Nehemiah's leadership and started rebuilding this great wall around the city. The details in chapter three of Nehemiah give us a great perspective of how industrious and unified the people were in this endeavor. There is around-the-clock activity; progress is evident almost immediately. This progress, ironically, becomes the catalyst of the problem that Nehemiah faces in chapter four.

At first, enemies of the Jews paid little attention to these plans. They laughed them off, even providing one of the first instances of "trash talking" in the Bible (Nehemiah 4:3), and assumed it would be business as usual in their world of extortion, murder, and pillage. Not so fast. Nehemiah—with much prayer and divine purpose—was getting things done. As the wall becomes halfway complete, the enemies begin to concern themselves. This unit looks at how Nehemiah responds, and how that translates to how you and I are called to fulfill the plans God has for us.

In our time this week, may we be encouraged by the resilience and determination of Nehemiah and his people. Lord, may we find your strength to continue in the work you have called us to when we come under attack by the enemy in our lives. May we seek you in prayer and find great confidence in your protection and provision. Amen.

## Going Beyond the Text

A Pharisee at age 19, Flavius Josephus (37 - 100), commander of Jewish forces in his early thirties, was taken prisoner by Roman soldiers when Jerusalem was overtaken. His life was spared after predicting that Vespasian would be the next emperor. Vespasian “promoted” Josephus to Roman citizen, employing him to write Jewish history. In his recording of Nehemiah (as historical account) he wrote:

When the Ammonites, and Moabites, and Samaritans, heard that the building went on apace, they took it heinously, and proceed to lay snares for them, and to hinder their intentions, even hiring some of the foreigners to kill him ... But none of these things could deter Nehemiah from being diligent about the work ... He was a man of a good and righteous disposition, and very ambitious to make his own nation happy. Now this was done in the days of Xerxes.<sup>5</sup>

In our aim to please the Lord, may we be diligent about fulfilling his plan for our lives.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Have you ever felt that you were under attack by an enemy, whether seen or unseen? What do you recall about that situation? How would you describe the level of fatigue, frustration, or fear?

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<sup>5</sup> William, A. M. Whiston, trans., *Josephus: The Complete Works* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1998), 355-357.

2. Nehemiah 4:1-3 describes a group of “haters”: those who would openly mock, hurl insults, and even try their hand at sarcastic jokes. Do these people still exist today? Have you ever caught yourself doing this to someone else who is fulfilling a certain calling or performing a certain task? How do we respond to others (think social media)? How does Nehemiah respond?

3. Against the enemy, Nehemiah put a specific strategy in place, part offense and part defense. What is it that Nehemiah did in order to continue the work God had called him to, yet also defend against this outside threat? (Nehemiah 4:16-18).

4. What do you think the people of Jerusalem were thinking when Nehemiah first announced that they would build a wall? (Nehemiah 2:17-18 provides their actual reaction). Did it surprise you? The Jews would not only be building a wall, but also performing security. Do you think they considered their abilities, or just that God was calling them to action and he would provide? Is there an example of this in your life?

5. We read in the final passage of this chapter of an exhaustive commitment by Nehemiah and his men to the people of Jerusalem. Do you ever feel exhausted in your labor for the Lord? How do you persevere? What have you learned in laboring alongside others in the ministry of serving?

6. In your own words, what practical application comes to your mind from this unit on "Going Beyond Our Ability"? What one big idea will you take with you?

# PRAYER PAGE

## Member Prayer (by Elizabeth Carlson)

Lord,

You know that discouragement is never in short supply. When you nudge us to make changes in our lives, we often hear words of discouragement. These thoughts come from inside us and around us. The tasks are challenging and often reach outside our comfort zones.

Like Nehemiah, who faced great opposition, we can learn to combat them. Help us to station guards at our weak points and to arm ourselves with your weapons: esp. your Word. Help us to combine prayer with preparation for our task. God, please remind us today of the moments in our lives where you parted the Red Sea for us.

Renew our faith so that we do not grow discouraged in the battles we face today. Help us remember to look to you when we feel inadequate for a job you have called us to do. Cast out our fears and remind us that you are with us to deliver us. May we be blessed by our weaknesses as opportunities to rely on you for help and strength. May we never take our eyes off of you. Amen.

## A Personal Prayer

In consideration of those areas in my life where I might be holding back God-given abilities for any number of reasons—fear, selfishness, lack of confidence, or simply because they’ve not been revealed to me—I pray that the Lord will release all the potential he has designed in me to serve him and others more completely.

Lord,

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# MISSION-MINDED FOR MISSIONAL LIVING

In unit four, we have another outline of Scripture that can be used to share the gospel. It is derived from the acronym **FAITH** and can answer the question: “*What does the Bible say is required for me to enter heaven?*”

Before reflecting on the Scripture below, please know that there are many models and approaches for sharing the good news of Jesus, just as there are styles and situations. The key is that we are grounded in Scripture, not opinions, and that we are ready. We are called to proclaim Jesus, but only the Holy Spirit can make changes. In this we are given our charge with confidence and comfort.

## The **FAITH** Outline

**F - Forgiveness:** Because of sin, we cannot have eternal life without God’s forgiveness (Ephesians 1:7).

**A - Available:** Forgiveness is available for all (John 3:16), but not automatic (Matthew 7:21).

**I - Impossible:** God cannot allow sin into heaven (Romans 3:23, James 2:13).

< So how can a sinful person enter heaven, where God allows no sin?>

**T - Turn:** Turn means to repent from sin and self (Luke 13:3), and to turn toward someone else—Jesus (1 Corinthians 15:3-4, Romans 10:9).

**H - Heaven:** Eternal life begins here (John 10:10) and hereafter (John 14:3).

<How can a person receive God’s forgiveness and turn?>

***Forsaking All I Trust Him***



**UNIT**



**FIVE**

# UNIT FIVE

## GOING BEYOND ... OUR MATERIALISM



And he said to them, "Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions." And he told them a parable, saying, "The land of a rich man produced plentifully, and he thought to himself, 'What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?' And he said, 'I will do this: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry." ' "But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?' So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God."

And he said to his disciples, "Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat, nor about your body, what you will put on. For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing. Consider the ravens: they neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds!"

### LUKE 12:15-24

#### **Biblical Context**

Physician and occasional traveling companion of Paul, Doctor Luke was used as an instrument of God to record a two-volume history of Jesus and his church. These books are known as the Gospel According to Luke and the Acts of the Apostles.

Luke's Gospel is unique among the four Gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke and John—in that it is written, not as a typical narrative, but as a Greco-Roman literary work; the research, order, and eyewitness historical accounts were critical components to the finished document (Luke 1:1-4). The overarching themes in Luke are Jesus as Savior and salvation to both Jew and Gentile.

In chapters 9-19, Luke details Jesus' journey to Jerusalem, including many of the teachings, prayers, and interactions with individuals along the way. There are numerous parables that relate to God's kingdom and our place in it. When we arrive at chapter 12, Jesus seems to have been gathered outside with his disciples when "so many thousands of people had gathered together that they were trampling one another" (12:1). It's then that Jesus begins to speak, and the command to **go beyond our materialism** is issued.

## Emphasis

Bible commentators have recognized the passage of Scripture from Luke 11:9 through 13:9 as being one extended conversation between Jesus, his disciples, and the various crowds that have come and gone. There are two occasions when he is "interrupted" by someone in the crowd, only to use those interruptions to underscore truths that are much more important. In this unit, we will emphasize one of those times.

The question posed by the man in Luke 12 is quickly dismissed by Jesus, as he would rather isolate the real issue prompting the inquiry: covetousness and greed. In other words, this man asks a question about inheritance, yet Jesus sees that the basis for the question is selfishness. This individual has just heard Jesus speak of confessing Christ before men, yet all this particular man can think of is his financial inheritance. It's the equivalent of sitting through a worship service during which Scripture—perhaps even salvation—is being taught, and thinking about how jealous we are of our neighbor's new car. Perspective, huh?

Jesus will use this question to warn the crowd—and followers today—not only of the misuse of wealth, but also of the anxiety and worry associated with a worldly view of materialism. This is a lesson in trust and generosity. It is not a lesson against amassing wealth, but of not allowing wealth to control our hearts and mind.

In our time this week, may we evaluate the impact of worldly materialism in our own lives. May we question whether our accumulation of material "things" is an effort to give and share and build up, or a pursuit of self-pleasure, position, and power? May we lay our worries down and be encouraged to trust. Amen.

## Going Beyond the Text

G.K. Chesterton (1874 - 1936) was often called the official Christian cultural critic of the early-twentieth century. As an author and journalist, he often commented on the consumeristic behaviors of modern society. He was one of the wittiest intellectuals of his time, and had a particularly strong influence on both C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien. In the spirit of going beyond our materialism, he wrote:

If we could fathom the gift of sheer existence, our response would be one of gratitude - of surprise and wonder at the simple provisions of God, of ordinary objects, experiences, and above all, people. ... See, there are two ways to get enough in our world. One is to accumulate more and more, the other is to desire less.<sup>6</sup>

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Have you ever found yourself in a dispute over material goods—property, cash, inheritance? How was your heart attitude throughout the dispute? Are there words or thoughts you would take back if you could do it over again? Did you view the dispute in light of eternity?

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<sup>6</sup> Center for the Study of C.S. Lewis and Friends, *Lent and Easter: Wisdom from G.K. Chesterton*, Liguori (MO: Liguori Publications, 2007), vi.

2. Jesus tells a parable (Luke 12:16-21) in response to the question on inheritance. In this parable, he makes clear that the rich man's sin was not his wealth, as he seemed to earn it legally and ethically. What was the rich man's sin? Perhaps Paul's warning to Timothy in 1 Timothy 6:6-10 was a result of this understanding. Why is it so difficult to amass wealth in a godly manner?

3. It's true that worry is often the result of financial stress. In Luke 12:22-31 Jesus is not instructing us to never give serious thought to how we steward our finances, or to go about nonchalantly accumulating debt and behaving irresponsibly. Rather, he is connecting the idea of laying up treasures for oneself, or increasing trust in oneself, to that of increased anxiety and decreased trust in God. Why is this the case? In this passage, what is the lesson of simplicity, wants vs. needs, and materialism?

4. Read Exodus 20:17, the tenth commandment. Are you ever tempted to covet your neighbor's possessions? Why? How do you control or prevent envy? Do you find any comfort in Luke 12:32-34?

5. "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Luke 12:34). Where is your treasure? In other words, in the place where you store your valuables, what do you find there? Accumulated possessions for self? An ever-growing bank account left untapped for fear or worry? A title, position, place of authority? Evidence of a life that goes beyond materialism and demonstrates kingdom priorities? Where is your heart?

6. In your own words, what practical application comes to your mind from this unit on "Going Beyond Our Materialism"? What one big idea will you take with you?

# PRAYER PAGE

## Member Prayer (by Stephanie Royall)

Lord,

We are called to a life of stewardship. All we have, whether it be talent, time, or money, should be used to glorify you. Doing so can be scary and difficult, however. We fear making a commitment that will hurt other parts of our life, or not having enough left over for our everyday needs. As we enter this time of going beyond, we pray that You help us move beyond our anxiety. Help us to put all our trust in You and to remember that when we are faithful to you, you are faithful to us. Help us to not worry about where our food or clothing will come from, but to trust that you will provide for us even more than you do the birds and the flowers. Show us how to best use what we have to be good stewards and place ourselves and all we have fully in Your hands. Guide us during this season and help us push ourselves beyond our fears and into a life of trusting and faithful stewardship. Amen.

## A Personal Prayer

In consideration of those areas in my life where covetousness, greed, worry, and fear have taken over, I pray for release from these attitudes and feelings that drain me and minimize my impact for your kingdom. May I lay up treasures for you, God, and may I be trusting in your provision to meet my needs.

Lord,

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# MISSION-MINDED FOR MISSIONAL LIVING

In unit five, the objective is to consider our desire to intentionally build relationships with others that enable us to share our lives and love of Jesus.

A life on mission intentionally invests in others. This is not a call to “target” unbelievers. Nobody likes being a target. This is a call to be genuinely filled with compassion for those who do not know Jesus as Lord and to be purposeful in how you share with them. The Lord places others in our paths every day. Let’s not miss the opportunities to build trusting relationships and see what the Lord will do.

Sample prompts to reflect on, pray about, and discuss with others:

- Do I sincerely desire to share the gospel with someone who doesn’t accept Jesus as Lord and Savior?
- Who has the Lord placed in my regular path that I can build a relationship and trust with, prayerfully seeking an opportunity to share the gospel? In my home? My neighborhood? My workplace?
- Am I praying over the list of individuals with whom I want to share? Do I name them by name? Am I intentional with my time for this purpose?

Sample conversation starters for engaging with others:

- “Hey, I’ve never heard your take on spiritual matters; do you have one?”
- “I was wondering if church is something that has been in your background or if you would be open to joining me. I can pick you up or meet you there.”
- “We were talking this past Sunday, and it made me think about a question; do you think materialism is a problem or just something that is normal?”

Practical advice for engaging with others:

- Advice: Ask if they mind your question regarding spiritual matters or faith.
- Advice: Listen. You don’t have to speak. In fact, less is usually more. You can learn a lot when listening to why and how a person has come to a point in life where they are relative to faith.
- Advice: Don’t debate, judge, or argue. We are called to proclaim, but the Holy Spirit convicts and opens eyes. Build the relationship, don’t tear down a person.
- Advice: Never extend a conversation past a point where the other person has communicated that they wish it would stop.

**UNIT**



**SIX**

# UNIT SIX

## GOING BEYOND ... OUR COMFORT



And when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

**MATTHEW 6:16-18**

While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them."

**ACTS 13:2**

And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed.

**ACTS 14:23**

"Yet even now," declares the Lord, "return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning."

**JOEL 2:12**

### **Biblical Context**

Prayer and fasting are the subject of various sections of Scripture that highlight others **going beyond their comfort** to serve or obey the Lord. In our study, we will focus primarily on the references to prayer and fasting in Matthew and Acts.

As an element of context, the passage above, found in the Gospel According to Matthew (Matthew 6:16-18), is included within Jesus' Sermon on the Mount teaching. In fact, the transition "and" in verse 16 indicates an attachment of the fasting passage to the teaching immediately prior to this, the Lord's Prayer. This would make sense as prayer and fasting are often mentioned together.

The narrative in Acts 13:2 is a key passage in which the apostle Paul, along with Barnabas, is selected and sent off for what would be Paul's first missionary journey.

Lastly, though not a key point in our unit six study, the reference in Joel is important as the prophet was called by God to turn the hearts of the people, to announce God's judgments, to invite them to repentance and a restored relationship with God. A characteristic of a contrite heart seems to often include prayer and fasting.

## Emphasis

The emphasis on fasting and prayer this week is to encourage us to go beyond our comfort, both our physical and spiritual comfort, with times of dedicated fasting and prayer. The use of these spiritual disciplines is a biblical reality in both the Old Testament and New. The prophets and priests called for them, the psalmist practiced them, Jesus taught on them, and the apostles of the early church of Acts relied on them. Why many of us so readily engage in prayer and only associate fasting with the Lenten season—if we practice fasting at all—is likely due, at least in part, to the warning Jesus gives around the legalistic abuse of fasting in Matthew 9 and the churches utilizing that warning to abandon the practice of fasting all together.

In short, Jesus tells his followers that when (not *if*) you worship God in these ways, do not make a spectacle out of yourself. To the world around you, do not announce your fast and do not appear as if you are miserable (despite how uncomfortable you might be). If you behave this way, you might as well not even fast.

This unit is challenging in many ways. First, we live in a self-promoting, #lookatme, world. To worship in this way without announcing it, or documenting it with pictures, is countercultural. Secondly, we live in a busy world. To delay gratification, to slow down (the very essence of fasting and prayer), is countercultural. Finally, we live in a comfortable world. To deny oneself comfort in a disciplined manner is countercultural.

In our time this week, may we engage in the idea of fasting and prayer. May it bring us to a level of worship that is more rich and meaningful. May we not feel the need to announce our worship and service to the Lord, knowing that the audience of One is all we ever need to impress. Amen.

## Going Beyond the Text

Most are familiar with C.S. Lewis (1898 - 1963) through his classic Narnia series of books, particularly *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*. Yet the early twentieth-century scholar, author, lecturer, and theologian, was most avidly a Christian apologist, or defender of the faith. In this, he wrote and spoke in defense of biblical doctrines and worldviews. On the lighter side of fasting, and going beyond our comfort, he wrote:

Perhaps if we had obeyed more calls for voluntary fasting before, God would not now have put us on these darn diets! Well, they say that an imposed mortification can have all the merits of a voluntary one if it is taken in the right spirit.<sup>7</sup> [and] I didn't go to religion to make me happy. I always knew a bottle of Port would do that. If you want a religion to make you feel really comfortable, I certainly don't recommend Christianity.<sup>8</sup>

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Have you ever wondered what fasting was all about? Did you realize that it is found as an element of personal worship throughout the Bible? Have you ever practiced fasting? What questions remain regarding fasting?

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<sup>7</sup> Wayne Martindale and Jerry Roots, eds., *The Quotable Lewis* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishing, 1990), 218.

<sup>8</sup> Brett McCracken, *Uncomfortable* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 36.

2. In Matthew 6:16-18, Jesus says to “not look gloomy,” and don’t let “your fasting be seen by others.” Do you find it difficult to hide your discomfort, especially when it is the result of worship, service, or following Jesus in any practice or ministry? When might we be most tempted to show our gloominess around some aspect of our faith?

3. One of the dangers of a disciplined time of fasting is that it can become legalistic, much like the situation of Matthew 9:14-17. Jesus tells the Pharisees that there is a time and place for fasting, and—much like Sabbath—it is a blessing, not a burden. Have you ever been legalistic about a worship practice or biblical mandate? How do you balance obedience and avoid being legalistic? When might be a time that you should set aside a regular time of fasting?

4. The scene in Acts 13 and 14 is an especially monumental event in the life of the church. The apostle Paul is being called for his first missionary assignment and the first elders are called into the church. What is occurring at both occasions? How do you consecrate or dedicate sendoffs and milestones in your life, your family, or home?

5. Old wine in new wineskins, new wine in old wineskins, old wine in old ... say what? Jesus concludes his warning against ritualistic and legalistic fasting with this metaphor of wine and wineskins. What is he saying? Literally, what does he mean regarding the skins and the wine? From that image, we know that Jesus is speaking of the Holy Spirit being the new wine and—as believers—we are not to be the old wineskins of the past rituals and ceremonies. We are, instead, freed to be new wineskins that receive the Holy Spirit and utilize the practices as blessings and gifts, not as law. Where else might this apply? In what areas should this not be applied?

6. In your own words, what practical application comes to your mind from this unit on “Going Beyond Our Comfort”? What one big idea will you take with you?

# PRAYER PAGE

## Member Prayer (by Brett Kanode)

A Prayer of Confession (If you are able, bow or kneel.)

Heavenly Father,

My heart hurts. I know I have offended you. I just can't seem to rid myself of the vices of this world. I confess my disobedience and my impurity. I'm sorry for choosing my own crooked path instead of your level highway. Only you can forgive me, and I know that I don't deserve your mercy, yet, without you, my life is lost. My only hope is in your Son, Jesus. In His great name and because of His great sacrifice on the cross, I come before you, Almighty God, and ask for your forgiveness. (In silence, allow a moment to receive the comfort and healing ministry of the Spirit of Truth.)

Thank you for your steadfast love and mercy. Thank you for being patient with me and slow to anger. Thank you for not abandoning me. Thank you for your forgiveness. Help me today to live my life in way that honors you and brings glory to Your Great Name. Amen.

## A Personal Prayer

In consideration of those areas in my life where I seek comfort over obedience, I pray for a desire to go beyond the comfortable in order to experience a more complete satisfaction. May I find time to pray and fast, and may I discover the Lord's presence in ways never before realized. Amen.

Lord,

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## MISSION-MINDED FOR MISSIONAL LIVING

When the term “missions” is used in a church setting, the first images that most commonly come to mind are of international mission trips or the work of long-term international missionaries. It’s true that this is an important component of missions, but it is not the only component. In fact, for most of us, participating in international missions will be limited to prayer and financial support through our tithes and offerings.

One of the easiest ways to get connected with the work of dedicated mission service is right inside the church. Opportunities to serve missionally are plentiful and diverse. This week, consider the ways that you might connect with mission work internal to River Oaks. You can make a note on your “Hey, I’m Here” card this Sunday or contact the church office directly.

Being mission-minded includes the sharing and showing of Jesus to all who enter the doors of his church.

Living a life of mission *in our church* might include:

- Investing in the life of children, youth, and adults as a helper/teacher of Sunday morning teaching ministries and discipleship ministries. Each week, the Lord brings individuals and families to River Oaks as first-time guests who are seeking a place to belong and seeking to know more about a faith in Christ. Every connection you make is a mission opportunity that the Lord can use to encourage another and to enable life transformation through the gospel.
- Volunteer on a Sunday morning hospitality team. Serving coffee, assisting in parking, ushering into worship, greeting guests, and more—with a greater purpose: sharing the life and love of Jesus.
- Joining one of the many missions teams: international, local, missionary care, outreach to internationals, unreached people groups, short-term missions, global equipping, and missions weekend hosting teams. There is a place to contribute to the ongoing emphasis of building followers of Jesus who are sent to reach others through the various mission outlets.
- Perhaps the most overlooked way to live on mission within the walls of the church is to greet someone next to you in worship and introduce yourself to someone who isn’t familiar to you in the Coffee Bar. We all arrive with varying levels of “mess” in our lives. I am amazed at the number of people who have been especially encouraged, in the midst of their own unique mess, by someone taking the time to say, “Hi, I don’t think we’ve met. Can I help you or answer any questions?” “We are so glad you joined us for worship.” “The Lord is good, I hope you find that in his presence today.”

**UNIT**



**SEVEN**

# UNIT SEVEN

## GOING BEYOND ... OUR ANXIETY



Therefore, I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? Therefore do not be anxious, saying, "What shall we eat?" or "What shall we drink?" or "What shall we wear?" For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.

### **MATTHEW 6:25-34**

#### **Biblical Context**

The Gospel According to Matthew, written by one of the twelve disciples, Levi—later Matthew, also known as the "tax collector"—was specifically intended to reach a predominately Jewish audience. It begins with a genealogy that goes back only as far as Abraham (rather than Adam), and continuing with the inclusion of Jewish customs (without explanation) and phrasing that would appeal to a Jewish sensibility.

Matthew's purpose is clear: to demonstrate that Jesus is the long-awaited Messiah. To demonstrate this claim, Matthew references quotes from over sixty Old Testament prophecies and promises, each emphasizing how Christ is the fulfillment of the Scriptures. Further, his details regarding Pharisees and Sadducees (more than any of the other Gospels), highlights the error of the religious leaders in light of the Christ.

One of the reasons that many of Jesus' teachings are collected in Matthew is that he grouped the material around five great discourses, with little attention to chronological order. In other words, Matthew presents stories to his readers with major themes, as opposed to dealing with specific timelines. It's within the theme of kingdom authority, and the Sermon on the Mount discourse, that **going beyond our anxiety** is found.

## Emphasis

The connection between materialism and worry is inescapable. As the old saying goes, "More stuff, more problems, more worry." The emphasis in unit seven is less about the burden of an anxious life and the pitfalls of accumulating possessions for one's personal gain, and more about the freedom and liberty of a stewardship-based life.

The encouragement that we find in Jesus' teaching is that our participation in the kingdom activity of this world is the equivalent of a storing up of treasures in the kingdom activity of the heavenly world. The hopes and promises of God are infinitely (eternally) greater than any hope or promise offered by the world.

And because our attention is on this heavenly hope, followers of Jesus should exhibit a life of greater trust and less fear and worry. Certainly, this is easier said than done, but Jesus tells us next *how* we can do it: by "seeking first the kingdom of God and his righteousness."

The freedom of stewarding our possessions—our life even—in a way that is unto the Lord and not unto the consumeristic culture of "more, more, more," is a life more focused on the provisions of today and more free of the anxiety of tomorrow.

In our time this week, may we engage in prayerful consideration of our possessions and the control they have over our hearts and priorities. May we evaluate the ways where "less can be more" in our life, and where Christ-like stewardship is calling us to a more simple, yet richer journey. Amen.

## Going Beyond the Text

Corrie ten Boom (1892 - 1983) saved the lives of 800 Jews by hiding them in her closet during WWII, hence the title of the movie documenting her story, *The Hiding Place*.<sup>9</sup> A Dutch watchmaker and bold Christian, Corrie was arrested by the Nazis and released on a clerical error only a week before prisoners in the camp were executed. Despite life's circumstances, when it came to worry, ten Boom had a signature reply: "Worry is an old man with bended head, carrying a load of feathers which he thinks are lead."

As David Jeremiah would say:

Corrie ten Boom understood that anxiety is ultimately foolish because it concerns an unknown future, what if's, could-be's, and speculations. As long as we dwell on the worst-case scenario, we guarantee our own misery.<sup>10</sup>

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Have you ever wondered what treasures in heaven might be like? If they are anything grander than the treasures of our current world, why do you think we often prioritize the world over matters of our faith? Is this a struggle for you, or have you discovered a way to serve only one master?

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<sup>9</sup> Ten Boom Museum, "Extend the 100-Year Prayer Meeting," <http://tenboom.org>, accessed August 2018.

<sup>10</sup> David Jeremiah, "Winning Against Worry," Turning Point, [https://www.davidjeremiah.org/site/articles/winning-against-worry.aspx?tid=dj\\_stage](https://www.davidjeremiah.org/site/articles/winning-against-worry.aspx?tid=dj_stage), accessed August 2018.

2. In Matthew 6:25-32, Jesus gives us five reasons why we shouldn't worry. Can you find them? Which of them resonate with you, and why? Would any of them help you to worry less?

3. Jesus says not to worry about tomorrow, because today will be challenging enough. When you read this, what is your initial thought? How do you reconcile this against Proverbs 21:5? What is the balance, or the key, to living this out?

4. In Paul's letter to the Philippians, he addresses more completely a practical approach to dealing with worry and anxiety. Read Philippians 4:4-7, and reflect on how it relates to the teaching of Jesus. According to Paul, what is the ultimate prayer request on matters of anxiety and worry?

5. Trying to serve two masters, according to Jesus, is not only impossible, but also the cause of much stress. How do you know if you are serving money over God? What might be some warning signs that we are trying to serve both? What if the question is phrased as, "How do you know if you are worshipping money over God?"

6. In your own words, what practical application comes to your mind from this unit on "Going Beyond Our Anxiety"? What one big idea will you take with you?

# PRAYER PAGE

## Member Prayer (by Martin Harrison)

Dear Heavenly Father, creator of heaven and earth,

Thank you so much for the daily reminders of your love. In the flowers of the field and birds of the air, you reveal your love and order. Thank you for the truth of “how much more” you love me (Matthew 6:25-30) despite my weaknesses and sin. Give me the power to endure weakness in love and humility and know that even if my thorns are not removed, that your power is made perfect in weakness (2 Cor 12:9), and you work in all things for the good of those that love you (Rom 8:28). Help me to trace the good and bad-turned-good back to you so I can have eternal rest in you. May your joy and peace, which transcends all understanding, lift up my anxiety and hopelessness (Phil 4:6-7), and protect me from drifting into a works mentality. As you have loved me, help me love others. Amen.

## A Personal Prayer

In consideration of those areas in my life where I am overly worried and consumed by my anxieties, I pray that the Lord would lift them from me. May I approach each new day as one that I am grateful to receive and ready to address. May I balance serious concern with godly actions and great faith. Amen.

Lord,

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## MISSION-MINDED FOR MISSIONAL LIVING

In considering the possibilities for living out a life on mission in the field of “missions,” we discovered opportunities in the previous unit that exist within the local church. Now, let’s broaden the range of missions to include the local community and the world we touch each and every day.

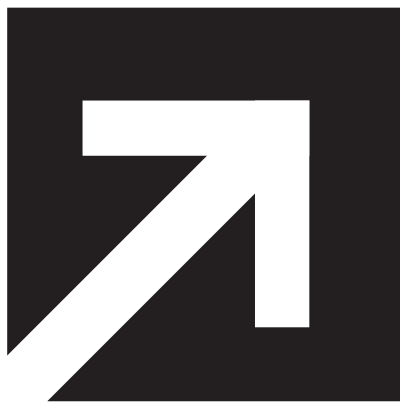
Local missions is alive and well in our community. However, there is always a need for more hands and hearts; there are numerous ministries and options to jump in. Being mission-minded includes the sharing and showing of Jesus to all who live, work, and play in our surrounding community.

Living a life of mission **in our community** might include:

- Like most local churches, River Oaks is “partnered” with several local ministries. There are historically a dozen or more partners for which the church provides funding, awareness, and volunteer support. From food banks to homeless shelters to inner-city education, each of the ministries is gospel-centered and open to all the assistance you can lend them.
- Many small groups have partnered with local ministries and community organizations. By dedicating volunteer time on a regular basis, coming alongside with meals and Bible studies, or participating in larger events, having your small group or your family commit to regular mission work in our community is a mutual blessing given and received.
- Set a date, maybe “Taco Thursday,” invite a living room full of your friend circles (church, neighborhood, work), and have no expectation other than to introduce your friends to each other. Be the model of Christ-like hospitality and service.
- View our community as God views our community: thousands of individuals who are hungry, hurting, and homeless, physically and spiritually. Let us remember that with each interaction in the marketplace, the workplace, or the streets, it’s not simply *What Would Jesus Do*, but *How Would Jesus Feel?* Be a genuine light of life on mission in our community.



**UNIT**



**EIGHT**

# UNIT EIGHT

## GOING BEYOND ... OUR TIME



Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.

**DEUTERONOMY 6:4-7**

You then, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus, and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also.

**2 TIMOTHY 2:1-2**

Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.

**2 PETER 3:18**

### **Biblical Context**

The idea of **going beyond our time** can be thought of as investing in something today for results that will occur tomorrow. It's a sacrificial giving where the giver is not the beneficiary. In discipleship, it can be thought of as the passing along of God's Word and the modeling of living a life according to that Word.

The book of Deuteronomy is an ideal example to consider for this forward-looking call. Almost the entire book is a collection of sermons by Moses, most of them include his heartfelt appeals to the next generation of Israelites to acknowledge the Lord as their God, with instruction for how to do so.

Deuteronomy is also a book of covenant form, with God as the great King and the people as his vassal states. Following an introduction and a brief historical background, Moses speaks to the covenant requirements of the people. This is where we find the primary passage, also known as the Shema, with instruction for how we can go beyond our time in a way that leaves a spiritual legacy in our place.

As a brief word to the New Testament passages, Second Timothy is Paul's final letter and is primarily a charge to his young co-laborer to establish strong doctrine and pass along the faith to believers and churches as he, Paul, has done with him.

Similarly, Second Peter is Peter's final letter before death and the verse listed at the beginning of this unit, speaking to the beyond of the faith until Christ returns, is found within a letter that is mostly warning churches in Asia Minor against false teachers. So, again, pass along truth!

## **Emphasis**

Deuteronomy 6:4-5 introduces a central biblical text, the Shema (Shuh-ma), used in Jewish synagogue worship, then and now. Shema, meaning "to hear," is referenced in this way because the passage begins with "Hear, O Israel." In these two verses, Moses is commanding the people of God to recognize that God is the only one true God, worthy of our love. Further, that love is to be a way of worship, because it involves all that we are: our heart, our soul, and all of our strength, or might. It is a command to live a life of worship in response to our love.

This commandment would also be used of Jesus when asked about the greatest of commandments (Matthew 22:36-40). Jesus would say that this life of worship was the first and great commandment: to love the Lord your God, the Lord alone.

The emphasis is on what we do with this great commandment. Deuteronomy, along with other words of Scripture, tells us that—of priority importance—we are to teach them to a next generation and pass along this way of worship. In a sense, the expectation is that adults will have matured spiritually, and will model this love of God with heart, soul, and strength. But this isn't enough; it is critical that we go beyond just our existence and think to those who will exist after we are gone.

In our time this week, may we be encouraged to teach the worship of God to our children and our children's children. May we seek to love God as sit at our meals, walk along our ways, and lie down in our beds. May our worship not cease, and may there be an influence and lasting legacy of God's glory as a result. Amen.

## Going Beyond the Text

The most defining characteristic of the next generation, often referred to as Generation Z, is that they are the first to have been raised completely with a post-Christian, post-truth worldview.<sup>11</sup> What does that mean? According to pastor, cultural commentator, and author of *Meet Generation Z*, James White (1961 - ), one thing it means is:

In terms of their spiritual lives, they are marked by spiritual illiteracy. This is the defining mark of the post-Christian world. They do not know what the Bible says, the basics of belief or theology, what the cross is about, or what it means to worship. But it is deeper than that, they don't even have a memory of the gospel. And as a result, there is a profound spiritual emptiness, accompanied by a crisis in values without meaning or purpose. These are the bridges over which we must learn to walk, addressing the key questions and barriers that face this next generation faith narrative, as a matter of eternal significance.<sup>12</sup>

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Have you ever wondered what life will be like a century after we have left this world? What comes to mind relative to the worship of God in this future vision? What do you think past generations saw in their projection of a future world? There have been many seasons of revival and great worship over the past two millennia, many of which the previous generations would have never dreamed. If your future vision saw one of those seasons approaching, what would you do now to encourage it along?

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<sup>11</sup> James Emery White, *Meet Generation Z* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2017), 49.

<sup>12</sup> White, 131.

2. In Deuteronomy 6:4-7, Moses lists several ways we can love the Lord and pass along this worship to a future generation? What are these in practical terms today? How might they look in a home without children? As a single adult?

3. How can love be a command? What if your child asks you how God can command us to love him, when love is a feeling? What is God saying through Moses in regard to the heart, soul, and strength of our love toward God?

4. Going beyond our time is not simply a call to instruct children and young adults; a next-generation is just that, the next generation from the stage of life where you find yourself today. Where does 2 Timothy 2:1-2 apply in your life? Who are the next-generation men and women in your life that you can instruct in order that they teach others?

5. With his final words, Peter pleads with the church members to do what? Have you considered this to be your marching orders? Are you excited about or indifferent to the thought of growing in grace and knowledge until your final breath, and—in doing so—going beyond your time so that others may do the same?

6. In your own words, what practical application comes to your mind from this unit on “Going Beyond Our Time”? What one big idea will you take with you?

# PRAYER PAGE

## Member Prayer (by Corey Mitchell)

Father, may we ever be in pursuit of a deeper walk in our relationship with you. In a culture that seeks to pull us away from you, help us to evaluate our lives and allow you to prune and mold us into vessels that seek after you in all things. Help us to be true representations of you to those around us that we may reflect a fraction of the grace and forgiveness you have offered us.

I pray for every student and child that walks through the doors of our church week after week that they will see this same representation of who you are through us as the volunteers, leaders and congregation. I pray that you would lead and guide me as to how I can have an influence on the next generation and allow me to use the gifts you have given me as my part in the body of Christ. Amen.

## A Personal Prayer

In consideration of those areas in my life where I have the opportunity to go beyond my own time on this earth and invest in a next generation, Lord show me how and give me a great desire to see this bigger picture of your kingdom activity in this world. May I see future generations as your children, and as a catalyst to the next revival of faith. Amen.

Lord,

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# MISSION-MINDED FOR MISSIONAL LIVING

In considering the possibilities for living out a life on mission in the field of “missions” in the last two units, we discovered opportunities that exist within the local church and our community. In unit eight, the range is further widened to include global missions.

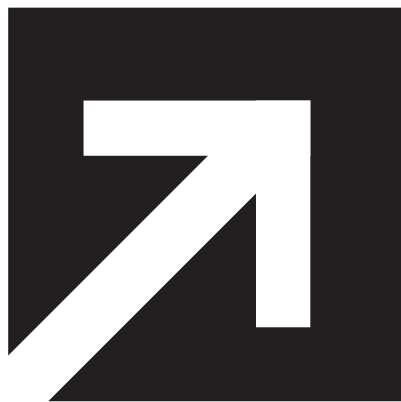
An important consideration for twenty-first century global missions is our understanding of where the church is alive and well, particularly, when compared to our historical understandings. As a result of the Holy Spirit’s presence, and the work of the many who have labored in sharing the gospel in the most remote of locations, there is a great deal of activity among believers in Africa, Asia, South America, and even in parts of the Middle East. The fields are still ripe, yet many of these countries are now preparing to send international missionaries to the United States. In other words, perspective and a humble heart are a necessary component of this conversation.

Being mission-minded includes the sharing and showing of Jesus to all peoples, all nations, all ethnicities, whether they are citizens of their temporary home country or are guests in our temporary home country (Philippians 3:20-21).

Living a life of mission *in our world* might include:

- **Short-term Missions.** River Oaks has a number of regular, and one-time, short-term mission opportunities each year. If your heart is one of serving others and building up the global church, then international mission trips might be where the Lord is leading you to connect.
- **Equipping Ministries.** One of the most important initiatives within an expanding global church is teaching sound doctrine. Our Global Equipping team has partnered with churches in Asia and seminary programs in Africa, and is constantly seeking other opportunities to serve our international brothers and sisters. If this is a gift or interest, consider your role in coming alongside this ministry.
- **Outreach to Internationals.** One of the fastest growing segments of our international missions ministry is outreach to internationals in our community. Opportunities include teaching and tutoring ESL classes, supporting refugee arrivals, or participating with events promoting fellowship within the international peoples, such as Taste of the Nations. Many internationals attend and are members at River Oaks, and it is an exciting time to serve and grow this future, eternal reality of heaven.
- **Missionary Care.** Many of our small groups and member families support missionaries by praying for them, corresponding with them, and encouraging them. If this is an interest, we are certain that our missionary families would be especially grateful for your prayers and encouragement.

**UNIT**



**NINE**

# UNIT NINE

## GOING BEYOND ... OUR BORDERS



May God be gracious to us and bless us  
and make his face to shine upon us, *Selah*  
that your way may be known on earth,  
your saving power among all nations.  
Let the peoples praise you, O God;  
let all the peoples praise you!

Let the nations be glad and sing for joy,  
for you judge the peoples with equity  
and guide the nations upon earth. *Selah*  
Let the peoples praise you, O God;  
let all the peoples praise you!

The earth has yielded its increase;  
God, our God, shall bless us.  
God shall bless us;  
let all the ends of the earth fear him!

### PSALM 67

#### Biblical Context

Psalms is the longest book in the Bible, with 150 individual psalms—songs and prayers—categorized into five collections of “books.” Nearly half, seventy-three, are attributed to King David, while others are identified as having been written by the sons of Korah, Asaph, Solomon, Heman, Ethan, and—the oldest of the psalms— to Moses (Psalm 90). Fifty-one are not attributed to any single author.

In the third century B.C., these songs and prayers were collected and put into the form that we now have in our Bible. They were used regularly in the temple during Jesus’ time and in worship of both Christians and Jews through today. Psalms is also the most-often quoted book of the New Testament writers.

The psalms speak to God's sovereign nature and often demonstrate a great sense of transparency and vulnerability by the psalmist. As a hymnbook, they contain the reasons to praise God and declare that because his glory extends to all nations, his people are to **go beyond all borders**. Because of these three themes, the psalms are wonderful to pray and meditate on when we just don't have the words to express our fears, joys, or sorrows.

## Emphasis

Psalm 67 is an optimistic psalm, expressing God's mercy and his universal blessing on all nations. It is a passage offering an Old Testament voice for world missions, while reflecting on the "all-the-families-of-the-earth" promise to Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3).

The emphasis this week will be on our perspective of an "all-nations" gospel, and the call to go beyond our borders. In this, "borders" refers not only to the lines of national boundaries, but also those lines of separation in our own community—cultural, demographic, and socio-economic. As the psalmist writes, God has blessed and been merciful to us, not simply that we might enjoy his pleasure and hoard his blessings, but that we might bless others and his "saving power known among all nations."

Tim Keller speaks to this "blessing" as sharing the enjoyment of something and desiring that others enjoy it also. With God, this must naturally lead to missions. He writes, "God never draws us in except to send us out—to serve and reach others. We want a multi-ethnic, international church of worshippers and a world of justice,"<sup>13</sup> just as the psalmist declares.

In our time this week, may we engage in the idea of borders and boundaries in our life. May we be willing to go beyond them as an obedient act of faith and gratitude for the Lord's grace and mercy. May we move beyond a theology of country and see the global church and the global people of God as he sees them. Amen.

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<sup>13</sup> Timothy Keller, *The Songs of Jesus* (New York, NY: Penguin Random House LLC, 2015), 146.

## Going Beyond the Text

One of the greatest challenges for those going beyond borders to share the gospel, is the call to defend Christ against the behavior of some who call themselves Christian. An example—and a reminder regarding our life as witness—is that of the early missionary to the Native Americans, David Brainard (1718 - 1747). Living among the Delaware, Brainard represented the most sincere of those who would share the gospel. He was often frustrated of how un-Christian most “Christians” lived. Once he wrote:

The man conversed with me for about an hour when he angrily demanded, “Why do you desire the Indians to become Christian, seeing the Christians are so much worse than the Indians are in the present state. The Christians lie, steal, and drink worse than the Indians. And they steal from one another to the degree that their rulers are obliged to hang them for it. I suppose that if the Indians should become Christians we would then be as bad as these.” I freely lamented, and joined with him in condemning the ill conduct of these.<sup>14</sup>

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Have you ever wondered what worship in heaven might be like relative to fellowship with others? Did you know that—worldwide—North Americans comprise only about 15% of the global church? Now, what might worship look like? What is your initial thought regarding going beyond your borders in the name of Jesus?

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<sup>14</sup> Vance Christie, *David Brainerd: A Flame for God* (Fearn, Ross-shire, Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, Ltd., 2009), 105.

2. In Psalm 67:1, the psalmist offers a prayer for God's mercy and favor. When you read this single verse, how might you pray that prayer in your own words and in your life situation? What does God's face shining on you look or feel like?

3. How might the "all-nations," "all-peoples" language of verses 3-5 reconcile with that of Matthew 8:11? Can you articulate that God is an "all-nations" God to a friend or family member who might also be a practicing Jew?

4. The ultimate reason we are grateful for God's mercy and his universal acceptance to all peoples is found in verse 5. What does "praise" look like in your life? How do you go beyond your borders to offer praise with other believers?

5. Some of the more divisive conversations of our day are those regarding governments and national affairs. Psalm 67:4 speaks to God as the one who shall govern the nations and judge the people righteously. How might it look if governments ruled as if they were imitators of God's righteousness and justice? How might policy be drafted if it were influenced by an all-nations, all-peoples perspective that was informed by compassion over bias? How then might we desire and work toward the kind of justice and righteousness that God expects? As a check of pride, when we rescue the conversation from politics, how are you doing in living out justice and righteousness in the leadership of your home, workplace, and community?

6. In your own words, what practical application comes to your mind from this unit on "Going Beyond Our Borders"? What one big idea will you take with you?

# PRAYER PAGE

## Member Prayer (by Nathan and Rebecca Ogilvie)

Lord, be merciful to us and show us your kindness. Equip us to walk in your ways so the world may know who You are and what you are like. We know that you desire none to be lost, but rather all to come to repentance and faith. You take no pleasure in the death of the wicked.

As we worship and obey you, help us turn the world's attention to You, and through this, draw the nations to yourself as you have promised in your word. We pray that the world may know you and your righteous judgments; that they would experience your tender mercies, your favor, and your blessings through a right relationship with you through Jesus Christ.

We pray this for all nations, that in all things you may be honored and respected as is your right as the Creator of all people. Amen.

## A Personal Prayer

In consideration of those areas in my life where I view the world through my personal biases and narrow field of vision, I pray for a more global vision of the church and a genuine compassion for all peoples of the world, knowing that you, Lord, see no boundaries or borders, you are an all-nations God. Amen.

Lord,

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# MISSION-MINDED FOR MISSIONAL LIVING

A life on mission is one that requires us to blur the line between the sacred and the secular. Many of us find it difficult to express the sacred in all parts of our lives, especially Monday through Saturday. But our call is not one of segregated parts and distinct pieces that are plugged into Sunday morning and removed for the rest of the week. Missional living views our work as worship, our neighborhood as our mission field, and our schools as our places of praise.

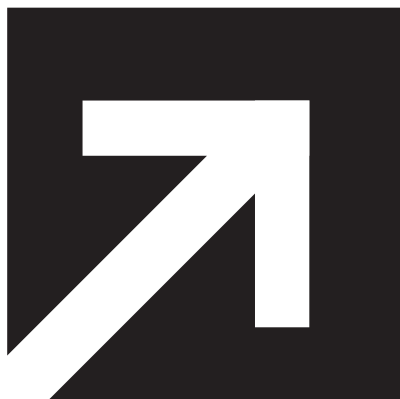
If this concept is a difficult one to picture, or if it seems like too big of a challenge to take on in the real world, let this be an encouragement: your thoughts are normal and we are in this together. Together we can blur the lines to the degree that we find the sacred in all things, that we can be in the world, but not of the world.

Three points to help us move toward this objective of missional living:

1. **Iron sharpens iron.** As indicated in Proverbs 27, it takes accountability, encouragement, support, and motivation to live on mission. It is the one on mission sharpening the other on mission. Do you have someone(s) that fits this description? Be intentional in surrounding yourself with someone outside of your home to share with and build up: a sharpening agent.
2. Consider attending the annual **Work as Worship** simulcast. Held early in the New Year and hosted by Right Now Media, join others in our church and community who seek advice and insight from well-known public figures in business, ministry, government, and entertainment. Discover the ways they see work as a way to worship and break down the wall between the sacred and the secular.
3. The most important mission-minded thing we can do in our everyday life is to **be the light**, to live, work, and play in a Christ-like manner. It's displaying, in a genuine and sincere way, the same Sermon-on-the-Mount traits on Monday through Saturday that we display on Sunday morning. It's seeing and treating everyone in our day as if through the lens of Jesus. It's resisting the ways of the flesh and setting our minds on the Spirit.



**UNIT**



**TEN**

# UNIT TEN

## GOING BEYOND ... OUR INDIVIDUALISM



I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call— one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

### EPHESIANS 4:1-6, 11-16

#### **Biblical Context**

The biblical context of the apostle Paul's letter to the believers in Ephesus and the surrounding churches was discussed at greater length in unit one of our study. This includes the background to Paul's condition of imprisonment and the structure of the letter: the first three chapters providing theological teaching, the final three chapters offering more practical instruction.

Because this formal structure focuses on the broad foundational topics of what it means to be a follower of Jesus—as opposed to the informal, yet more specific, nature of many of Paul's other letters—it is reasonable to conclude that the condition of the Ephesian church (AD 60 - 62), is in need of core theology and practice. It may be a sign of their readiness to go deeper, or perhaps even a need to be reminded of who they are in Christ and how they should live that out.

As we recall, one of the landmark declarations in Ephesians is Paul's explanation of "the mystery" that God is an all-people Redeemer. For you and me, it is in this understanding that we are encouraged to **go beyond our individualism** to join the all-people equipping community, mission, and worship of the church.

## Emphasis

What we believe about the role and purpose of the church determines how we interact with the church. In this passage, Paul makes clear the various purposes and objectives of a local body of believers, and in doing so, includes teaching on "how" we are to join in this corporate gathering, particularly in the sense of our heart attitude and posture.

The emphasis from Paul is that we are called to build up the body of Christ. We do this through a maturing process that is grounded in love. When we come together in a humble and patient way, we will be eager to maintain unity as Christ intended.

Importantly, as the word *unity*, or oneness, is central to this passage, we should keep in mind that this is not a call to uniformity, or even union (as in connectedness). Paul uses the term *unity* to describe the church as having a common center around Christ, a unity that is not created, but is already available and simply needs to be kept.

In our time this week, may we engage in the idea of always coming together in the name of Jesus around the cause of Christ. May we deeply desire Christ-likeness in our interactions with one another, and may we seek the equipping that matures us. Amen.

## Going Beyond the Text

If you are uncertain about the idea of spiritual gifts as presented in Ephesians for the building up of the church's one body, Pastor Charles Swindoll (1934 - ) breaks down the biblical teaching in a helpful way. He writes:

A spiritual gift is a skill or ability that enables a Christian to perform a function in the body of Christ with ease and effectiveness. Not implying that it doesn't take hard work and practice, but the natural impulse and passion accompany our gifts.

Additionally, there are three things to keep in mind. First, spiritual gifts are given by the Lord alone. Second, the gifts are spiritual in nature. In other words, just because you are a good salesperson, that is not a spiritual gift, the church is not about 'selling' anything. Lastly, spiritual gifts are part of who you are in Christ, you don't come kicking and screaming into the area of your gift.

Finally, there are two dangers with spiritual gifts: One, not knowing your gift. Two, not exercising your gift.<sup>15</sup>

If you are uncertain about your spiritual gift you can take an assessment on the River Oaks Community Church website.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Have you ever experienced an isolated season of living out your faith? A time that you might have intentionally determined to withdraw from fellowship with the local church? What did you learn during this season?

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<sup>15</sup> Charles R. Swindoll, ed., *The Swindoll Study Bible, NLT* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2017), 1477.

2. Before considering the more in-depth view of church unity in Ephesians 4, read Hebrews 10:25. Why might that be a good starting point for this discussion? Have you ever had a conversation with a “Lone-Ranger Christian?” Does Hebrews 10:25 resonate with them?

3. In Ephesians 3 and 13, Paul uses the word, unity. It’s the only place in the New Testament where this word is used, so his description is important to us. Much as he does in Romans 12:5, there is similar sense of “oneness in Christ” to the word, unity. What does “oneness in Christ” look like today? How are you engaged in unity of the church? Is your view a local view or global view? Why or why not?

4. Continuing with the theme of oneness, throughout his writings Paul actually describes Christian unity in seven ways using the word, one. As with verse 5, and in 1 Corinthians 12:12-13 and elsewhere, Paul speaks of the one body, spirit, hope, Lord, faith, baptism, and Father. Do these all make sense to your understanding? How would you explain one hope or one baptism in your own words? Do you know where to turn in Scripture to better understand?

5. Ephesians 4:12-14 is a powerful passage. It speaks of our purpose and objectives. Read these three verses, and then put them into your own words. In short, Paul is saying we must, "Grow up!" We can't be left as children in our faith or we will fall for anything. Have you experienced this before? How do you, or how will you, mature in the faith?

6. In your own words, what practical application comes to your mind from this unit on "Going Beyond Our Individualism"? What one big idea will you take with you?

# PRAYER PAGE

## Member Prayer (by Bryan and Elizabeth Geigler)

Our Father in heaven, we come before you now in prayer, humbled by your sovereignty and wisdom. Lord, you hold all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, and yet we look to our own knowledge and understanding time and time again. We find ourselves trying to rely on our own strength. We can relate to Paul's words in Romans when he said, "I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do."

Help us to remember that you God, are before all things, and in you all things hold together. We are weak, but you are strong. Holy Spirit, we acknowledge your presence now, and call on you to help guide our thoughts, decisions, and attitude. Lead us, strengthen us, and equip us today with what we need to glorify you this day. Amen.

## A Personal Prayer

In consideration of those areas in my life where I am attempting to live a life of faith in a particularly isolated and individual manner, I pray that you might bring me into community and connection with others. I pray that my gifts might be used within the body to further her ability to serve and bring you glory. Amen.

Lord,

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# MISSION-MINDED FOR MISSIONAL LIVING

## *Putting it all together ...*

Living life on mission, purposed toward disciple-making, and intentional about each and every relationship, is ultimately living a life of spiritual maturity. It is the description, as outlined by the *Missional Discipleship* curriculum of Randy Pope and Perimeter Presbyterian Church,<sup>16</sup> of an equipped follower of Jesus who:

- Lives consistently under the leading of the Holy Spirit, the direction of God's Word, and the motivation of the love of Christ.
- Has discovered, developed, and is actively utilizing their spiritual gift(s).
- Has learned and implemented a life of sharing and showing their faith through a personal life testimony and the gospel of Jesus.
- Is a willing and available minister to others: the least and the lost.
- Serves in one or many mission fields: the church, the community, the world.

Wherever you are today in your pursuit of a mission-minded life, whether you are well on your way or you have never even given it a second thought, as followers of Jesus we are called to missional living and can move in that direction right now. Will you join those around you in fulfilling the call of Christ? As you do, may you experience the giving and receiving of many kingdom blessings, eternal treasures, and a life filled with unimaginable joy, peace, and hope, as you **go beyond** all that you ever thought life could be.



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<sup>16</sup> Randy Pope, *The Journey (Life-on-Life Missional): Green Year* (Atlanta, GA: Perimeter Church and Life-on-Life Ministries, 2017), 7.

# APPENDIX 1: VISION 2025



In the year 2025, River Oaks is known as a church where people have a strong knowledge of the Bible, joined with active compassion for those outside of the church. Its mission of “**Building followers of Jesus who are sent to reach others**” has shaped the church’s ministry of spiritual formation for all ages. Children, students, and adults have a growing knowledge of Scripture that is being formed by active involvement in worship services, small groups, and classes. A distinctive culture of disciple-making is shaping both the church and individual households with a passion to invest in the spiritual growth of others, particularly the next generation. The fruit of this culture is seen in vibrant corporate worship and Christ-centered homes. In addition to other disciple-making environments, over 10% of River Oaks’ attendees are engaged in Missional Discipleship groups.

Those who call River Oaks their church home recognize that biblical knowledge should overflow into concern for the spiritual well-being of others, and that *following Jesus leads to an outreach-focused life*. River Oaks members embrace their calling as Jesus’ disciples to live as ministers and missionaries in our community. This is especially evident among the young, as students and children bring friends they have reached to church. Baptisms are a regular celebration at River Oaks, as those baptized share how a friend led them to faith and helped them begin their own journey of spiritual growth.

The centrality of outreach at River Oaks has shaped a culture of hospitality toward internationals who study, work, and live in Forsyth County. The richness of the church’s corporate worship is enhanced by the presence of worshipers from over two dozen different nations. Members and guests often note that worship services at River Oaks “look like heaven” because of the diversity of race, ethnicity, and age in the congregation.

The emphasis on spiritual formation that leads to gospel-centered outreach is joined with a culture of prayer at River Oaks. It is a common to see people clustered in the Coffee Bar or hallway praying for someone on Sundays. Students frequently gather before and after youth meetings to pray for their friends who do not yet know the Lord. The Prayer Room is one of the most utilized spaces throughout the week as staff and students, ministers and members, young and old gather informally for prayer.

The people of River Oaks recognize that their own *spiritual growth should overflow into God's blessing upon the surrounding community*. Care for the poor and afflicted, service to the schools, and strategic church planting all reflect this overflow. While 80% of River Oaks members serve locally in some way, dozens of others have been called to missions overseas. Many college students and young adults reflect upon a call to pastoral or missions ministry they received while students at River Oaks. Spiritual formation at River Oaks is overflowing with generosity that enables the church to give over \$500,000 annually to global and national missions, local ministries, and church planting. While River Oaks' first daughter church continues to thrive, River Oaks' second church plant is flourishing as it reaches an underserved community in the Triad.

If spiritual formation is the engine that drives the gospel forward in individual relationships, our local community, and around the world, then the prayer-fueled cylinders that power the engine are authentic worship, studying God's Word, serving others, and sharing the gospel. Said another way, we are advancing the mission of *Building followers of Jesus who are sent to reach others* by providing a discipleship pathway that enables people to *Worship Together, Grow in a Group, Serve on a Team, and Go with a Mission*. Spiritual formation firing on all four cylinders is producing inward life transformation leading to outward gospel proclamation and genuine love of others.

Every person at River Oaks recognizes that spiritual growth and effective outreach is only accomplished through God's enabling power. An increasing dependence upon the Holy Spirit through prayer characterizes the church and those who call River Oaks home. We express this dependence often by quoting a theme verse for the church:

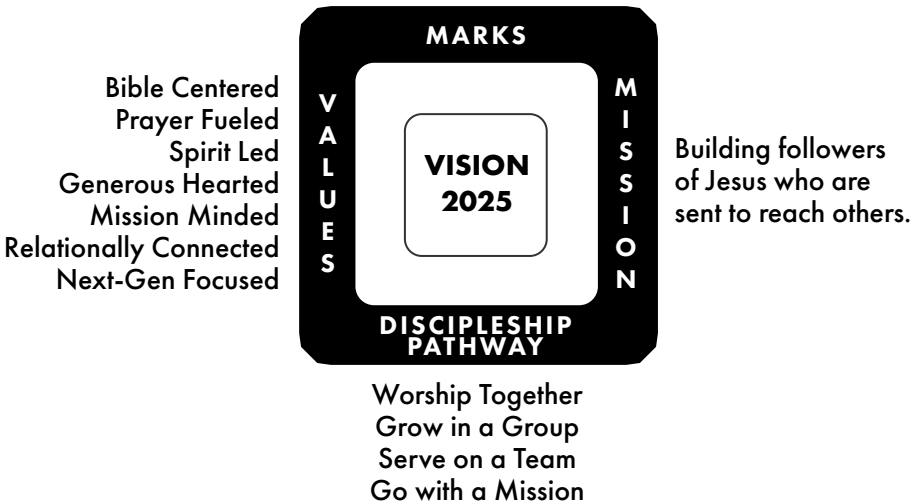
*Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain.*  
Psalm 127:1

Approved by River Oaks Community Church Session, 2017

# APPENDIX 2: VISION FRAME

The Vision Frame below is a depiction of the Mission-to-Marks framing of Vision 2025. In a real way, it is the mirror reflection of God's local body of believers at River Oaks in pursuit of his call to discipleship. Let it serve as a reminder to the Great Commission charge and an encouragement to live on-mission daily.

Biblical Understanding • Devotion to Praying  
The Spirit's Empowering • Generous Giving  
Missional Living • Relationship Building  
Next-Generation Investing



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