

## A Verse to Live by

“Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind. Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing.”

1 Peter 3:8-9 (ESV)

### July Prayer Focus

In June we prayed for unity in the church. Please continue to pray for that but add to it a prayer for peace in our nation. That God has mercy on our country and there will be a quick end to the violence and pandemic. It may be easy to focus the blame on certain groups but we need to remember who the real enemy is - this is a spiritual battle. “For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.” (Eph. 6:12) We need to take our prayer life to the next level; it is time for everyone of us to become prayer warriors.

### Life Application Challenge

Each of us has stubbornness and rebellion in our hearts. We all have areas we struggle to submit to God. This month honestly look at your heart and ask yourself what areas of stubbornness and rebellion do you need to confess and deal with? Pray for God to humble you in these areas and soften your heart. Is there an area where pride has grown into disobeying God? “But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says: ‘God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble.’” (Jas. 4:6) What a great motivator to remove pride from our hearts!

### Recommended Scripture Reading

James 3 - This chapter about taming the tongue is a great reminder that we need to be careful before we respond to others. Also gives instruction on how to recognize the wisdom that comes from God versus the wisdom of the world.

# Church On Fire!

Eleventh Street Church of God | July 2020 Prayer Newsletter

I hope you are enjoying your summer so far. I know many of you had to change or modify vacation plans which is disappointing. We can handle disappointments like that; the important thing is our families stay healthy. The pandemic is temporary: one day we will be telling the story to our kids and grandkids. But for now, we need to: "Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer." (Rom. 12:12)

Going through this pandemic has brought to my attention the absolute need for a solid, Bible believing, Christ led, purpose driven church. We have a wonderful opportunity to be that church, right here in Canton. The need is so great. Times like these reveal just how weak and out of control we actually are. As Christians we have God to lean on and His promises to give us hope, but those without Christ try to get through on their own. I believe without Christ it is impossible to live with peace and unity in this broken world because it is filled with broken people. As the saying goes, hurt people hurt people. We are seeing proof of this every day. "For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace." (Rom. 8:6) With so much anger, bickering and outright violence the church needs to be a place of peace, restoration and understanding.

It would be so easy for us to get caught up in all the bickering over masks, racism, politics, conspiracies and the church's responsibilities in all of it. Everyone has an opinion on these things, and we will disagree with everyone on something. In the Bible we read the cause of these arguments are our own desires battling in us. "What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you?" (Jas. 4:1) We want others to do what we feel is the right thing to do. But that simply will not happen in this world. We are all too different, with different convictions and ideals. This is going to take a lot of humility and patience on our parts. We may have to bite our tongues, or do things we feel are not necessary. Paul gave us instructions on how to keep peace in the church. The leaders in the church are to "shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly;" (1 Pe. 5:2) And for the members of the church we need to respect and follow the lead of our pastor and the Board of Elders trusting they are doing their best to follow the will of God. We are instructed to "Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you ." (Heb. 13:17) The two actions of obeying and submission, are hard for humans, especially us Americans. We are very independent and used to our freedom. So the idea of submitting to something we don't like or particularly agree with hits us in our pride and our first response is to dig our heels in the ground and say "NO!". Yet, if the leaders of our church are trying their hardest to lead with righteousness and love then we are called to submit. This may mean wearing a mask in service when our church starts to meet again, for others it may mean staying home if you are immunocompromised, while for others wearing a mask is too uncomfortable for various reasons and so opt for the online service. This is where patience and understanding will keep us united as a family. At this point, none of us know exactly how things will look in a month or in six months, but as long as we obey

God's Word and love each other we can get through this without a divided church. "And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony." (Col. 3:14) We will just have to set aside issues with no eternal consequence so we can meet together with the love and peace God intends His children to have for each other.

In Psalm 133:1 David writes "How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity!" How inviting and encouraging it would be for people to visit our church and see unity, love and peace even while the nation is filled with anger and cruelty. What a wonderful opportunity to show the love and peace that comes when people give their hearts to Christ. If we revere, meaning deeply respect, Christ we will be willing to submit to each other, "Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ." (Eph. 5:21) Christ is the ultimate example of ultimate submission to God, when He willingly faced crucifixion, "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done." (Lk. 22:42) He is not expecting or asking more from us than He did Himself. The suffering He faced for us is in no way comparable to the minor discomfort we may have to deal with to revere Christ and submit to one another. Pride is like that. It makes mountains out of molehills and offenses out of requests. We must resist the desire to argue and push our own will onto others. "Don't have anything to do with foolish and stupid arguments, because you know they produce quarrels." (2 Tim. 2:23) What would qualify as a foolish or stupid argument? I would think arguing over things that do not have eternal consequence and that cause us to become so angry we speak cruelly. "For the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God." (Jas. 1:20)

The evidence to this world that we are true followers of Christ is that we live in peace with each other. "For God is not a God of disorder but of peace—as in all the congregations of the Lord's people." (1 Cor. 14:33) There will be times we cannot be at peace, Christ warned us about that in Matthew 10:34-6, "Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to turn 'a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law— a man's enemies will be the members of his own household.'" We will have to stand by things in the Bible even if it upsets others. This type of division is between the offended person and God; we must always preach the truth regardless if it offends or is unpopular. Speaking the truth in love may hurt some people but it will not harm them. The harm would be to their souls and ours if we twisted or changed God's word to make others feel better about sinful behaviors. But we are told to try our hardest to be peacemakers, "If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone." (Rom. 12:18)

May God be with us as we navigate through this turbulent time together. Praise God we are not doing it alone! "Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times and in every way. The Lord be with all of you." (2 Thes. 3:16)

Watching God Work,

Carolyn Abel