

PERSPECTIVE

SEPTEMBER 2022

— WHAT CAN I LEARN FROM —

THE LORD'S PRAYER?



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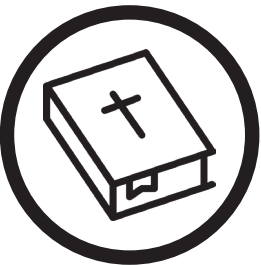
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What Can I Learn from the Lord's Prayer?
Aaron Menikoff



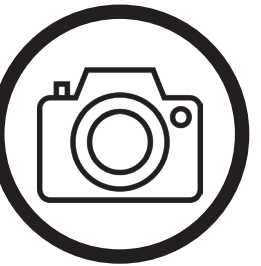
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What Can I Learn from the Lord's Prayer?

The first Christian book I ever purchased was on the topic of prayer. I may not have been a believer then, but I knew that if Christianity were true, God would listen to his people. I wanted him to listen to me. So, as a child, I occasionally spoke to God, asking him to fix my little problems—I figured God existed to improve my life. But, after God saved me, I realized my posture toward prayer fell far short of his expectations. Instead, I learned that God wants me to come to him with humility, reverence, and joy, share his priorities, and care more about his glory than mine.

These are lessons I'm still learning, and thankfully Jesus continues to instruct me through the words of what we call The Lord's Prayer, recorded in Matthew 6:5–15.

Our local church is spending some extended time thinking about prayer. I know you want to pray more and better. But perhaps you struggle to enjoy praying. Perhaps you are discouraged by the results of your prayers. Maybe you don't pray enough, or your prayers are too shallow or too short. Don't be discouraged! By God's grace, you can grow in your prayer life. The better you pray, the richer your life will be.

Before you read any further, take out your Bible and slowly read Matthew 6:5–15. After you read, ask God to help you heed the counsel of Jesus as he so kindly gives us a model prayer.

Did you do that? Great! Now I'd like to share with you four lessons I've gleaned from the Lord's Prayer. They've helped me, and I believe they can help you.

FIRST, WHEN YOU PRAY, BE HUMBLE.

⁵ *"And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. ⁶ But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you."*

Before Jesus gets specific about how we ought to pray, he addresses the pride of hypocrisy. A hypocrite tries to *look* religious without genuinely caring about *being* religious. Jesus addresses this again and again in his teaching. First, he mentions those who give to be seen by others (Matt.

6:1). He highlights those who enjoy drawing attention to themselves by fasting (6:16). Finally, he turns to the topic of hypocrisy and prayer (6:5). Jesus wants us to slay the bloodthirsty dragon that is hypocrisy!

Matthew 5–7 is known as the "Sermon on the Mount." The whole of this message is a call to Christlike humility. The sermon memorably begins in Matthew 5:3 with, *"Blessed are the poor in spirit."* The *"poor in spirit"* see their sin and eagerly seek help from God to overcome it. Jesus wants us to understand that genuinely humble people aren't looking for attention; they don't need the applause of others. Instead, they give, pray, and fast in secret. They are living for the reward of heaven, not earth. They care about the glory that comes from God far more than the glory that comes from man (John 5:44).

It is no wonder, then, in Matthew 6:6, Jesus says we're to pray privately: *"when you pray, go in to your room."* No one sees you in your room. No one knows how long you pray. No one is impressed with you when they can't see you. You are who you are when you are alone.

Jesus modeled private prayer. Luke 5:16 says, *"he would withdraw to desolate places to pray."* Yes, it's good to pray in public—I do it. It's good to pray with others. It's good to text and let people know you prayed for them—I do that, too. But like an iceberg, let most of your prayers be in the hidden place, underwater, where only God can see.

What if someone told you I only pray when standing behind a pulpit at MVBC? I'm sure this would disappoint you. You might get sad, even a bit angry. Finally, you might wonder if I knew the Lord. A private prayer life is a leading indicator of genuine Christian spirituality.

The volume of your prayers amplifies when you live a humble life. We see this not only in the fact that Jesus calls us to pray privately, where no one can see, but where Jesus calls us to forgive those who sin against us. Our passage ends with this call because God opposes the proud—he doesn't hear their prayers—but gives grace to the humble. There is no more extraordinary act of humility than forgiving those who sinned against you.

¹⁴ *For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, ¹⁵ but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.*

God doesn't forgive us because we forgive others. However, those who proudly cling to resentment or bitterness should not expect to be forgiven by God.

Forgiveness is the impulse of a humble heart.

In summary, Jesus bookends his instruction about how to pray with two calls to humility. The first call is to pray in private. The second call is to forgive. Someone willing to pray when no one is watching knows he lives for an audience of One—our great God. Someone who forgives knows he's a sinner who receives forgiveness by the cross of Christ. If you want your prayer life to improve, ask yourself these simple questions:

- ✦ Do I have a place in my home where I can privately spend time with the Lord?
- ✦ Do I take advantage of that place to commune with God in prayer?
- ✦ Are there people in life I'm refusing to forgive?
- ✦ Even if I say I forgive them, am I holding on to bitterness out of anger or pride?

These questions need careful answers before our prayer lives can get better.

SECOND, WHEN YOU PRAY, BE THOUGHTFUL.

⁷ *"And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. ⁸ Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.*

Jesus' point in verses 7 and 8 is that we are to be careful with our words—intentional, purposeful, and thoughtful. God doesn't need a weather report. He knows all the headlines in all the papers in the world. So, when you pray, get down to business—praise him, thank him, and (respectfully) let him know what you want from him.

Often, our prayer lives are weak because we've gravitated toward stock, repetitive words and phrases. "God, thank you for this food." "Lord, help me to have a good day." "Father, keep me from getting sick."

Try to avoid saying the same things over and over again. Muscle memory is excellent for athletics but awful for praying thoughtfully before our holy and living God. Fail to heed this counsel, and before you know it, you won't even pay attention to what comes out of your mouth. You'll be like the fools in verse 7 who think they'll "be heard for their many words." In short, God is not pleased simply because we talk to him. We can squander our time with the Lord with our "many words."

What, practically, can you do to pray more thoughtfully?

MEDITATE ON SCRIPTURE SO YOU CAN PRAY SCRIPTURE.

Meditation requires you to stew in God's Word. We need to internalize it by becoming more familiar with his commands, character, and promises. Be like Isaac, who mediated on the promises of God (Gen. 24:63). Be like Moses, who told the people to meditate on the Book of the Law "*day and night*" (Josh. 1:8). Be like David, who meditated on the statutes, precepts, and promises of God (Psa. 119). Be like Jesus, who resisted Satan with the very Word of the Lord (Matt. 4).

One of the reasons you should meditate on Scripture is because you want God's Word to saturate your words. Thoughtful prayers are Bible prayers. God loves to hear his Word on your lips. When God tells you in Psalm 46 that he is your refuge and strength, he loves you to pray, "God, you are my refuge and our strength." He loves to hear, "Father, be a refuge and strength for your people today!"

After I read a chapter of the Bible, I'll stop and praise God for what I've just read, what I've learned about him, and how that chapter challenges me to glorify him with all of my life. For example, this morning, I read Numbers 16, the account of Korah's rebellion against Moses and Aaron and, ultimately, against God. Korah resented Moses and Aaron for placing themselves in leadership above all the people. God, however, had elevated Moses and Aaron by making Moses his prophet and Aaron his priest. As a result, God's vengeance against Korah was swift and terrible. I left that chapter wanting to honor God more and trust him more. I left praising God for exalting Jesus Christ, who deserves all honor and praise. I left asking myself if there are ways I'm not content where God has placed me. In this way, Numbers 16 informed my prayer life today. It's how, by God's grace, I prayed thoughtfully.

PLAN TO PRAY, SO YOU DO PRAY.

Without some plan, you'll likely let prayer fall by the wayside. You may stop coming to God in prayer altogether without knowing how you will approach the throne of his grace. If you have not given some attention to what you are going to pray, you'll likely fall into the trap of praying the same old stock, repetitive phrases.

Consider keeping a list of people or problems for which you want to pray. Or, use a prayer app to organize your prayers. If you tell someone you are going to pray for

something, write it down so you'll remember to do just that. In short, it's okay to plan out your prayers. We plan everything else! Our vacations, our jobs, our menus. So why not plan out our prayers? What attributes of God do you want to praise him for this week? What do you want to see in the lives of your friends, parents, children, and church members? How do you want to grow as a Christian?

WRITE OUT YOUR PRAYERS TO FOCUS YOUR MIND.

If your mind wanders when you pray, consider pulling out a journal and spending a few moments jotting down your requests before you take them to the Lord. Or take it a step further and write a letter to God. Did you know the first autobiography ever written, Augustine's *Confessions*, is simply one long prayer to God? There have been seasons in my life when I've written out my prayers to focus my thoughts.

Brothers and sisters, remember Jesus' warning that we shouldn't expect God to hear us simply because we are moving our lips. Instead, we need to engage our hearts, so we should pray thoughtfully.

THIRD, WHEN YOU PRAY, BE GODWARD.

The Lord's Prayer contains six petitions or requests. The first three are Godward—all about God and his glory. The Lord's Prayer is a prayer for Christians—those who can call God their Father by the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.

⁹ *Pray then like this:*
"Our Father in heaven,
Hallowed be your name.
¹⁰ *Your kingdom come,*
Your will be done,
On earth as it is in heaven.

THE FIRST PETITION IS "HALLOWED BE YOUR NAME."

In his *Gettysburg Address*, President Lincoln spoke of "hallowed ground"—ground made holy by the sacrifice of the men who fought and died there. We're to pray God would make his name holy. We want God to cause all people to celebrate his name everywhere. Those who pray, "*hallowed be your name*," want God to be famous.

On a recent overseas trip, I had a layover in Amsterdam. I saw an advertisement in the airport featuring LeBron James. King James is famous all over the world! How

much more do we want everyone to celebrate the true King, Jesus, worldwide? We want every man, woman, and child on this earth to know that the Lord our God is wondrous and worthy of praise.

Jesus told us to pray that God's name would be hallowed. May our prayers overflow with requests for God's truth to be spoken and understood. The entire world should know God is Creator, Redeemer, and Lord. To pray "*hallowed be your name*" is to pray that every city, village, farm, and valley knows the name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. God uses this kind of prayer to raise missionaries and pastors. It's also the kind of prayer God uses to embolden us to simply walk across the street and get to know our neighbor.

THE SECOND PETITION IS "YOUR KINGDOM COME."

If "*hallowed be your name*" is a prayer that God would be famous and crowned. But, of course, in one sense, God is already crowned! He reigns, right now, over all of creation. He is the King. Unfortunately, many refuse to acknowledge his reign. They won't bow their knee to the King. So, whenever you pray for the gospel to advance, you aren't just praying that God would be famous. You're asking God to forgive. You're pleading with God to increase the number of people who bow their knees and acknowledge Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.

Consider praying this way through our "Sending MVBC" booklet. Also, consider praying "*your kingdom come*" on Sunday evenings when we pray for the many evangelistic prayer requests shared by our brothers and sisters.

Remember, "*your kingdom come*" is more than a prayer for spreading the gospel. Ultimately, it's a prayer for God to end sin, death, evil, and rebellion. "*Your kingdom come*" is to pray, "*Come, Lord Jesus.*" We are asking for the return of Christ when everyone will acknowledge his supremacy. On that day, every knee will "*bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.*" Then, in the new heavens and earth, the reign of Jesus will be acknowledged by all.

THE THIRD PETITION IS, "YOUR WILL BE DONE ON EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN."

In heaven, we will entirely and happily obey the Lord. God's commands and plans will be music to our ears. In heaven, we will always take God's side and never question him. Every fiber of our being will know his ways are perfect.

Unfortunately, here on earth, we struggle to accept God's

will. Praying, "*your will be done*," is like thrusting a stake in the ground and saying, "God, I don't understand your ways, but I know you, and I trust you." Let's face it, God's will isn't always our will. I want my kids to be healthy, but one of them suffers from a serious disease. I want my extended family to come to saving faith. So far, they have not turned to the Lord in faith. Whether praying for my child's healing or my family's salvation, I know God's will is more important than anything. I believe his plan is perfect, and I want his plan. I side with him. So should you, and one way you side with him, is by praying, "*your will be done*."

What can you do to make your prayers more Godward? I have only one answer: treasure God more than anyone or anything. You've got to prize him. He must mean more to you than your life for your prayers to be full of his power. If you neglect these first three petitions, your prayers will be shallow and selfish. However, if you believe God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and trust all his ways are righteous and know God is glorious and good and merciful and mighty—your prayers will be rich and deep. Your prayers will be Godward.

FOURTH, WHEN YOU PRAY, BE PERSONAL.

Jesus teaches us to pray for ourselves. Though Jesus cares deeply about God's glory, he wants you to know that God cares for you. Therefore, he teaches us to make personal prayer requests.

- ¹¹ *Give us this day our daily bread,*
¹² *And forgive us our debts,*
As we also have forgiven our debtors.
¹³ *And lead us not into temptation,*
But deliver us from evil.

THE FIRST PETITION IS "GIVE US THIS DAY OUR DAILY BREAD."

We need bread to live. Without food, we die. Jesus teaches us to pray for what we need to sustain ourselves. God doesn't merely want us to work for our food; he wants us to pray for our food. Every good and perfect gift is from above—from God (James 1:17). We depend on God, even for our daily food.

One of my favorite verses in the Bible is Matthew 6:24, "*Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.*" I repeat this verse when I see someone worrying

about the future. However, it's not enough not to worry. We must pray!

The prayer for daily bread is a prayer for God to sustain us through our everyday troubles. Every day has problems. We must purchase food, pay rent, file reports, write papers, and repair relationships. Life is hard. What would God have us do? He would have us pray. Have you ever considered that the most important work you have each day is to pray for your daily bread? Jesus wants you to ask the Father to sustain you for the next 24 hours.

Because you are weak and he is strong, saturate your prayers with practical, tangible, material, and personal requests.

- ✦ "God, give me the strength to lead this meeting."
- ✦ "Give me the wisdom to have this conversation."
- ✦ "Lord, help me love my kids today."
- ✦ "Father, I'm tired; keep me from quitting."

It doesn't matter if you are living paycheck-to-paycheck or have twenty million dollars in the bank—you have no guarantee of tomorrow, which is why Jesus told us to pray, "*Give us this day our daily bread.*"

THE SECOND PETITION IS: "FORGIVE US OUR DEBTS, AS WE HAVE FORGIVEN OUR DEBTORS."

No Christian should take his salvation for granted. To pray, "*forgive us our debts*," is to acknowledge the reality of indwelling sin. It's to admit you're still a sinner and go to the Lord each day asking to drink afresh from his fountain of mercy and grace. What good is your daily bread if you are a stranger to God's grace?

How do you know you have your daily bread? Because you have enough food to survive. How do you know God has forgiven you? The answer is in verse 12: because you are quick to forgive others. Brothers and sisters, holding on to wrongs done against you is a surefire way to short-circuit your prayers. If you know the grace of God, you will be gracious toward others.

THE FINAL PETITION IS: "LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION, BUT DELIVER US FROM EVIL."

God would never lead anyone into temptation. Indeed, God cannot tempt anyone (James 1:13). Here, Jesus calls us to pray for what we are sure God will do—what God promises to do. He will not lead us into temptation; instead, he will deliver us from evil.

You aren't immune to the schemes of the devil. There is no vaccine against indwelling sin. We need God to protect us from Satan, the world, and even ourselves. That's why we pray, "*lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.*"

Begin each day by begging God to keep you strong. Plead with God to keep your thoughts pure and your words truthful. Yes, we need food. Yes, we need forgiveness. But we also need faithfulness and holiness, without which we'll never see the Lord! From where does holiness come? You can't buy it at the grocery store. Holiness is a gift we receive as we commune with God in a hidden place.

It's hard to believe, but the One who created the universe cares about you. He doesn't merely ask you to pray for his glory but also for your good. God's care for his glory and my good encourages me; does it encourage you? I am praying it does! It's been decades since I bought my first Christian book on prayer. I've learned a lot in the intervening years. I better understand that God cares about his fame, and I more deeply appreciate that he also cares about me.

The Lord's Prayer teaches us that God cares for himself. We see this in petitions 1–3. But God also cares for you: petitions 4–6. Therefore, your prayers should always have a Godward *and* a personal focus: God's glory and your good. God's kingdom and your forgiveness. God's will and your faithfulness.

CONCLUSION

It's worth noting that though Jesus calls us to pray privately, he also calls us to pray with each other in mind. Notice the plural pronouns throughout his model prayer: "*Our Father*" (verse 9), "*our daily bread*" (verse 11), "*our debts*" (verse 12), "*lead us . . . deliver us*" (verse 13). Jesus called them to pray this way because he knew his disciples would be together in a church.

Brothers and sisters, we are part of a church family. We break bread together, confess our sins to one another, and pursue holiness as one family of faith. Prayer is a community project.

According to Jesus, how then shall we pray?

♦*Be humble.* Pride will kill your prayer life—find a hidden place where only God gets the glory. Be quick to forgive those who have wronged you.

♦*Be thoughtful.* Prayer takes work—use the Bible to help you pray and plan your prayers to avoid

squandering your time with the Lord.

♦*Be Godward.* God's glory and purposes should be your prayer life's central theme.

♦*Be personal.* God is your Father—he wants to give you food, forgiveness, and faithfulness. Just ask him.

— Aaron Menikoff

A Simple Way to Pray

Written by Martin Luther

As Martin Luther was getting his hair cut, his long-time barber and friend, Peter Beskendorf, asked the excellent Reformer for advice on how to pray. Although Luther had been preparing pastoral tools “to train pastors to train parents to train children” for eighteen years, this sincere request led Luther to pen a personal letter of practical instruction on prayer for his friend.

Do you sometimes feel you are becoming cold and numb about prayer? So did Luther (6). Luther points out to his dear friend that the devil and the flesh are continually waging war on the Christian, trying to prevent them from praying (7). For this reason, Luther shares his method of praying through Scripture and Christian Creeds. Luther calls his simple way of praying “a wreath of four strands” – “ITCP” – Instruction, Thanksgiving, Confession, Prayer. He proceeds to model this method as a guideline for praying *the Lord’s Prayer*, *the Ten Commandments*, and *the Apostles Creed*.

♦Presenting *the Lord’s Prayer* as seven petitions, he takes each phrase of this prayer and guides us into a better understanding of how we are to pray and to whom we are praying.

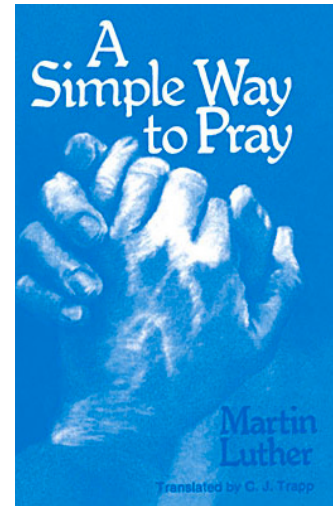
♦Concerning *the Ten Commandments*, Luther treats them in a “fourfold fashion, namely as a little book of instruction, a little book of thanksgiving, a little book of confession, and a little book of prayer” (27).

♦Making a fourfold garland of praying *the Apostles Creed*, he divides the creed into three articles: Creation, Redemption, and Sanctification.

Upon concluding each prayer, Luther tells us, “You must always say ‘Amen’ strongly, with all faith, and without a doubt that God certainly does hear you and says ‘yes’ to your prayer” (12).

I highly recommend this short, easy, and thought-provoking read! It will counsel, instruct, and inspire you as you pray Scripture daily.

– RECOMMENDED BY JANE HALL



Excerpts from the Book

1

“It is such a good idea to start your day, first thing, early in the morning, by praying, and then make it the last thing you do at the end of the day. This way, you can prevent lying to yourself by saying, ‘Oh, I can wait a little while. I’ll pray in an hour or so, but first I need to do this or that.’”

– p. 6

2

“It often happens that I get lost in right and good thoughts as they come, so that I do not even say the rest of the Lord’s Prayer. When such rich thoughts come, just let other prayers go and give these thoughts plenty of room; do not in any way hinder them. For in this way the Holy Spirit is preaching to you.”

– p. 13

3

“A good prayer should not be long, nor should it be drawn out, but prayed often and fervently.”

– p. 27

Daring to Draw Near

Edited by John White

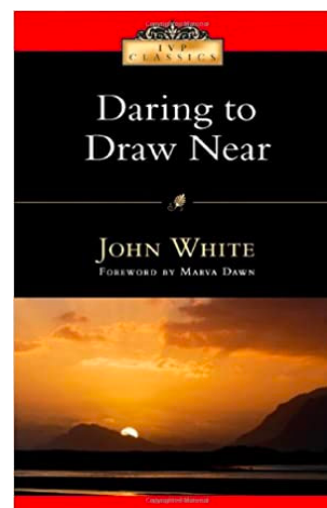
In *Daring to Draw Near*, John White examines ten different prayers throughout the Bible. Rather than writing about prayer generally, White shows his readers how other people's prayers are windows into seeing who God is and how prayer ultimately begins and ends with him. These prayers are bold and full of confidence in the character and majesty of God, though some deeply sorrowful and anguishing. Through studying these prayers, we, too, can pray more boldly to God and love him more, no matter our circumstances.

Prayer begins with God through his initiative. We tend to water down our prayers, especially in times of suffering, due to fear, pride, laziness, or simply because we recognize that we are inadequate compared to a holy God. We say, "Let X, Y, or Z happen if it is your will. Amen," but we rarely consider that God calls us to take part in bringing his will to pass. When we do, we understand more of who he is. Take Abraham's prayer for God not to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah as an example. God does not need Abraham's approval or opinion about his decision, but he doesn't hide his intentions from Abraham. He cares for Abraham and wants Abraham to know him more. Abraham grapples with God's plan and eventually calls out, longing for God to be merciful and spare the city if there are fifty righteous people, then forty, then thirty, then twenty, then ten. Abraham then recognizes the familiar God of the covenant, a promise-keeper and righteous judge.

Prayer also ends with God. Take Hannah's prayer, for example. First, God initiated her prayer by closing her womb. Then, we see him gently lead Hannah through her suffering. God mercifully shows Hannah that until she finds joy in him, his gifts will bring her no joy. Her pain drove her into God's arms. However, we see that he drew her to himself, carried her and listened to her amid her suffering, and ultimately opened her womb and gave her a child that she dedicated to him.

This book convicted me in several ways. I often am afraid of finding that God's plan may not match mine, of pouring out my heart and questioning his plans, of feeling out of control. This book was a comfort and reminder that God delights in listening to his children and cares about us. It reminded me that all I have is his and that he will reveal more of himself to me when I suffer. I recommend this book to anyone who struggles to pray boldly. It has certainly challenged me in my prayer life to pray more boldly than before.

— RECOMMENDED BY HANNAH HAIR



Excerpts from the Book

1

"When Scripture and your experience clash, do not run away from the tension. Let it become the energizer of earnest prayer. In the Christian life, you need more tension, not less, if you are to do the will of God"

— *Daniel: The Man Who Was Greatly Beloved*,
p. 69

2

"In the long story of kings, battles, sieges, and the exploits of the great, it tells of a God who cares for the poor and the downtrodden, of a God to whom no hurt is too trivial to demand his care. God is indeed the God of the sparrows and the lilies"

— *Hannah: Whispers in Pleasure, Shouts in Pain*,
p. 87

3

"Let it not dismay you then that in the fiercest storms of life, the wind and waves should continue to buffet you long after you have said, 'Not my will, but Yours, O Lord!' The storm will not last forever. But it need not abate the moment you set your course."

— *Jesus: The Last Battle*, p. 149

SEPTEMBER

These Scripture readings have been selected to help you prepare for the Sunday morning message. Take Up & Read!

September 1	Acts 5:12–42	September 17	Acts 11:1–30
September 2	Psalms 105:1–15	September 18	Acts 25:1–12
September 3	Acts 6:1–15	September 19	Habakkuk
September 4	Acts 23:12–35	September 20	Habakkuk 1:1–11
September 5	Acts 24:1–27	September 21	Habakkuk 1:12–2:5
September 6	Acts 7:1–30	September 22	Habakkuk 2:6–20
September 7	Acts 7:31–8:3	September 23	Hebrews 10:32–11:3
September 8	Acts 8:4–25	September 24	Habakkuk 3:1–19
September 9	Ezekiel 3:16–21	September 25	Habakkuk
September 10	Acts 8:26–40	September 26	Acts 25:13–26:32
September 11	Acts 24:1–27	September 27	Acts 12:1–25
September 12	Acts 25:1–12	September 28	Acts 13:1–12
September 13	Acts 9:1–19a	September 29	Acts 13:13–52
September 14	Acts 9:19b–43	September 30	Job 19:21–29
September 15	Acts 10:1–48		
September 16	2 Samuel 23:1–7		

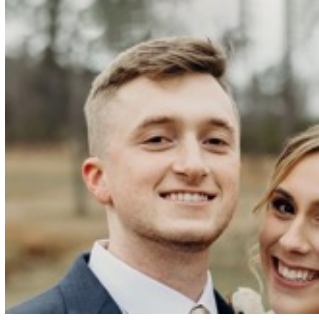
*Sermons in bold

TAKE UP & READ

NEW MEMBERS



**Hadley
Foust**



**Jonathan
Melber**



**Sarah
Melber**



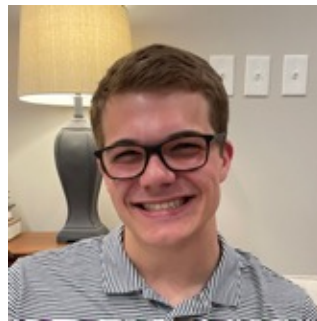
**Paul
Morris**



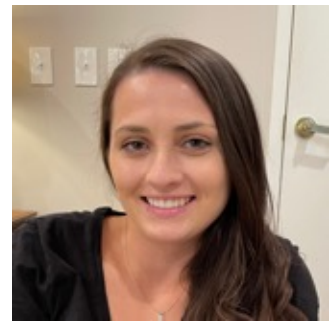
**Stefanie
Morris**



**Emma Grace
Roe**



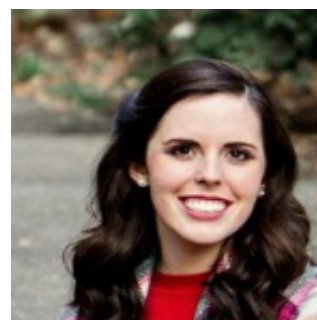
**Jacob
Salley**



**Sarah
Salley**



**Tyler
Ziemer**



**Emily
Ziemer**



Mount Vernon
BAPTIST CHURCH