

**Author:** Lisa Cole

**Scripture:** 1 Thessalonians 5:14-18 (NIV)

We urge you, brothers, warn those who are idle, encourage the tender, help the weak, be patient with everyone. Make sure nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always try to be kind to another. Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks for all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

**Insight/Story:**

There are so many areas of the Bible that instruct us on how to treat one another. When I read these verses, it spoke straight to my soul. Don't be lazy with other lazy people. Warn them that work and discipline are better. Don't yell or intimidate the timid and weak. Help and encourage them. But first distinguish between lazy and timid/shy in order to instruct others. In all instruction, be kind and encouraging. Our attitude towards others should not fluctuate with our situations. Always be joyful, helpful, encouraging. Pray continually regardless of the circumstance. Often, our natural inclination is to be joyful during a time of blessing and pray during a time of need. But once we make a conscious decision to do what God says, we gain a new perspective. When we do God's will, we find it easier to be joyful, thankful, encouraging, and full of blessings.

**Prayer:**

Father, we need you in our lives. We ask that our eyes and ears are always open to what You have planned for us. Give us a spirit of joyfulness no matter what our circumstances. Guide our thoughts and actions so that we are always kind and encouraging to others, and are thankful in every situation. Thank you for knowing us, loving us, and always having our lives in Your hands. Amen.

**Author:** Carl Hesselbach

**Scripture:** Genesis 12:7-8 (NASB)

The Lord appeared to Abram and said, "To your descendants I will give this land." So he built an altar there to the Lord who had appeared to him. Then he proceeded from there to the mountain on the east of Bethel, and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east; and there he built an altar to the Lord and called upon the name of the Lord.

**Insight/Story:**

"Abraham's spiritual pilgrimage can be traced to examining the altars he built. Every time Abraham came to a milestone in his life, or whenever he learned something new about God, he built an altar." \*

"Each altar provided a testimonial to Abraham's growth in understanding God's ways and to his trust in God. For today's leaders, spiritual markers provide a backdrop by which they can see where God has helped them mature in their relationship with Him. God's current instructions are always best understood in light of the knowledge of all He has done in a leader's life so far." \*\*

The quotes here reference leaders, but easily apply to all Christ's followers. I am encouraged as I reflect on my own landmarks, my own altars to the Lord. They help me to keep in perspective what He has done for me vs. what I have done.

**Prayer:**

Father God, thank you. Thank you for how richly you bless us with your provision, your favor, your mercy, and your grace. Our landmarks that we could create to recognize what You have done for us truly would be endless. We pray that as we create these landmarks that they are an ongoing testimony both for us and for others to remember and understand how You have moved in our walk with You, in our lives, in our relationships, in our physical wellbeing, and in our finances. We pray that as others who do not yet know You see those landmarks that they would want to experience You as we have. We love You and give You thanks for who You are in our lives.

\* and \*\* *Spiritual Leadership by Henry and Richard Blackaby*

**Author:** David Breaux

**Scripture:** Romans 8:26-27 (NIV)

In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God.

**Insight/Story:**

I served in fpStudents Ministry for almost a decade. I can't even begin to count how many times I heard a student say they did not want to pray out loud because they didn't know what to say. For years, I thought it was just a problem of their age. But I have come to realize through adult small groups that it is not just a youth problem.

The Bible not only says that God searches our hearts, but that the Spirit intercedes for us. The words are not what is important, it is the connection. We should not let lack of vocabulary keep us from seeking the face of a God who already knows our hearts.

Pride gets in the way of a lot of things, even our prayer life.

**Prayer:**

Father, you know our hearts. When words fail us, your Spirit intercedes for us. Father, we won't let pride get in the way of our relationship with You. Thank you for hearing our prayers, and knowing our thoughts, regardless of the words we use.

**Author:** Rob Patrick

**Scripture:** Philippians 4:6-7 (NIV)

Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

**Insight/Story:**

Wow, don't be anxious! That's easier said than done, right? A few years ago, I noticed a small lump on the right side of my neck. I dismissed it and thought it would go away. As it grew larger and more noticeable, I began to worry that it might be a tumor. I kept thinking that if I ignored it, I would not have to go to the doctor and get that news that no one wants to hear; cancer. I began to worry more and more. Finally, my wife noticed and others also. God used a close friend to guide me to the above passage. After reading and praying through it, I remember coming to the realization that God wanted me to talk with Him often about it, be thankful in my circumstance, ask Him for healing, and trust Him for peace in the middle of my storm.

**Prayer:**

Father, we are so thankful that we can talk with you anytime about anything that is troubling us. We can trust through your Word that we can have your peace that goes beyond our comprehension. So, we give our worries and anxious thoughts to you today and ask that you guard our hearts and minds with your peace. Thank you, Holy Spirit, for your presence and guidance through life's storms. In Jesus' name, Amen!

**Author:** Jody Kenyon

**Scripture:** James 5:16

Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.

**Insight/Story:**

As I have served in the groups ministry for over 15 years, I could not begin to count the number of lessons, blogs, or stories I've read or listened to that spoke of the need for transparency in group life. It is an easy concept to hear, but a difficult one to live by. Who likes to confess their sins? Don't we all try to put our best face on when we go to group? To look like we've got it all together? But what I have learned from experience is that there is great freedom in letting others see the real me. I mess up. I need prayer. I'm glad I have people that will allow me to share and then pray for me, but love me just the same.

**Prayer:**

Father, thank you for the people in our lives that we know will pray for and with us when we struggle. Thank you most of all that no matter what, you love us beyond measure and nothing whatsoever can separate us from your love.

**Author:** Wes Selecman

**Scripture:** Phil. 3:4-7 (ESV)

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say rejoice. Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

**Insight/Story:**

God wants to guard your heart and mind in Christ Jesus and he does it by giving you his very own peace; but you have to want it and ask for it. My wife and I, when faced with challenges and difficult decisions, ask God to establish peace in our hearts and show us his will for our lives. We don't pray for our preference or desired outcome to come true, instead we ask for peace about which direction to take – he has never failed us. The key, besides asking, is to be willing to follow wherever he leads even if it's not what you want (Luke 22:42). Avoid using God as your "magic genie" who grants wishes; rather allow him to be your "Peace Guide" in life. When he delivers on his promise, write it down so you can share how the "Lord is at hand" in your life.

**Prayer:**

Father in Heaven, you are sovereign, holy, and perfect and you care about our lives. Lord, guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus so that we may honor you with our decision-making. Give us peace about the direction we should go with our lives and anxiety about any other direction that goes against your will. Open the door and give us the strength to walk through it in obedience. We surrender to your will because you are our loving King. Thank you for loving and saving us, amen.

**Author:** Cindy Barnes

**Scripture:** Romans 11:6 (NLT)

And since it is through God's kindness, then it is not by their good works. For in that case, God's grace would not be what it really is—free and undeserved.

**Insight/Story:**

There is a pretty common teaching out there that sin will separate you from God. Sadly our youth are inundated with this teaching in an attempt to harness their behavior. Sin will sting and it does come with consequences, but losing favor or right standing with our Abba Father is not one of them. Be assured of what Jesus' finished work accomplished for you. You are a new creation, and NOTHING can separate you from his love. He already paid the price for your sins, so stop condemning yourself. Make sure that what you believe only points you back to Jesus and His finished work, He is the hero! Grace is indeed free and undeserved, and it's only by our believing, not our doing, that we receive that grace and become part of the family of God. Be secure in His love for you and of your place in Him.

**Prayer:**

Father, we come to you boldly and thank you for your overwhelming love for us. Thank you that because of the finished work of Jesus we, as believers, stand before you as righteous and Holy. We pray that you help each of us to see ourselves the way that you see us, Lord. And while our actions don't always bring glory to you, we believe that you are helping us to grow and mature on the outside into who we already are on the inside. We know that as we keep our minds renewed to your truth our behavior will line up with who we already are in you. Help us to receive this unconditional love and to also give it away to everyone around us.