



 **REACH:**
Seeking
the Will
of God

**STEPPING INTO
THE FUTURE
WITH CONFIDENCE**

A 40 Day Devotional Guide for the Otter Creek Family of Faith





OPEN LETTER FROM THE ELDERS

To our Otter Creek Family,

The time has come for us to step into our future... to determine who we will be, what we will do, and where we will grow. There are opportunities before us that will impact this church for decades. Some involve land and facilities. Some are about our character and our calling. All are important. And we need to know **God's** will about these matters to step into tomorrow with confidence.

For seven years now, your elders have been seeking **God's** will about our facility. We know the mission of **Otter Creek**. We know our potential. And we know the limitations of our present home. With all our hearts, and with one mind, we believe **God** is calling us to build and move. We approach this challenge with great confidence. This is the right thing to do.

We understand, however, that there are differences in **Otter Creek's** feelings about these plans. Some view these plans with a real sense of excitement. Others, honestly, do not yet share this confidence and enthusiasm.

Hence, this devotional guide. We invite you to join us on a forty day journey into the will of **God**—so you have an opportunity to feel as confident and confirmed as we do, and so that each of us can prayerfully consider how **God** wants us to help financially.

God has a will for our church—not just a general wish but a specific dream for how we can best serve him. Part of that dream has to do with ministries and mission. Part involves more mundane matters like parking and classrooms. Seeking his will for our personal involvement in that dream is a godly endeavor.

He has promised that if we earnestly seek him, he will make himself known.

The Elders

*They entered into a covenant to
seek the **LORD**, the **God** of their
fathers, with all their heart and soul.*

2 CHRONICLES 15:12

Prayer

Father, I want to please you.

*Show me what I should do to make
your dreams for my church come true.*

SEEKING THE WILL OF GOD

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REACH:

DAY 1— *God has a Plan*

SCRIPTURE: *Jeremiah 29:11*

“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”

Moses went to the mountain, seeking **God**. **God** waited for him, ready and eager to reveal his plans. And the result is instructive. For what Moses brought down from the mountain was not just ten commandments about general themes. It was a detailed, specific, exhaustive description of **God’s** will for his people. How they should dress. What sacrifices to make when. How to build a tabernacle.

The will of **God** goes beyond generalities and universal truths. Yes, he wants us to love each other and do good. But his desire for us is more personal than that. He has a detailed plan for your life. He has a specific will for the life of this church. He has a future in mind. But how do we discover it?

In former days, **God’s** people believed he cared about details—who should lead them, whether to go to war, what to build. So they asked him to make his “will” known.

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They put out fleece,

cast lots, consulted the urim and thummin (see Nu 27:18-21). They set their options before **God** and expected him to tell them what to do.

God has given us even more powerful tools for knowing his will in these latter days. We have the mind of **Christ**. We have **God’s Spirit** within us. We have a community of faith surrounding us. With all this available, surely we can find a way to hear **God’s** voice in specific and confidence-inspiring ways.

CONSIDER:

- **God** has a specific plan for you and for **Otter Creek**.
- **God** is ready, eager, and willing to reveal his plan to you.
- When you seek **God** earnestly, he will make his plan known.

SEEK:

- Read Deuteronomy 4:29, Judges 6:11-40, and Acts 1:15-25.
- Pray for **God** to make his will known about your participation in the future of **Otter Creek**.

DAY 2– Asking

SCRIPTURE: *Matthew 7:7-8*

“Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.”

The plan is there. **God** is waiting to reveal it. But he wants us to ask, seek, and knock. He will not cast the future before people who aren't interested.

Esther asked. (Have you read the fourth chapter of Esther lately?) Her people were in danger. Only the king could save them. And only she was in a position to beg him for mercy. What should she do? What did **God** want of her? She fasted and prayed for three days. All the Jews of the city fasted with her.

The Bible doesn't record Esther's prayers. But it's easy to imagine that her requests were direct and detailed. “What should I do in this matter? What words should I use? What should I wear when approaching the king?” Asking. Seeking. Knocking. It's also certain that she asked with passion—her life was on the line. Her people were on the line. And as the three days indicates, she asked

repeatedly. Morning, noon, and night. Day after day.

In the end, **God** answered. Esther knew what to do and what to say. She knew **God's** will.

CONSIDER:

- The first step to knowing is asking. Specifically. Directly.
- The asking cannot be casual. It requires some passion, some intensity.
- Often, we demonstrate that intensity by asking repeatedly... persistently.

SEEK:

- Read Esther 4, Mark 14:39, Luke 22:39-44, and Luke 18:1-8.
- Pray to know **God's** will using the words of the prayer inside the front cover of this guide. Pray this pray intensely, repeatedly through the day. Be persistent in this prayer through the course of this 40 days. Pray it with your friends and family.



REACH: DAY 3—Listening

SCRIPTURE: Mark 4:23

“If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear.”

We seek the will of **God** by asking. But true conversations require us to listen as well. Why ask for **God’s** plan if we’re not willing to hear the answer?

The crowds were always doing this with **Jesus**—asking him questions but missing his responses. They wanted to know who he was, where he came from, why he preached, what he meant. They asked. He answered. But they didn’t hear. Sometimes their deafness was caused by hard hearts, sometimes by preconceptions and biases. Mostly, they simply lacked the faith to listen.

We’re deaf in similar ways. There are things about **God’s** will we don’t want to hear because they’re hard... things we can’t hear because they don’t fit our categories and assumptions... things that escape us because our

4 faith is too small.

CONSIDER:

- Listening to **God** is more a matter of heart than auditory acuity.
- **God** will not out-shout our sin or narrow-mindedness or lack of faith.
- We “clean our ears”—get ready to hear **God**—through confession, repentance, openness, sincerity, and prayers for a larger faith.
- The practice of silence is necessary for true conversations with **God**. Give yourself time to listen.

SEEK:

- Meditate on Psalm 131, Isaiah 30:15, and 1Samuel 3:9.
- Spend some time “cleaning your ears.” Confess, repent, and pray for more faith.
- Ask someone close to you whether you’re a good listener. Listen to their answer.

DAY 4– Discerning

SCRIPTURE: *Philippians 1:9-10*

“And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best...”

If **God** always spoke with a megaphone, if he answered our seeking in unmistakably obvious ways, we might not need discernment—the ability to sift, weigh, and discriminate what is of **God** and what is not. Unfortunately...

One of the strangest stories in all the Old Testament is found in 1Kings 13. (Go read it.) A young prophet travels to Bethel to speak against idolatry. **God** has warned him not to eat or drink there. But an old prophet invites him home anyway, insisting that an angel told him to serve lunch. What’s a young prophet to do? Two conflicting words from the **Lord**. Diametrically opposed options. Discernment might have warned the younger man that the old man was lying. Discernment might have nudged him to obey the command he knew was from **God**. But lacking discernment, the young prophet ate and was killed by a lion on the way home.

How can we tell what is from **God** and what is not? Seeking the will of **God** may begin with asking and lead to listening.

But eventually we have to weigh the answers we hear. Discernment is a necessary step in knowing **God’s** will for our lives.

CONSIDER:

- The answers we hear about **God’s** will may be subtle, ambiguous, and even incompatible.
- **God** is not the only one to answer such questions. Our own desires can masquerade as **God’s**. Satan often finds opportunities to feed false answers.
- Though discernment comes from several sources—scripture, wise counsel, prayer—it is rooted in intimacy. Knowing **God**, being familiar with his voice, allows us to recognize when he is talking to us.

SEEK:

- Meditate on 1Kings 3:1-9, Psalm 119:125, and 1Corinthians 2:14.
- Pray that **God** will give you a “discerning heart.”
- What are you “discerning” about your role in the **REACH** campaign? Are you hearing **God’s** voice on this matter yet?



REACH:

DAY 5— Prayer and Seeking

SCRIPTURE: Psalm 17:6

“I call on you, O God, for you will answer me; give ear to me and hear my prayer.”

When Samuel grew old, the people asked him to appoint a king (see 1Samuel 8). Samuel did not like the idea. He thought it was rebellious and irreverent. What should he do?

He prayed. He took the matter to **God**, seeking to know **God’s** will. The words of Samuel’s prayer are not recorded. But **God’s** response is. Essentially, he said, “They’ll regret it, but give them what they want.”

When Samuel had a decision to make, when people were pressing and times were dangerous, Samuel went to his knees. By praying, Samuel discovered **God’s** will.

Sometimes we pray for favors. Sometimes we pray to praise. But there are occasions when prayer is our best tool for seeking the will of **God**. Prayer allows us to wrestle with the mind of **God** and see things from his perspec-

tive. Prayer opens us to plans and dreams that could only come from **God**. Prayer lets us ask, lets us listen, and lets us discern.

CONSIDER:

- Prayer is not the only way **God** reveals his will. But it is the most common way.
- **God** will not speak into the heart of the man or woman who will not speak to him.
- So many prayers tell **God** what we want from him. Do you ever pray to know what **God** wants from you?

SEEK:

- Meditate on Romans 12:12, Colossians 1:9-10, and 1Thessalonians 5:17.
- How has **God** answered your prayers in the past? Write down an example or two.
- Use your prayer time today by seeking. “Show me what I should do to make your dreams for my church come true.”

DAY 6– Purpose-Driven Prayer

SCRIPTURE: Psalm 88:1-2

“O LORD, the God who saves me, day and night I cry out before you. May my prayer come before you; turn your ear to my cry.”

King Jehoshaphat (I’ve always thought that was a funny name) was alarmed. The armies of Edom were marching against him. The city of Jerusalem lay open and vulnerable. He called a meeting of the people and—together—they prayed one of the most focused, purposeful prayers in Scripture. (See 2 Chronicles 20:5-12.) No requests for health and wealth. No stock phrases or rote clichés. Direct. Concentrated. To the point.

There is a place for prayers that wander and cover lots of ground... general prayers... all-purpose prayers. But sometimes, circumstances dictate and needs demand that prayers have a laser-like focus. When you’re praying by the bed of a sick loved-one, you don’t dilute your prayer with unrelated matters. When you’re praying for the future of your church, a focused and purposeful prayer is appropriate.

Otter Creek faces a defining moment. The shape of our future is being determined. Purpose-driven prayer is called for. “What do you want of us?

What do you want of me? Will you make this possible? We have no power or resources to reach what has been set before us. We do not know how it can be done. But our eyes are upon you.”

CONSIDER:

- What we pray is determined by hunger. What are you hungry for? What burdens your heart? Does the future of **Otter Creek** weigh on you?
- What we pray is also determined by a sense of frailty. I don’t usually pray to breathe or for my heart to beat. But there are some matters—**God-sized** matters—I pray about constantly. **Otter Creek’s** future is one of them!

SEEK:

- Meditate on the first chapters of Nehemiah and 1 Samuel—more examples of focused prayer.
- Write a prayer of your own, focused on **God’s** will for **Otter Creek**. Spend some time and effort doing this. Pray this prayer over the next few days. Share it with someone else.



REACH:

DAY 7— Praying and Listening

SCRIPTURE: Habakkuk 2:20

“The LORD is in his holy temple; let all the earth be silent before him.”

Most prayers are full of words—our words. Do you think silence should also play a role in praying about **God’s** will? Shouldn’t there be some quiet space in our prayers, to allow **God** to speak and us to listen?

Jesus prayed for hours in the Garden. **Esther** prayed for three days before approaching the king. **Daniel** prayed an entire night in the lions’ den. Was all this time filled with words? Was there constant talk, an unbroken stream of prayer-patter? Or did they leave spaces in their prayers, periods of quiet and calm, for **God** to respond?

When the Bible tells of long periods of prayer, approves the act of fasting, uses the phrase “seeking the **Lord**”—it seems to imply that prayer is conversation; that there is speaking and listening, question and answer, request and response involved in prayer. Do you believe that?

His voice may not be audible. He may respond

with comfort or conviction rather than with words. His answer might be the gift of a changed heart. But it is important to give **God** room to respond when we pray, to leave some spaces in our prayers for him to work.

CONSIDER:

- We are too busy. We have no time for silence before the **Lord**.
- A commitment to begin and end prayer with silence would change the nature of the words we speak.
- Our prayer habits often communicate that what we have to say to **God** is more important than what he has to say to us.

SEEK:

- Meditate on Exodus 14:14, Jeremiah 7:24, and Zephaniah 1:7.
- Practice silence today as you pray. Ask **God** what he wants of you at this defining moment of **Otter Creek’s** life. And then listen— in silence—for **God’s** response.

DAY 8– A Pattern for Prayer

SCRIPTURE: *Matthew Luke 11:1*

“One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, ‘Lord, teach us to pray...’ ”

When **Jesus** talks about prayer, it’s a good idea to listen. He prayed all the time. Whole nights were devoted to prayer. At every critical juncture of his ministry, whenever he felt stressed or tired, if he felt the need for wisdom or power—**Jesus** prayed. No one prayed more often (or more effectively!) than **Jesus**.

The prayer he taught his disciples (see Matthew 6:9-13) provided a pattern for their praying and for ours:

<i>Our Father... hallowed be your name</i>	Praise
<i>Your will be done</i>	Submission
<i>Give us today our daily bread</i>	Request
<i>Forgive us our debts</i>	Confession
<i>Deliver us from the evil one</i>	Protection
<i>For yours is the kingdom</i>	Praise

CONSIDER:

- Prayer is something that must be taught and learned. Prayer is not our native language.
- The fact that **Jesus** would provide a model prayer—this particular model—is instructive. There must be something about these elements that is important for conversation with **God**.
- **Jesus** probably did not intend to limit prayer to these elements. But these are the basic building blocks. We won’t progress far in prayer without learning to pray like this.

SEEK:

- Meditate on Matthew 6:9-13 and the pattern for prayer **Jesus** provides.
- Talk about this prayer-pattern with someone today.
- Write out a prayer of your own—focused on **God’s** will for you and **Otter Creek**, and modeled on this pattern.



REACH:

DAY 9— *Fasting and Prayer*

SCRIPTURE: *Ezra 8:23*

“So we fasted and petitioned our God about this, and he answered our prayer.”

Fasting—going without food for the purpose of focusing on and listening to **God**—is not particularly popular these days. We don't easily go without. David, Nehemiah, Daniel, **Jesus**, and Paul fasted. But we don't. In Scripture, whole cities, families, armies, and nations are shown fasting. But the practice is rare today. It's not often that the church is called to fast.

Yet (in conjunction with prayer) fasting is one of the primary ways the people of **God** have sought the will of **God**. Fasting breaks us out of our normal routine and draws our attention to spiritual things. Fasting lifts our eyes from our stomachs to heavenly realms. Fasting sharpens our discernment, heightens our awareness, and puts the flesh in its place.

Fasts can be long (**Jesus** and the forty days) or short (skipping one meal). It can mean going without all food and drink (Esther 4:16) or only certain foods (Daniel 10:3).

Whatever form a fast takes, the function is what counts: seeking **God**, worshipping **God**, practicing a form of sacrifice in order to draw closer to **God's** presence.

CONSIDER:

- Physical hunger can teach us about spiritual hunger.
- Saying “No” to the flesh often leads to growth in the **Spirit**.
- Fasting is a great way to demonstrate “earnestness” and “intensity” in our quest for **God's** will. A quest that costs us nothing isn't worth much.

SEEK:

- Look in your Bible concordance and make a list of people who fast in Scripture.
- Over the next few days, go on a coffee (or soft drink or dessert) fast... skip a meal... try a 24 hour fast (e.g., from lunch to lunch). Use the urges that result as reminders to seek the will of **God**.

DAY 10– Pray for Enlightenment

SCRIPTURE: Ephesians 1:18

“I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know...”

Do you remember that great story about Elisha? (See 2 Kings 6:8-23.) The King of Aram wants to capture the prophet and shut him up. He surrounds the city of Dothan with his army and horses. When Elisha’s servant sees them, he is terrified. “What shall we do?” *And Elisha prayed, “O Lord, open his eyes so he may see.” Then the Lord opened the servant’s eyes, and he looked and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.*

Prayer can open our eyes to realities we did not see before. Prayer can make us aware of things we didn’t know. When we look at something that terrifies us and ask, “What shall we do?” prayer often provides the answer by showing us new information. An idea. A perspective. An invisible army that can only be seen through prayer-opened eyes.

How many Christians live tiny lives with eyes wide shut... while **God** waits with baited breath to show his chariots of fire to those who pray?

CONSIDER:

- Paul, in his letters, prayed constantly for the eyes of believers to be opened... so they could know, understand, appreciate, grasp, realize what was available to them in **Christ**.
- If Elisha and Paul can pray for the eyes of others, could we do the same for members of our church family?
- If we can pray for the eyes of our church family, could we pray for our own eyes to be opened?

SEEK:

- Meditate on Ephesians 1:15-19a, Philippians 1:9-11, and Colossians 1:9.
- Pray for your brothers and sisters at **Otter Creek**—that their eyes might be opened to realities they have not seen before.
- Pray the same thing for yourself—especially that **God** would make clear what he wants of you at this season of **Otter Creek’s** life.



REACH:

DAY 11– Spirit and Revelation

SCRIPTURE: Ephesians 1:17

“I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better.”

He didn’t know what to do... what **God** wanted him to do. He tried to preach the gospel in Turkey, but “the **Spirit** prevented him.” He tried for new audiences along the southern coast of the Black Sea, but the **Spirit** “would not allow” it. Finally, frustrated and confused at Troas, Paul had a vision—a man beckoning, “Come over to Macedonia.”

No one relied as heavily on revelation from **God’s Spirit** as Paul. The **Spirit** spoke to Paul in visions and voices, in dreams and urgings. And Paul depended on these revelations to understand **God’s** will about matters large and small.

As we seek **God’s** will during this forty days, let’s recognize that **God’s Spirit** is always involved whenever revelation occurs. Whether through the cumulative effects of study, prayer, and careful thought, or the sudden insights of inspiration, dreams, and signs—**God’s Spirit** is always at work in our efforts to discern **God’s** will.

CONSIDER:

- To seek **God’s** will is to request that **God** reveal himself to you.
- Do you understand the **Spirit’s** role in this process? Have you ever experienced a revelation, conviction, or understanding prompted by the **Spirit of God**?

SEEK:

- Meditate on 1 Corinthians 2:11-16.
- Use this passage as a “prayer guide.” Turn Paul’s statements into personal requests: “**Holy Spirit**, teach me the deep things of **God**... let me know the thoughts of **God**... come into my heart so that I can understand what **God** has freely given me” etc.

DAY 12– The Counselor

SCRIPTURE: John 16:13

“But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth.”

The disciples were confused and afraid and sad. Jesus kept telling them he was leaving. They didn't know what to do without him. There were hard days ahead.

So Jesus offers them “the Counselor... the **Spirit** of truth” to guide them. He promises his disciples that the **Spirit** will:

1. **REMAIN** with them
“forever” (John 16:16)
2. **REMINDE** them of everything
Jesus said (14:26)
3. **TEACH** them “all things”
(14:26)
4. **GUIDE** them into “all truth”
(16:13)
5. **TELL** them what is “yet to come”
(16:13)

We tend to think of the Counselor as a dispenser of theological principles and truths, teaching the disciples what they needed to know about atonement, morality, and church. But what if there were a more practical role for the **Spirit**? What if he “counseled” them about **God’s** will for particular matters, like

where to meet or how to appointing a replacement for Judas or what to say on Pentecost? What if “all things” included practical, specific guidance about everyday living?

We also have the Counselor. As we seek **God’s** will for our church at this time, maybe the **Spirit** has some specific “counsel” for us. Are you listening?

SEEK:

- Read Acts 1:12-26, 2:42-47, 4:32-37, and 6:1-7. Think about how many practical matters these early Christians needed the **Spirit’s** counsel for.
- Plans for buying land and building may not seem very “spiritual” or very worthy of the Counselor’s advice. But if the **Spirit** was involved in the first church’s decision to share possessions and distribute food, perhaps he has a word to speak about our future home and how he wants each of us to participate.



DAY 13– *The Spirit Within*

SCRIPTURE: 1 Corinthians 3:16

“Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you?”

Moses had to climb Mount Sinai to discover **God's** will. The kings of Israel frequently consulted prophets. Zechariah needed a visit from an angel.

Learning the will of **God** often depends on “outside” resources — Scripture, other people, holy places. But, in these last days, **God** has put his **Spirit** directly into our hearts. How does that **Spirit** “inside” us whisper **God's** will to us?

CONSIDER:

- Have you ever experienced a sudden clear insight into a person or situation?
- Have you ever been overwhelmed by a strong sense of conviction?
- Has **God** ever broken your heart and prompted repentance in you?
- Have you ever had a dream that brought you comfort or confidence?
- Have you ever spoken words to others that you knew came from **God**?
- Is “wisdom” one of your spiritual gifts?
- Perhaps **God** uses all of these ways to speak to us through the **Spirit** who lives within us.

SEEK:

- Meditate on Romans 8:9-11; 1 Corinthians 3:16 and 6:19; 2 Corinthians 1:21-22; Galatians 4:6; Ephesians 3:16; 2 Timothy 1:14.
- Ask specifically for the **Spirit of God** to give you insight, wisdom, and conviction about the future of **Otter Creek** and the role he wants you to play in that future.

DAY 14– Testing God’s Will

SCRIPTURE: Romans 12:2

“Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.”

This is an incredible Scripture. It says some things we need to hear as, together, we seek **God’s** will. Start at the end of this verse and work backwards.

1. *God has a “good, pleasing and perfect will” for us.*
2. *But his will is not always obvious. It needs to be “tested” and “approved.”*
3. *That testing goes on in our “minds” and hearts.*
4. *But proper testing can only happen in a proper mind—one that has been transformed and renewed.*

Which leads us back to the subject of the **Holy Spirit**. Transformation is the **Spirit’s** work. A changed mind, a fresh heart, a new birth always comes from the **Spirit**. Without the **Spirit**, we cannot think right. And without right thinking, we cannot know **God’s** will.

But when our minds are transformed by the work of the **Spirit**, we know how to “test” for **God’s** will... we can tell

the difference between **God’s** desires and our own... we can use godly wisdom to discern godly purposes.

SEEK:

- Pray and fast today, asking **God’s Spirit** to give you the mind of Christ.
- Write down two or three ways you could “test” **God’s** will. Talk about this “testing” with someone whose spiritual judgment you trust.
- What would it mean for you to “approve” **God’s** will? Does it imply more than “agreement”? Does it imply active support and participation?



REACH:

DAY 15– Seeking More Spirit

SCRIPTURE: 2 Kings 2:9

“Elijah said to Elisha, ‘Tell me, what can I do for you before I am taken from you?’ ‘Let me inherit a double portion of your spirit,’ Elisha replied.”

Wanting more is not always wrong. Elisha wanted more (see 2 Kings 2). He wanted more **Spirit**, more power, more ability to honor **God**. Elijah, his mentor, had battled the prophets of Baal with fire from heaven. He’d prophesied to kings and armies.

But Elisha wanted more. So he asked for a “double portion” of the **Spirit** and power that filled Elijah’s ministry. And, because he asked, Elisha went on to do incredible things. He raised the dead to life, fed a crowd with a few loaves of bread, healed a leper, anointed kings.

Wanting more of **God’s Spirit**, asking for more, is a godly thing. Especially when times are challenging, when great **16** opportunities arise, when

defining decisions must be made, we need more of **God’s Spirit** to discern his will and follow his leading.

CONSIDER:

- This is a defining moment in the life of our church family. If ever there was a time to ask for more **Spirit**, this is it.
- The future will require vision, boldness, sacrifice, and persistence. More **Spirit** will make these things available to us.

SEEK:

- Pray that **God’s Spirit**, who provided guidance at critical moments in the life of Israel and the early church, will lead us at this critical point in our church’s history.
- Pray for a double portion of **God’s Spirit** as we reach for tomorrow.

DAY 16– Principles to Count On

SCRIPTURE: *Matthew 28:19-20a*

“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.”

You don’t have to seek **God’s** will about everything—there are certain matters on which he’s already been very clear. Don’t spend long hours in your prayer closet asking **God** if he really wants you to be faithful to your spouse... that’s settled. You don’t have to seek **God’s** will about loving your brother... he’s already told you what he wants.

The Bible gives us trustable insights into the will of **God**. And some of those insights concern the church.

CONSIDER:

- **God’s** will is for all people to hear the gospel (Matthew 24:13; Luke 24:46-47) and the church is his chosen instrument for getting it done (Ephesians 3:10; Romans 10:14-15).
- **God’s** will is for the church to be unified (1 Corinthians 1:10; Ephesians 4:3).
- **God’s** will is for each of us to build up and strengthen the church (1 Corinthians 14:12; Ephesians 4:16).
- **God’s** will is for members of the church to love each other (1 Peter 1:22; 1 John 4:7).
- **God’s** will is for the church to serve others (1 Peter 4:10; Galatians 6:10)

SEEK:

- Recommit yourself to a regular plan of Bible reading—to better know the part of his will he has already revealed.
- Pray through the bullet points above—substituting “**Otter Creek**” for “the church.”



REACH:

DAY 17– Examples to Guide

SCRIPTURE: 1 Thessalonians 1:7-8

“And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia... your faith in God has become known everywhere.”

Sometimes, **God** teaches us his will through commands in Scripture or through prayer. But sometimes he teaches by telling us the story of others. What should a church do when members are poor and hungry? In Jerusalem, Christians sold property and gave the money to the Apostles to distribute. In Philippi, they took up a collection. What does a church do when two members disagree sharply? The Corinthians were advised to have spiritual men mediate the dispute. How should churches handle the problem of preachers who speak too long? In Ephesus, a young man fell out of a window. (Well, I guess there are certain examples we don't have to follow!)

Some of **God's** most practical teachings about the church come in the form of stories and examples rather than lists

of commands and precepts. As we read Scripture and learn about the daily life of **God's** people, we are seeing examples of how those people sought the will of **God** for very practical things—where to meet, whether to pay visiting preachers, what kind of leadership to appoint.

As we think about where we are as a church and what **God's** will is for us, we might not find a “thou shalt” answer in Scripture. But we may find in Scripture stories of people struggling with similar issues... examples to guide our own decisions.

SEEK:

- Skim through the book of Acts. What early church examples would you like to see **Otter Creek** take more seriously?
- Pray for a revival of first century zeal, enthusiasm, and devotion here at **Otter Creek**.

DAY 18— Examples of Growth

SCRIPTURE: Scripture: Acts 16:5

“So the churches were strengthened in the faith and grew daily in numbers.”

Every healthy church in the New Testament was a growing church. Luke tells us a great deal about the growth of the Jerusalem church and is not embarrassed to give numbers. From 120 people prior to Pentecost, the church grew to 3,000 (after Peter’s sermon), then to 5,000 men (not counting women and children). And still their number was increasing until, 25 years later, the elders of the church could point out “how many thousands of Jews have believed” (Acts 21:20).

In Antioch, a “great number of people believed” (Acts 11:21)—Barnabas had to bring in Paul just to keep up. The Ephesian church grew rapidly. Churches in Philippi, Rome, and even Corinth experienced rapid growth.

Of course, the gospel was still new, the good news about Jesus still fresh. No doubt, the rate of

growth slowed as years passed and people grew accustomed to the story. The point, however, is that church growth is seen in the New Testament as a sign of health and vigor and spiritual strength.

QUESTIONS:

- If numerical growth was seen as a symptom of vitality in the early church, why do we tend to view growth as optional and unnecessary... or even inconvenient?
- Can you imagine a New Testament church opting not to grow? Or saying, “We’re getting too big?”

SEEK:

- Pray for an insight into God’s will on the matter of numerical growth at Otter Creek.
- Ask God what he wants of you as we try to make room for the people he is bringing to us.



REACH:

DAY 19— Examples of Space

SCRIPTURE: Acts 19:9-10

“So Paul left [the synagogue]. He took the disciples with him and had discussions daily in the lecture hall of Tyrannus. This went on for two years...”

Holy space was critical to the life of Israel. They dedicated sacred ground and built a tabernacle and three temples (David’s, Zerubbabel’s, and Herod’s).

In the New Testament, a new kind of temple is consecrated—the heart of a believer. But that doesn’t mean that physical space was unimportant to the worship and ministry of the early church. In Jerusalem, Christians met in homes for fellowship and at the temple for public worship (Acts 5:12). It is likely that, in Philippi, Lydia’s house became the church’s classrooms and her courtyard the place where the believers gathered for worship. In Corinth, a Christian named Titius Justus placed his (large?) house at the church’s disposal. In Ephesus, Paul made use of a lecture hall.

Early churches were flexible about what space they used—

private hall. But they provide a clear example of the need for a physical base for the ministries and worship of Christian congregations. As the Christian movement spread and gained acceptance, dedicated spaces quickly sprang up.

QUESTIONS:

- How many “spaces” have the sacrifices of others made available to you for your own worship, learning, and ministry?
- When “space” actually hampers ministry, what is the faithful response?

SEEK:

- Read the accounts of building the tabernacle (Exodus 35:4-29 and 36:3-7) and the temple (1 Chronicles 29:1-20).
- Using these great stories as a backdrop, pray about our plans for creating new “space” for the Otter Creek family.

DAY 20— The Otter Creek Mission

SCRIPTURE: Psalm 143:10

“Teach me to do your will, for you are my God; may your good Spirit lead me on level ground.”

HERE IS THE OTTER CREEK MISSION STATEMENT:

The Otter Creek church is a Christ-led, Spirit-powered, grace-motivated family of believers. Our mission is to reach up (through worship and holy living), reach in (by building intimate community and Christ-like disciples), and reach out (through witness, service, and Christian influence). God is changing the world through us as we become his presence in this place.

QUESTIONS:

- Do you believe this statement captures what God wants for our church?
- Are the purposes and “missions” described here godly pursuits?
- If we could live up to this statement, would God be honored and the kingdom be advanced?
- Are we making a difference in the world—one life at a time?
- Do you believe Otter Creek “smells” like Jesus? (See 2 Corinthians 2:15)

SEEK:

- Pray that God will give us the wisdom and commitment to make our mission statement a reality.
- Call someone at Otter Creek who “smells” like Jesus. Tell them how much you appreciate them.
- Think of our plans to build and move. Will those plans help us live out our mission statement, to reach up and in and out, more effectively?



REACH:

DAY 21– Reaching Up

SCRIPTURE: Psalm 99:5

“Exalt the LORD our God and worship at his footstool; he is holy.”

Worship is an experience of the presence of **God**. It calls people to think on **God**, to consider his mighty acts, to contemplate his character. True worship invites us to express, brokenness, gratitude, awe, joy, fear, and humility before the **Lord**. **God** wants his people to look up.

Holiness is an expression of our devotion to **God**. It involves the notion of separating ourselves from—dedicating ourselves to—godly living. When **God’s** people take holiness seriously, we please our **Holy God** and open ourselves to his blessings.

The **Otter Creek** family reaches up by offering **God** our worship and our consecrated lives.

QUESTIONS:

- Do you believe **Otter Creek** encourages active, sincere, spiritual worship?
- Do you see that we are as interested in private devotions as in public worship?
- Are we a church that takes holiness seriously?
- Are these goals (worship and holiness) worthy of our best efforts?

SEEK:

- Pray for **God** to give you a more worshipful heart and a holier life.
- Pray for **God** to make **Otter Creek** a more worshipful, holier church.
- Thank **God** for specific ways your worship and holiness have been encouraged by an association with the **Otter Creek** family.
- Mediate on our responsibility to share this experience with others.

DAY 22– Reaching In

SCRIPTURE: 1 Peter 1:22

“Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart.”

In a world characterized by loneliness, isolation, and self-centeredness, **God’s** people provide a striking contrast. **God** has called us into a family. We are bound together by common faith and common blood. We are to love each other, live in harmony together, forgive, encourage and serve, lay down our lives for each other, share our possessions.

Only that kind of family is capable of nourishing the sort of disciples who can turn a world upside down. Maturing, training, equipping, and mentoring the next generation of faith is a central responsibility for faithful churches.

Otter Creek reaches in by promoting intimate relationships and growing people into the image of **Christ**.

QUESTIONS:

- Have you experienced authentic, deep relationships in the **Otter Creek** family?
- Do you see that such relationships are important to us, that we do our best to encourage and promote them?
- Do you see evidence of maturing and equipping going on in this church?
- Are these goals (community and discipling) worthy of our best efforts?

SEEK:

- Pray for **God** to give you meaningful friendships and opportunities both to grow and to help others grow.
- Pray for **God** to make **Otter Creek** a warmer, equipping church.
- Thank **God** for specific ways your relationships and maturity have been encouraged by an association with the **Otter Creek** family.
- Mediate on our responsibility to share this experience with others.



REACH:

DAY 23– Reaching Out

SCRIPTURE: *Matthew 5:14-16*

“You are the light of the world... let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.”

Just as **Jesus** came “not to be served, but to serve,” so his followers are expected to pour themselves out in selfless ministry. The poor, the broken, the lost and hurting, the weak and the small are our special concern.

And we have a story to tell, good news for the very people we serve. The gospel of **Jesus** is something we preach with our mouths and testify to with our lives. We are a “commissioned” people, charged with the privilege of telling others what we have found in **Christ**.

And **God** expects us to make a difference in the flavor of our world, for the kingdom of **God** to salt the kingdom of men.

Otter Creek reaches out through selfless ministry, authentic witness, and efforts to influence our world for the good.

QUESTIONS:

- Are ministry, witness, and Christian influence priorities you see in the **Otter Creek** family?
- Which do we do well? Which not so well?
- Are these things (ministry, witness, and influence) godly goals for **Otter Creek**?

SEEK:

- Pray for **God** to give **Otter Creek** a servant heart, a fearless witness, and a burning desire to make a difference in the world.
- Thank **God** for specific ways your ministry and witness have been encouraged by an association with the **Otter Creek** family.
- Mediate on our responsibility to share this experience with others.

DAY 24— Listening to Each Other

SCRIPTURE: Proverbs 12:15

“The way of a fool seems right to him, but a wise man listens to advice.”

Jethro was worried about his son-in-law, Moses. All day, he would listen to people, make judgments, announce decisions. He was wearing himself out. So Jethro spoke to Moses—“What you are doing is not good.” And though Moses was himself a prophet who heard **God’s** voice, this time **God** spoke to him through the voice of a wise, older man.

Have you noticed that often **God** speaks to us through our companions? A word of wisdom delivered by a brother or sister who has lived long in the **Lord**. An overheard conversation between two young mothers in the hallway. Something said in a class or sermon. **God** is speaking to us constantly, teaching us his will. It’s just that, often, he uses the mouths and words of the people around us.

CONSIDER:

- You are at **Otter Creek** for a reason. **God** has brought you here.
- The people around you are here for a reason as well. **God** intends for them to be at this place at this time.
- **God** is speaking through each of us to those in our community of faith.

SEEK:

- Call three people who belong to **Otter Creek** today. Choose people you don’t normally talk to. Ask them why they’re at **Otter Creek** and what they hope for the future of our church.
- Listen carefully to their responses. Is **God** speaking to you through their voices?



REACH: DAY 25– Mentors

SCRIPTURE: Proverbs 2:1, 5

“My son, if you accept my words and store up my commands within you... then you will understand the fear of the LORD and find the knowledge of God.”

When **Jesus** chose the twelve apostles, he had two primary things in mind: they were to help him preach and they were to “be with him” (see Mark 3:14). Now that’s interesting. **Jesus** was picking men he could mentor, men who would accept his words and store up his commands and gain wisdom.

Who are your mentors? Who are the people **God** has put into your life — throughout your life — to encourage your spiritual walk? What have they taught you about Christian living? What have you learned from their words and their lives?

CONSIDER:

- Make a list of people you consider your spiritual mentors. It’s not the number of your mentors but the depth of their influence that matters most.
- There is something about these mentors that draws you to them, that makes them trustworthy advisers about spiritual matters. What is it?
- Some decisions are so important, so significant, that you feel the need for advice and counsel. Is the future of **Otter Creek** one of those decisions?

SEEK:

- Call one of your mentors. Thank him/her for influencing your life.
- Talk to your mentor about **Otter Creek** and our plans for the future. Listen as they counsel you on your attitude and participation.
- Ask them to pray for you as you pray, “Show me what I should do to make your dreams for my church come true.”

DAY 26— Leaders

SCRIPTURE: Hebrews 13:7

“Remember your leaders... Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith.”

Moses was one of the greatest leaders in the history of **God’s** people. Reluctant, stuttering, flawed as he was, Moses stepped forward at a critical moment in Israel’s life and provided the godly leadership they needed. It wasn’t easy to lead the Israelites. They grumbled and complained and rebelled all the way to the Promised Land. But Moses knew where they were going and why. With great patience and humility and persistence, he led his people forward into the will of **God**.

God often reveals his will for his people—his good, perfect, specific will—through the wisdom, experience, judgment, and guidance of godly leaders. They are in that role for a reason. **God** has called them. We have recognized their character and calling. The question is: Will we follow their leadership?

Now it’s true that having a position isn’t the same as being

right. Leaders make mistakes. But for seven years now—consistently and unanimously—our leaders have pointed to the need for new facilities. We admire them for so many different reasons. Why distrust their judgment when it comes to the matter of our future?

CONSIDER:

- Following leaders anywhere **WE** want to go is not following at all.
- Leaders take us where they believe **God** wants us to go. To yield on that point is to forfeit leadership entirely.

SEEK:

- Call an elder today. Tell him you are praying for him—for wisdom, discernment, and patience.
- Ask that elder to speak his convictions on the future of **Otter Creek**. Listen.



REACH: DAY 27– Consensus

SCRIPTURE: 1 Chronicles 13:1-4

“David said to the whole assembly of Israel, ‘If it seems good to you and if it is the will of the LORD our God... let us bring the ark of our God back to us...’ The whole assembly agreed to do this, because it seemed right to all the people.”

WHAT DO YOU THINK ABOUT THESE STATEMENTS?

- *The church as a whole has a wisdom greater than individual members.*
- *The community of **Christ** often knows **God’s** will better than the solitary disciple.*
- *The **Body** is a more adequate conduit for revelation than any particular part.*
- ***God** often speaks to us more powerfully (and more accurately) through the wisdom of the many.*

Independence. Self-reliance. Autonomy. Individualism. These are important cultural notions that affect us in ways we do not always appreciate. Yet, especially as Christians, we live in a web of relationships that pushes us in other directions—toward dependence, mutuality,

connection, and community. Do you trust the wisdom of the family of **God**? More than yourself?

There are times when **God’s** people come to consensus—when leaders and circumstances and convictions converge on a common conclusion. At such times, we have to wonder whether **God** might be speaking to us through the community, even if the community is telling us something we don’t want to hear.

SEEK:

- Pray for a clear consensus at **Otter Creek**—about the import of this moment, the character of our leaders, the rightness of this challenge.
- And then pray for a deep commitment to unity as we reach for that future together.

DAY 28— *Listening to the Future*

SCRIPTURE: *Joel 1:3*

“Tell it to your children, and let your children tell it to their children, and their children to the next generation.”

CONSIDER:

- During 2004, 34 babies will be born to Otter Creek members.
- At this time, we have 213 children (ranging from newborns to sixth grade) as a part of the **Otter Creek** family.
- Our Preschool/Kindergarten serves 142 children this year and is completely full. There are 30 children on a waiting list, hoping for a spot to come open.
- The Rubio's are doing an incredible job with a growing youth ministry.
- College kids keep flocking to experience worship at **Otter Creek**.

Look around you any Sunday morning: young families, children everywhere, singles and students. One way **God** reveals his will for us is by showing us our future. For the next few years, we will be heavily involved with raising,

teaching, equipping, encouraging and baptizing the next generation of faith. It doesn't take a degree in theology to figure out that **Otter Creek** has a responsibility to provide an adequate home for our future—the children we see around us every week and the children yet to come.

SEEK:

- Meditate on these passages about children: Genesis 18:17-19; Deuteronomy 6:4-9; Psalm 34:11-14; Psalm 78:1-8; Matthew 19:13-14.
- Pray today for the next generation of faith—infants, children, teens, students.
- Pray that we can be faithful to the responsibility entrusted to us and provide adequately for those who come after us.



REACH:

DAY 29— Interpreting the Signs

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 16:3

“You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times.”

You’ve heard the old joke about the flood victim praying for rescue from the roof of his house. A helicopter and a boat stopped to offer rides. The man refused (“My trust is in the **Lord!**”) and continued to pray. As he was swept away by the flood, he scolded **God** for failing to deliver him. A voice from heaven replied, “I already sent you a helicopter and a boat.”

Circumstances—the events and conditions of our lives—can often show us **God’s** will. **God** works providentially to direct our paths by shutting down certain opportunities while making other available. There are times when it’s good to open our eyes from prayer to see the helicopters **God** is sending.

To the world, changing circumstances mean nothing more than that life is uncertain.

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But to those of us who

believe, circumstances are a window for looking into **God’s** mind and seeing his will for the particulars of our lives.

CONSIDER:

- The circumstances of the **Otter Creek** church over the past few years—growth, children, facility limits, attempted solutions—are not accidents. **God** has been speaking to us through those circumstances.
- The “signs of the times” are rarely easy to interpret. But there are signs and **God** is sending a message through them.

SEEK:

- Pray for **God** to make the “signs” clear to you.
- Fast over lunch today as you pray about the circumstances at **Otter Creek** and how you can respond to them.

DAY 30— Closed Doors

SCRIPTURE: *Judges 20:18*

“The Israelites went up to Bethel and inquired of God.”

A terrible crime had been committed. The tribe of Benjamin was guilty and unrepentant. The rest of Israel mustered for war at the city of Gibeah. (Read Judges 20)

Before striking a single blow, however, the Israelites “inquired of **God**” about going to battle against their own blood. **God** told them to fight. But on the first day, 22,000 Israelites died. They inquired again. Again, **God** told them to fight. And on the second day, 18,000 more Israelites were slaughtered. Finally, after inquiring a third time, Israel fought and defeated the Benjaminites.

God closed the door twice—“Not today... not without cost”—before opening the door for victory. Closed doors can be **God’s** way of saying, “Not this” or “Not now” or “Not here.” But, for people of faith, closed doors are not mere circumstance... they are a way for **God** to communicate his will if only

we can understand what he’s telling us.

CONSIDER A FEW CLOSED DOORS HERE AT OTTER CREEK:

- A facility that is inadequate for our numbers and unsuited to our ministries.
- Forest Hill’s rejection of our proposals for rebuilding on this site.
- Timing that prevented us from buying existing facilities elsewhere (e.g., the old Brentwood Baptist building).
- Inability to go to three viable worship services to increase room for growth.
- Roadblocks that eventually scuttled our plans to build at Old Hickory and Franklin Road.

SEEK:

- Lay these facts before the **Lord** and “inquire” of him—why these closed doors?
- Pray for a “day of victory,” for an open door to our future.
- Meditate on what **God** wants of you as that door opens.



REACH:

DAY 31– Open Doors

SCRIPTURE: 2 Corinthians 2:12

“I went to Troas to preach the gospel of Christ and found that the Lord had opened a door for me...”

Paul believed that **God** opened doors for effective ministry. He did it at Troas (although Paul was too worried about the Corinthians to take advantage of it). He opened a door (several of them) during Paul’s missionary journey with Barnabas (see Acts 14:27). He opened a “great” door in Ephesus (see 1 Corinthians 16:9). Paul was constantly watching for the doors **God** would open—for those **God**-given opportunities to do kingdom work.

And those opportunities came in different forms: a ready heart, an invitation to speak at a synagogue, a healing that attracted an audience, a new Christian who opened her home to the church, the chance to use a lecture hall.

God is still opening doors and showing his people where he wants them to go. He still makes opportunities available for effective work. Are you watching?

CONSIDER A FEW CLOSED DOORS HERE AT OTTER CREEK:

- So many new families, babies, singles over the last few years.
 - The talents, gifts, experiences, and perspectives of the people **God** is bringing to us.
 - Opportunities to be involved in exciting ministries (like Made in the Streets).
 - A chance to buy a choice piece of land near an interstate and a major intersection.
 - People stepping forward with the time, energy, skills, and resources to make a new home for **Otter Creek** possible.
- SEEK:**
- Make a list of the ‘open doors’ you see at **Otter Creek**. Pray over them.
 - Pray especially for a heart that is eager to walk through the doors **God** opens. Opportunities are of little use without a willingness to respond.

DAY 32– Eyes to See

SCRIPTURE: Luke 11:34

“When your eyes are good, your whole body also is full of light. But when they are bad, your body also is full of darkness.”

Have you ever noticed that you and I are always the exception to the general rule? If we had seen Moses part the Red Sea, we wouldn't have grumbled with the rest of the Israelites in the wilderness. If we'd seen Elijah call down fire on the prophets of Baal, we'd have given up idol worship even if nobody else did. If we had watched **Jesus** feed the five thousand or raise a dead man to life or calm a storm, we wouldn't have struggled with doubt like the others.

The problem, of course, is one of hindsight. Knowing how those stories end, we wonder how people at the time could have been so blind. Surely we would have seen and believed. At least we see now.

But fast forward to the present, when we're not sure how everything will turn out, and it suddenly gets harder to figure out the “signs.” What is **God**

doing with these circumstances? What's an open door or a closed door? Where is he leading us? What is his will?

Ultimately, reading the signs and understanding the circumstances depend on having “good eyes” — eyes that are sensitive to spiritual wavelengths. And good eyes are always dependent on a **God** who makes the blind see.

SEEK:

- Pray for **God** to open the eyes of your heart so you can see his providential leading.
- Pray for **God** to let you live in foresight rather than hindsight.
- If **God** is leading us to build and move, what does he expect of you in supporting that effort?



REACH:

DAY 33— Faith of our Fathers

SCRIPTURE: Hebrews 12:1

“...since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses...”

The people we meet in Scripture model faith or warn us about faithlessness. We read their stories. We look at the trajectory of their lives.

But those are not the only lives that encourage and warn and challenge us. We have lots of stories from **Otter Creek's** past. There are stories of ministries being started and handed on (the Kindergarten), of ambitious visions for service (Agape, the Wayne Reed Christian Childcare Center), and far-reaching mission efforts (Korea and Guatemala). We have stories to tell about strong leaders (Buddy Arnold) and loving servants (“Candy Man” Charlie Armstrong) and elders who sat down after public prayer and slumped over into the arms of **God** (Thomas Rogers). We have stories of faith and courage and sacrifice.

Right now, we are creating the stories on which the future of **Otter Creek** will be built.

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Our lives will provide the

models or warnings for tomorrow. What kinds of stories will they tell of us? Will the future look back on today and recount a time of great faith, great unity, and great vision? Or will the stories be about our fears, our missed opportunities?

CONSIDER:

- We've received a rich heritage—full of encouragement for faithful living—from those who've gone before us.
- Like them, we will hand on an example of Christian living to the next generation.
- The stories told about us will be determined in part by how we respond to this defining moment in the history of our church.

SEEK:

- Write out ten adjectives (“faithful,” “bold”) to describe how you'd like to be remembered by the church of tomorrow.
- Share this list with **God** and ask him to help you live in such a way that your life will be remembered in those terms.

DAY 34— *Daring to Dream*

SCRIPTURE: *Genesis 37:19*

“ ‘Here comes that dreamer!’ they said to each other.”

Not everyone is a dreamer like Joseph. His whole life seems intimately linked with dreams—his own and others. His brothers, on the other hand, were not the dreaming sort. They had no dreams of their own and they certainly did not approve of Joseph’s dreams. They were plodders, plotters. When they called Joseph a “dreamer,” it was not a compliment.

Otter Creek has a long history of dreamers. It’s in our DNA as a church. Dreams for service, for outreach, for intimacy and worship. It took dreamers to build the facility we’re in now. In 1948, the budget for **Otter Creek** was about \$2500 a year. Yet they built a facility that cost \$40,000—sixteen times their annual budget. What a step of faith! What a vision!

We are their children. We’ve inherited the dreamer gene. Some of our dreams will involve

ministries we cannot imagine now. Some will lead us to far places and people we’ve never met. But some will challenge us to build a home for the future of this church—dreams for building a place where other dreams can be born and realized.

CONSIDER:

- Yesterday’s dreams are today’s realities.
- Not every church is able to dream great dreams. But **Otter Creek** has done so frequently, regularly. It is one of our spiritual gifts.

SEEK:

- Ask **God** to lay a dream on your heart—to give you a vision for something that makes a difference.
- Pray that we can reach our facility goals—a necessary step toward making other dreams come true.



DAY 35– Mission Possible

SCRIPTURE: Genesis 6:7-8

“So the LORD said, ‘I will wipe mankind, whom I have created, from the face of the earth... for I am grieved that I have made them.’ But Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord.”

Who could have imagined that a big barge would make so many good things possible? The salvation of the human race, all animal and bird species, all plants. The continuation of worship and love and joy. The possibility of Abraham, Moses, David, **Jesus**. It was just a boat made of cypress wood, coated with pitch, with three decks. Who could have known it would carry so many hopes, so much potential, within its wooden walls?

Some of the greatest things imaginable require a tangible container: **God’s** hopes and the ark... **God’s** presence and the temple... the gospel and clay pots. The containers themselves are not the point. But the treasure is lost without them.

Think about all the ministry our present building made possible. If **Otter Creek**

had decided to stay in that white, clapboard house down the street, there would have been no Kindergarten, no day-care center, no 20 year mission in Guatemala, no Korean work, no Agape, no Zoe, no Made in the Streets, no youth ministry.

The building itself is not the point. It’s the ministry made possible in a place where more people can devote more resources to accomplishing greater things.

SEEK:

- We still have heroes from our past in our midst. Write a note to one or two of them, thanking them for the ministry their sacrifices made possible.
- Ask **God** to bless you with a vision of ministry powerful enough to prompt similar sacrifices.

DAY 36— Money Matters

SCRIPTURE: *Matthew 6:21*

“For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

Jesus talked more about money than about prayer, the **Holy Spirit**, heaven, or a host of other “important” religious topics. Money mattered to **Jesus**, though not in the way it matters to us. He didn’t care about things, material security, or physical comforts. He did care about the hearts of men.

And money shows heart. Where money flows shows what the heart loves. Follow the money. It will lead you to the priorities and desires of the man.

That’s why money mattered to **Jesus**. He always appreciated money given away, used to support the poor, invested in others, encouraging worship (see Luke 7:1-10), spent on feasts, or offered to **God**. Money used for others, for the kingdom, reflected good things about the heart.

CONSIDER:

- We cannot claim a kingdom commitment if our bank accounts are not impacted.
- Spiritual wisdom requires that we use our resources for spiritual ends.
- Where does the kingdom fall on your financial priorities? What precedes it?

SEEK:

- In a few days, each of us will be asked to give generously to support plans for the future of **Otter Creek**. Have you been praying about what **God** wants of you in this effort?
- Pray particularly that—in your regular giving, in your compassionate giving, and in your campaign giving—your kingdom commitment might be demonstrated.



DAY 37— *Hard for a Rich Man*

SCRIPTURE: *Matthew 19:22*

When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth.

We've been earnestly seeking the will of **God** these last few weeks. But the point has never been to discover some academic answer to which we give our mental assent. The point has been to discover *and then submit ourselves* to that will.

Often, that submission will be demonstrated with our money. We tend to vote with our pocketbooks. That's what the Rich Young Man did. He came to **Jesus** seeking the will of **God**—"What good things must I do?" But his heart wasn't ready to hear the answer.

"Sell everything," **Jesus** told him. "Put your riches where your faith is. Show by your financial sacrifice what's truly important to you. And then come, be my disciple."

Jesus knew something about us we are reluctant to admit about ourselves — there is a direct and significant

connection between our faith and our wallet. Knowing the will of **God** is one thing. Submitting to it—in the way we use our resources, in the way we invest our treasure — is another. The rich man decided it didn't matter what **God** wanted. It wasn't worth sacrificing all that lovely money. What will you decide?

CONSIDER:

- The rich man was willing to submit to **God** in his behavior and morality (see Matthew 19:18-20), but not in his finances.
- How strong is a commitment that doesn't significantly involve our "treasure"?

SEEK:

- Ask an elder, minister, or MCC member for coffee this week. Talk about giving and the connection between faith and finances.
- As you think about your tithes and offerings, pray to **God** the rich man's question: "What do I still lack?"

DAY 38— True Riches

SCRIPTURE: Luke 16:11

“If you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches?”

The parable is one of the strangest Jesus ever told. A dishonest servant is fired by his master. What is he to do? He invites the master’s debtors in, one at a time, and reduces their debt with a stroke of the quill. He uses worldly wealth to make friends for himself.

Jesus commends him. Jesus says, “That’s shrewd! That shows an understanding of how to use money!” Wealth, Jesus suggests, is only a means to an end. It is not to be hoarded, or wasted, or spent thoughtlessly. It is to be invested for purposes greater than itself.

The will of God is a “treasure.” Knowing it gives us “true riches.” But God’s will almost always has financial implications — sell, give, support, simplify, build. Will you be “shrewd” with your money and invest it for kingdom purposes?

CONSIDER:

Hard on the heels of this parable, Jesus makes some important comments on money. Read Luke 16:1-15 and then reflect on the following statements:

- The way we use money tests our character. If we use money wisely, for kingdom purposes, God will trust us with “true riches.” (vss 10-12)
- You cannot serve both God and money. Different purposes. Different ends. We’ll either make money our God or make money serve God. (vs 13)
- God “despises” the things money usually buys (vss 14-15) because they further our purposes, not his.

SEEK:

- Take a look at your budget. What percentage of your spending lets you invest in “eternal matters”?
- Pray over your checkbook. Ask God to make you “shrewd” with the money he has give you.



REACH: DAY 39— Generosity

SCRIPTURE: Luke 19:8

“But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, ‘Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor...’ ”

Zacchaeus. Short. Unsavory. A tax collector and cheat. He probably had bad breath, to boot! Yet he wanted to see **Jesus**. He went to some lengths to get a good look at the prophet from Galilee. And—wonder of wonders—**Jesus** saw him! Invited himself to lunch!

Luke does not record any sermons preached over the meal. But Zacchaeus gets the message. This is his chance to turn his life around. He seizes it with both hands.

But isn't it interesting that his "salvation" is evidenced by his pocket book. There is no baptism or confession of faith... only a financial commitment that somehow shows **Jesus** all he needs to see about this man's heart. Half of everything to the poor. Reimburse those he's cheated. Generosity in response to a second chance.

In another context, **Jesus** will say that those who are forgiven much will love much. Here, the lesson seems to be that those who experience **God's** generous salvation will be generous themselves.

CONSIDER:

- **God** has been generous to you—in his mercies, in his blessings, in his material provision.
- Fully appreciating his generosity to you has real and significant impact on your practice of generosity. Little appreciation leads to meager giving.

SEEK:

- Meditate on 2 Corinthians 8:1-15 and 9:6-15.
- Use these passages as prayer guides: “Let me be richly generous... give as much as I am able, even beyond my ability... seeing this as a privilege...”

DAY 40– *Immoderate Love*

SCRIPTURE: *Mark 14:3*

“A woman came with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, made of pure nard. She broke the jar and poured the perfume on his head.”

We don’t know who this woman was. We don’t know where she’d met **Jesus** or how he’d made such a profound impact on her. What we do know is that she had come to pour out her gratitude to him.

Notice, though, that she does not use the currency with which we usually express gratitude to **God**—words. She doesn’t say a thing. Instead, she’s brought something very precious—a priceless perfume kept in an expensive container.

And she breaks it. In an act of extravagant and immoderate worship, she devotes a precious gift to **Jesus**. The disciples call this a “waste.” **Jesus** calls it a “beautiful thing.” What do you call it? Have you ever done it?

CONSIDER:

- Real love, real worship, is always extravagant, extreme, immoderate.
- The world (and even some in the church) will view such devotion as wasteful.
- **Jesus** honors such devotion and defends it against those who would measure love with teaspoons and a calculator.

SEEK:

- Pray for **Otter Creek**, that we will love **Jesus** so much that we will be extravagant with our gifts of time, talents, and treasures.
- Pray this prayer for yourself as well.



REACH:
Tomorrow

24 HOURS OF PRAYER EVENT
FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 5TH • 6:00PM



For information on how you can participate, check out our website: ocreach.com or call the church office: 373-1782

LETTER FROM TIM WOODROOF



Dear Otter Creek family,

I hope you've found this devotional guide a helpful companion over the past few weeks. I wrote it with you on my heart.

*I could not finish this guide, however, without a word of personal testimony. I believe in what **God** is doing at **Otter Creek**. I believe in our mission and leadership. I believe in you.*

*And I believe that building and moving is the right thing to do. My family and I are committed to this process. We want to go through this with you. And we are going to sacrifice financially to help achieve **Otter Creek's** goals for the future.*

These are exciting times, defining moments. I am thankful to be walking beside you as, together, we reach for tomorrow.

Tim Woodroof

Seeking
the Will
of God

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A FAMILY OF FAITH

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