

4 WEEK DEVOTIONAL
9.9.24-10.4.24

the way forward

CALVARY CHURCH 4-WEEK DEVOTIONAL

Throughout Scripture, God often calls His people to special times of repentance and worship. The prophet Joel called the nation of Israel to consider national events that lined up with God's judgment on them for the violation of the covenant He made with them on Mt. Sinai. In light of that, God called his people to a Sacred Assembly to repent and seek His face. Here at Calvary, we are entering into our own "sacred season," as we prepare for our Sacred Assembly on **September 29 at 6pm**, at our White Bear Campus (to which YOU are invited! Childcare provided).

We are seeking God's face as we head into the next season of our church's life. In particular, we are setting aside this time for four purposes:

- 1 Acknowledgment that we need the Lord's empowerment.**
- 2 Movement toward reconciliation with others as needed.**
- 3 Recognition and action in areas where repentance is needed.**
- 4 Looking ahead to the next phase of the church's life.**

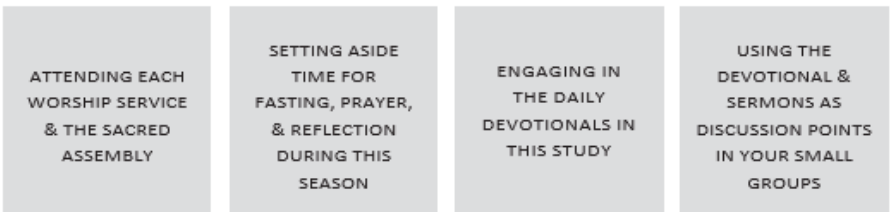
During this sacred season, we will be preaching a sermon series called, “The Way Forward.” Sacred Assembly is never about going back. It’s always about going forward. But in scripture, one rarely goes forward without in some way or another, going back.

Repeatedly, God calls His people to remember (e.g. Deut. 4:10; 8:2; 1 Chron. 16:12; 2 Thes. 2:8; 2 Pet. 1:9). In fact, Peter tells us that one of the characteristics of a carnal believer is forgetfulness. So he says, “But if anyone does not have [these qualities], he is nearsighted and blind, and has forgotten that he has been cleansed from their past sins”.

(2 Peter 1:5-9). More often than not, the “way forward” or God’s way forward is clarified when the condition of the heart is fully prepared to meet God. This is where the sermon series, and this devotional guide, become useful. This four-week series leading up to the Sacred Assembly will look like this:

- September 8: Joel 1:2; 2:12-19; “The Way Forward through Reflection”
- September 15: 2 Corinthians 7:8-16; “The Way Forward through Repentance”
- September 22: Colossians 3:10-17; “The Way Forward through Forgiveness”
- September 29: Nehemiah 8-9; “The Way Forward through Sacred Assembly”
- September 29: Sacred Assembly, 6pm at the White Bear Campus

Whatever your level of involvement is at Calvary, there is something for you during this important season. Some of the ways you can be involved are:



ATTENDING EACH WORSHIP SERVICE & THE SACRED ASSEMBLY	SETTING ASIDE TIME FOR FASTING, PRAYER, & REFLECTION DURING THIS SEASON	ENGAGING IN THE DAILY DEVOTIONALS IN THIS STUDY	USING THE DEVOTIONAL & SERMONS AS DISCUSSION POINTS IN YOUR SMALL GROUPS
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“You shall know that I am in the midst of Israel, and that I am the Lord your God and there is none else.” - JOEL 2:27

THE WAY FORWARD

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

Listed below is a set of questions designed to prompt your thinking with regard to areas of needed growth. In preparation for Sacred Assembly, consider working through these questions as you prepare to meet God during this sacred season.

	Who are the people in my life with whom I am in conflict? What can I do to make it right?
	How does anxiety or fear affect my relationship with God and others? Who are those I seek to control because of my anxiety? What situations do I try to control because of my anxiety? How does this affect my life and the lives of others around me?
	How do I spend time with God? How spiritually thirsty am I? What needs to happen to salt that spiritual thirst?
	How is anger over any number of things spilling over into work, home, church, or relationships? What is God asking me to do about that?
	Are there things that God wants me to be generous with towards others: time, money, resources, skills, possessions, etc.? How will I do this?
	How and when do I find myself reacting, rather than responding, to people, events, or circumstances in my life? Why do I do that? What does that mean?
	When, and how, do I make a big deal about things that are really not a big deal? Why do I do that?
	How do I break promises I make to others? What do I need to do to keep the promises I make? Are there those with whom I've made promises, and failed to keep them, that I need to reconcile with?

What will it take for me listen to another person without thinking about what I want to say in response? Who are the people in my life that need to be listened to? How will I do this?	
What sins in my life am I nurturing? How do they hinder my walk with God and the relationships I have with others?	
Am I recognizing and celebrating my God given limits (physical, mental, emotional, stage of life, etc.) and responding accordingly? Am I violating those limits? How is it affecting my life & others?	
If I could do anything to advance the cause of Christ on earth, what would it be? What steps am I taking to see that happen?	
Do I habitually ruin relationships or create tension with others? Why do I do this?	
Is there something I do really well that I should be doing more of for the glory of God?	
How do I tend towards legalism and thus rob myself, and others, of the joy we have in Christ?	
What kind of expectations do I place on others without their knowledge? How does this affect our relationships?	
Do I try to cover up my problems so that others will think better of me than they would if they really knew what was going on inside me? Why do I do this? What's this mean?	
Are there people God is asking me to show grace or mercy to? Who are they and what can I do to make that happen?	

MONDAY | SEPTEMBER 9

We come to our devotions hurried and with distractions on our minds. Take some time to be still, and ask God to speak to you through His Word today and during this season.

Read Joel 2:1-17. Verses 1-11 describe the coming of an army against God's people in judgment. How does this affect the way you read the call to repentance in verses 12-17?

How would you describe the repentance that verses 12-17 calls for? What words from these verses stand out to you?

Verse 13 says, "rend your heart, not your garments." In other words, repentance is a change of heart, not just an expression of religious piety. It's about motives. So we need to turn not only from those things we've done wrong, but those things we've done right for the wrong reasons. With that in mind, what will real repentance look like for you?

Take some time to ask the Lord if there are areas in your life where you need to practice repentance today. You may consider reviewing the questions on pages 3 and 4.

TUESDAY | SEPTEMBER 10

Before reading the passage below, take a moment to define the word, "**repentance.**" What is repentance, and what does it look like to you?

Read 2 Corinthians 7:8-13. How does this passage define repentance? Consider the words regret, sorrow, and the term repentance in coming up with your definition.

In verse 11, Paul tells us what repentance looked like for the Corinthians. He says, "See what this godly sorrow has produced in you: what earnestness, what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what alarm, what longing, what concern, what readiness to see justice done. At every point you have proved yourselves to be innocent in this matter." What would real repentance look like in your life? What would it look like in our church's life?

When Martin Luther nailed his 95 theses (talking points) on the door at Wittenberg Castle in 1517, the first one read: “When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said ‘Repent,’ He intended that the entire life of believers should be one of repentance.” Why is it so difficult to make repentance a lifestyle?

Take some time to ask God to grow you in your understanding of repentance. Are there any areas where you are slow to repent, or resist repentance?

WEDNESDAY | SEPTEMBER 11

Read Matthew 6:16-18. According to this passage, what is the true “reward” of fasting?

Joel 2:12 says, “Return to me with all your heart, with fasting, and weeping, and mourning.” Why do you think God called his people to repent with fasting? What difference, do you suppose, will going without food for a short time make in your relationship with God?

As we enter into this period of preparation, take some time to consider what God would have you fast in order to be more focused on Him. Remember there are different ways to fast: it may mean skipping a meal a week or eating no dessert for the next 25 days. It may also mean taking a break from TV or social media. The question is: What will help my heart focus more fully on the Lord?

THURSDAY | SEPTEMBER 12

Read Isaiah 58. According to this passage, what kind of fasting is pleasing to the Lord?

In our churchwide assessment, Calvary is described as having poor conflict resolution skills. In some cases, some people seem to be conflict avoidant. How have you been conflict avoidant? (*Continue on next page*)

Take some time, in light of the kind of repentance that is called for in Isaiah 58, to confess areas of poor conflict practice and any related issues. As you do, remember that God responds to us with grace as we come to Him in brokenness. “Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer; you shall cry, and He will say, ‘Here I am’” (Isaiah 58:9).

FRIDAY | SEPTEMBER 13

Read Romans 8:1-13. According to this passage, how do we put to death “the things of the flesh”?

The following issues may be the reason a church should practice Sacred Assembly. Take some time to prayerfully reflect on these things and ask God to reveal to you any that you need to repent of. Then ask the Holy Spirit to help you overcome these sins, through the power of the gospel in the years ahead.

- Arguing, rebellion, luke-warmness, selfish ambition, conflict bitterness
- Lying/gossip, legalism, arrogance, division, immorality, unforgiveness
- Complaining, greed, insolence, malice, unbelief, idolatry, perversion
- Extortion, adultery, anger, coercion

SATURDAY / SUNDAY | SEPTEMBER 14/15

Spend some time meditating on 2 Corinthians 7:8-16, in anticipation of today’s sermon, or in light of today’s sermon. What do you think God is saying to Calvary, or to you, through this passage?

MONDAY | SEPTEMBER 16

Read Hebrews 5:11-13. Identify 3-4 ways that Christians can remain on spiritual “milk” rather than spiritual “solid food.” In your experience, what does this look like?

Spiritual maturity isn't simply the by-product of Bible knowledge. The goal of the Christian life is a changed heart (the heart in scripture consisting of your mind, will, and emotions). Ask God to reveal to you areas of needed growth and maturity in your life.

Ask God to open your mind to where you have become spiritually apathetic or “stuck.”

Take some time to pray that God would use this sacred season to lead us/you towards spiritual, emotional, and relational health. If you are physically able, get on your knees and/or face before the Lord, and ask Him for forgiveness and renewal and revitalization.

TUESDAY | SEPTEMBER 17

Read Revelation 21:1-4. Imagine God wiping away every tear from the eyes of his people (v. 4). Identify some “tears” in your life that need to be healed in heaven.

Psalm 56:8 tells us, “You [God] have kept count of my tossings. Put my tears in a bottle! Are they not in your book?” (ESV) God is for us. He has such detailed tender care for us that He keeps a record of every tear. How do we know this? Paul says the same thing in Romans 8:31 “If God is for us, who can be against us?” This is grounded in the work of Jesus Christ (Keller, The Songs of Jesus).

As you ponder your own tears, sorrows, and sadness, take some time to reflect on God's care for you. He has put your tears in a bottle. He has a record of your every sadness! It does not escape His notice.

week two

WEDNESDAY | SEPTEMBER 18

Read 2 Chronicles 7:14. This statement by God, to the nation of Israel, can be easily applied to the people of God. The Chronicler puts beyond doubt the truth that God has compassion, forgives, and answers the prayer of those who humbly turn to Him.

How is God asking you to humble yourself and pray? What are some areas of pride that slip into your life? (e.g. economic, racial, education, success, family, status, personal history, etc.)

Seeking God's face is a term that means we seek God Himself. What would it look like for you to seek God for His beauty, His glory, or His loveliness alone?

What are you seeking more than God? Confess that to God then pray for a deeper sense of who He is and what He's done for you. How would you like God to bring healing into your life? Ask Him for that healing as you humble yourself and pray and seek His face.

THURSDAY | SEPTEMBER 19

Read James 4:1-10. What jumps out of the text at you?

James tells us that worldliness pulls us away from God. One theologian defined worldliness as whatever makes sin look normal and righteousness look strange. In what areas of your life do you let sin look normal and righteousness look strange? How is worldliness pulling you away from God?

Humility is a realistic picture of who we are before God. James, quoting Proverbs 3:34 says, "God is opposed to the proud but gives grace to the humble." Ask God for grace to live in humility. How is God revealing to you areas of pride that tarnish your walk with Him?

Verses 7-10 give a list of things humble people will end up doing by an act of God's grace. Which of these things grabs your attention? Which of these things do you want to become part of your life? Ask God to give them to you.

FRIDAY | SEPTEMBER 20

Take three to five minutes and sit in absolute silence.

Then say the Lord's Prayer thoughtfully: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Amen". (ESV)

Briefly ponder each section of the prayer. What does it mean for God to be "our" Father? Why is "in heaven" an important part of the prayer? How do we hallow God's name? What would it look like for God's kingdom (God's rule) to come into your life, family, work place, or community? What would it look like for His will to be done in your life? Determine what you need (daily bread) and then ask Him for it. How do you need to experience God's forgiveness? Whom do you need to forgive? What temptations are you currently facing and need deliverance from? Then spend time in exalting prayer, blessing God for His kingdom, power, and glory!

SATURDAY / SUNDAY | SEPTEMBER 21/22

Spend some time meditating on Colossians 3:12-13, in anticipation of the sermon. What do you think God is saying to Calvary, or to you, through this passage?

MONDAY | SEPTEMBER 23

Read 2 Corinthians 2:5-11. Why does God call the church to restore, comfort, and forgive the man who had caused their pain?

According to verse 11, what happens when Christians fail to comfort those grieving over their failure or brokenness?

Take some time to pray and ask God to show you if there are any people in your life that you need to “turn to forgive and comfort” (verse 7). Write down a plan for how to do this.

Take some time to pray for healing and comfort to occur in broken relationships in your life, or in the life of someone you know.

TUESDAY | SEPTEMBER 24

Read Colossians 3:12-17. What jumps out at you as it relates to community life? Make a list of community life principles that come from this scripture.

Consider verses 12-13 where Paul talks about forgiveness. Forgiveness is the choice to cancel a debt against another person. Who are the people in your life that you feel owe you a debt? In other words, whom is God asking you to consider forgiving?

Forgiveness is a journey. When we refuse to forgive, we start making collection calls! We may confront people rudely. We may withdraw our friendship. We may even seek to ruin their reputation. These are all negative consequences for choosing to not forgive. How has a failure to forgive affected your own life?

Miroslav Volf once wrote, “Forgiveness flounders because I exclude my enemy from the community of humans and I exclude myself from the community of sinners”. Ask God to give you the grace to forgive those who have hurt you. Ask God to bring to mind the names of those you should ask for forgiveness!

WEDNESDAY | SEPTEMBER 25

Read Psalm 131. What jumps out at you from this text?

David says he's not concerned himself with great matters, even though he's the king and it's his job to concern himself with great matters! Why would he say this?

David repeats twice that he's like a weaned child with his mother when it comes to God. What does a weaned child get from his or her mother? Why is this so important when it comes to his relationship with God?

David enjoys God for God's sake, for God's beauty, and for God's glory. He puts his hope in God. Ask God to calm and quiet your soul so that He becomes your ultimate joy and desire. How is God asking you to put your hope and trust in Him?

THURSDAY | SEPTEMBER 26

What is the difference between forgiveness and reconciliation? Is it possible to forgive without being reconciled? Take some time to reflect on how this can happen.

Read Matthew 6:14-15. Do you think Jesus' warning here is fair? Why or why not?

Pastor Steve Cornell writes, "Differing from forgiveness, reconciliation is often conditioned on the attitude and actions of the offender. While its aim is restoration of a broken relationship, those who commit significant and repeated offenses must be willing to recognize that reconciliation is a process. If they're genuinely repentant, they will recognize and accept that the harm they've caused takes time to heal... The process of reconciliation depends on the attitude of the offender, the depth of the betrayal, and the pattern of offense".

Is there anyone you are choosing to not forgive? Ask God to reveal this and help you extend forgiveness today.

Ask God to give you wisdom about how to pursue reconciliation with those you are forgiving. Are there any steps He would call you to take today?

FRIDAY | SEPTEMBER 27

Read Ezekiel 14:4-5 and notice the term idolatry. What does Ezekiel call an idol? Why is this significant?

Idolatry is an attitude of the heart that replaces faith in God with dependence on something less than God. What do you tend to depend on other than God for your source of joy, happiness, and delight? (e.g. a spouse, great kids, a good income, a pastor that preaches well, etc.)

Read Psalm 115:3-8. Notice the difference between the God of the Bible and idols. What does the text say happens when people worship idols (Remember, idolatry is more than the worship of little statues!)?

G.K. Beale in his book, *You are What you Worship*, makes a pretty good case that we will take on the characteristic of the God/gods we worship. See Ps 115:8. In the text, the Psalmist says that idolatry produces a spiritual insensitivity. Consider your tendency to idolatry. How may that affect you spiritually, emotionally, or relationally? How has idolatry affected Calvary?

SATURDAY / SUNDAY | SEPTEMBER 28/29

Spend some time meditating on Nehemiah 8-9, in anticipation of the sermon. What do you think God is saying to Calvary, or to you, through this passage?

MONDAY | SEPTEMBER 30

Read Romans 14:1-12. Identify two or three words from this passage that stand out to you.

Verse 1 says Christians are to “welcome” (ESV translates the Greek word “welcome”—the NIV translates it “accept”) one another. In your experience, is Calvary a “welcoming” place? Why or why not?

Our assessment indicates that many at Calvary feel a “lack of true acceptance and belonging”. The cause may be individualism, consumerism, self-focus or a sense of personal entitlement. How do these causes result in an unwelcoming culture? What can you do to change that?

Who are the people you have a hard time welcoming (e.g. people who are ethnically different, different socio-economic background, who look different, etc)? Ask God to help you love them and accept them in the way Christ has accepted you.

Take some time to ask God to reveal someone at Calvary that He wants you to reach out to and help feel accepted in this church family.

TUESDAY | OCTOBER 1

Read Numbers 14:1-19. What does this chapter reveal about our sinfulness? What does it reveal about God’s grace?

Moses tells us that the reason God does not destroy His people is because the nations will hear and doubt God’s power to save (v. 13-19). God’s people can affect God’s reputation! How does this affect the way we should consider issues like conflict and other sin that’s not dealt with in the church?

What do you think it would look like for God’s name to be honored and praised among our neighbors because of our church? Take some time to pray and ask the Lord to glorify His name through our church.

week four

WEDNESDAY | OCTOBER 2

Read Matthew 28:18-20. Based on this text, what is the mission of the church?

Take some time to identify areas in your own church experience that are “off target” from the mission described in Matthew 28:18-20. Why do you think we drift off God’s mission in the church?

Emil Brunner said, “The church exists by mission as a fire exists by burning”. Do you agree or disagree? Why is mission so important in the church?

Take some time to identify one person in your life who needs Christ. Pray for them, and ask God to give you an opportunity to share Christ’s love with them.

THURSDAY | OCTOBER 3

Read Joshua 4:1-7. Why do you think God had the people set up memorial stones?

God wanted children to hear about what He had done for them as a nation. Take some time to reflect on what God is doing in your life and in Calvary at this time. How could this be communicated/shared with your kids or other young people in or out of the church?

As a church, we have a responsibility to reach the younger generation for Christ. God cares about them, as He cared about the next generation of Israelites spoken about in Joshua 4. How do you feel God is calling you to invest in the younger generation?

Identify three or four children, or young people, who live near you, are related to you, or know you in some other way. Pray for God’s work in their life. Pray for their church involvement. Pray for their future leadership in their family and in our broader culture. Write them a card telling them you are praying for them!

FRIDAY | OCTOBER 4

Read James 5:13-16. Why do you think we are commanded to confess sins to each other?

What are some issues that you need to confess to another brother or sister in Christ?

Take some time to reflect on who would be a good person for you to confess your sin to. Ask God to give you opportunities.

Take a few minutes to review the reflection questions at the start of this devotional. **Are there any ongoing issues God wants you to consider addressing even after the Sacred Assembly service last week?**

Take advantage of the next two pages for any additional notes or reflections.



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