



**Non-Profit Org.
U.S. Postage Paid
Harlem, GA
Permit No. 8**

Happy Anniversary Happy Birthday

02-02	Trisha Laughery
02-03	Jeremy Davis
02-07	Carter Adams
02-07	Alicia Fitzgerald
02-17	Gary Holley

FINANCIALS

Deacon of the Month

CONNECTIONS

February 2024

The Pastor's Desk

If you have joined us for worship either in person or online over the past few weeks, you know that we have been in a sermon series that I've titled "Grow Up." It probably comes as no surprise to you that the subject of maturing in Christ has been on my mind a great deal in the recent weeks. And as I have studied, written, and preached three sermons in this series, I have had to acknowledge my own spiritual immaturities. There are places in my own spiritual development that simply have not increased as well as some others. To use an academic analogy, there are some spiritual classes that I am simply not passing at this point in my life. And one of these classes (yes, there are more than one that require some extra attention) is prayer.

In 1 Thessalonians 5 the apostle Paul calls his readers to "Pray continually." I believe this is the standard to which we should grade our prayer lives. Are we praying continually? I know that I certainly am not. But what does it mean to "pray continually?" Certainly it doesn't mean that we are to spend every moment of our day with our eyes closed and head bowed in prayer. To do so would be dangerous (to say the least). So what does Paul mean? The Greek word Paul uses for "prayer" here is a general word which "implies a worshipful approach to God" (Martin, Michael D., *The New American Commentary*: 1, 2 Thessalonians). With this word, Paul is encouraging his readers to make prayer a part of both their personal spiritual lives as well as their corporate spiritual lives. In other words, Paul is encouraging his readers to utilize prayer in every facet of life. But our tendency is to compartmentalize our prayer life. When things are clearly out of our control, we go to the Lord in prayer. But in those situations where we are increasingly comfortable and where we just cruise by, we often neglect prayer.

I suspect we all pray just a little bit more when a loved one is sick. Even though we have doctors at our disposal, sickness just seems to be one of those things that often makes us go to the Lord. When we, or a couple we know, are having marital troubles we also take that to the Lord. This is another one of those things that often seems a bit larger than us. But how often do we pray for our marriage when things are going well? How often do we pray for our loved one when they are healthy? This is what Paul was calling us to do. And as we continue to read in the very next verse Paul gives us deeper insight into how we can go about praying continually. In verse 18, Paul says to "give thanks in all circumstances." With these words, Paul teaches us how we are to go about praying continually. Even when we don't have anything specifically to pray for, we are to give thanks. And this, I believe, is how we move deeper into our prayer lives. Paul understood that if we are to grow in Christ we have to commune with Him. Our ability to move into the next stage of our spiritual growth requires that we make prayer an essential part of our lives. So, in the words of my friend Susan Camp, "let's get to gettin'" and make 2024 a year filled with prayer!

*Press on!
Carson*

LOVE
GOD

LOVE
PEOPLE

MAKE
DISCIPLES

CONNECTIONS is a monthly publication of Harlem Baptist Church • PO Box 790 Harlem GA • 706-556-6439 • e-mail Church@HarlemBaptist.org

Church News

HBC Ladies Event

"A Time for Growth"

MARCH 8TH 6:30PM-8:30PM



Join the ladies of HBC to fellowship, share a meal and grow in God's image.
Childcare is not provided for this event.

EASTER CHOIR

February 4th
after Church Luncheon

CHURCH CONFERENCE

FEBRUARY 18th AT 6:00PM

COMMUNION
FEBRUARY 11TH

During morning worship



Mena

FEBRUARY 4
(YOUTH)
MEXICAN BUFFET
& DESSERTS

FEBRUARY 18
(MEDIA)
PORK CHOP
& FIXINGS



The other day while my daughter was playing at the park, she called my name and says, "Mom! Watch this! I can walk backwards up the slide!" My fearless little dare-devil has accomplished many more dangerous feats than this, so I dutifully watched as she began ascending, when she promptly tripped and landed on her backside on the slide. She wasn't hurt, and she just jumped up and laughed, "Oops!!! Do over!!!" She proceeded to expertly complete her task, receiving appropriate accolades, of course.

But what amazed me in that moment was how she did not let apparent failure stop her. I had watched her go up this slide several times before she called to make sure I was paying attention – and then the minute someone was watching her, she messed up. How many times has that happened to us? It could be in sports, when we can make a million free throws until the game is on the line. Or it could be at work, when we know exactly what we are doing until our boss asks us a question. Or perhaps it is suddenly getting nervous before speaking in front of a group and feeling like we aren't going to survive. Mistakes happen, and they usually happen in front of other people.

But she didn't care. She knew she could still do it. She messed up - no big deal! She popped right back up and did it right. She handled a mistake better than most adults I know – certainly better than me.

We are so hard on ourselves. We have expectations of perfection in our daily life that are not practical – and certainly aren't Biblical. But Psalms 139 speaks of who we are created to be. We are fearfully and wonderfully made. God's thoughts are precious towards us. The simple and honest truth is that we are going to make mistakes in our lives because we are not perfect. I'm not saying to avoid striving for excellence – it is right and good to do so. But we have got to stop striving for perfection. And I'm not saying choose to sin and don't worry about it – and if that is what you hear then you were already looking for an excuse.

We need to embrace doing our absolute best without annihilating ourselves internally when our best isn't perfection. God loves us, flaws and all. If we were perfect, we wouldn't need a Savior. And I'd much rather need a Savior than get it all right. He's much better at being God than me. So go on - climb backwards up that slide. Let's cultivate the habit of saying "Do over!" instead of "What's wrong with me?" We are His and we are loved, and being holy because He is holy isn't about seeking after perfection...it's about seeking after the heart and will of God.

-Rebekah

**MEN'S
BREAKFAST**

Saturday, February 3rd
at 9:00am

Red Oak Manor
Harlem, GA

Sign up by February 2nd



CAMP
HARLEM

SAVE THE DATE

JUNE 26-28

-REGISTRATION COMING SOON-



One thing I still think about pretty often (and even talk openly about during youth group meetings from time to time) is a challenge that I faced in high school; I never fully "belonged" to a social group in high school. Instead of being a fully recognized member of any one clique or group, I was the guy who kind of floated between several different groups. And there was a joy to that – I liked the versatility of being able to have lots of different people that I knew and I could talk to, but the main disadvantage of this arrangement played out at lunch time. When all of the high school students separated themselves up in the cafeteria, I never felt like I had a certain seat at any particular table. Don't get me wrong; no one aggressively disliked me or anything... but I knew that I was just kind of on the outskirts of about 8 different social groups. I hated that feeling.

Where do you belong?

The answer is provided for us powerfully in the book of Ephesians, Chapter 2.

"Remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who were once far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier..." ***Ephesians 2:12-14a***

This, friends, is the beauty and the power of the gospel. For each of us, our story starts at this point: we didn't belong. But then, Jesus. We were spiritually on the outside looking in. Spiritually we didn't have a seat at anyone's lunch table. Spiritually we were without hope, without comfort, without security, and without acceptance. Spiritually we were excluded. But praise be to God! Christ came into the world, shouldered our sin and shame and sacrificed Himself on the cross... that we may gain entry to the body of Christ... it is because of His death and resurrection that we now belong. And no earthly circumstance or person can take that belonging away. We have been secured; our lives have been paid for in total because of the redeeming love of Jesus.

This has implications for how we are to live our lives.

I asked you earlier "Where do you belong?" Now I ask you a different question: "Who doesn't belong in your life?" or "Who doesn't belong in our church?" The answer to that question is no one. Christ died so that ALL who were far have been brought near. And I believe it is the mission of our church to reflect that love to everyone we meet so that when we spend time with another they receive a sense of belonging.

2024 is still a new, fresh year. I am going to begin praying now that – because of the way members of Harlem Baptist Church show powerful love to others – many more in our community will feel the oneness and sense of belonging that comes from being part of the body of Christ. This is our mission. Let's rise up to the task! And should we be tempted to think there's not room for someone or they don't fully belong for one reason or another, let us remind ourselves that there was a great reason (our sin) that we didn't belong in relationship with a holy, perfect, righteous God... but Christ came that we might be made reconciled to Him.

-Evan

Coffee with Carson



All retirees are invited to join Carson at
Red Oak Manor for breakfast!

Tuesday, February 27th
8:30AM

Let us know if you are coming!
706-556-6439 or church@harlembaptist.org