



NEXT



A Twenty-One Day Devotional Guide
by William Clay Smith

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INTRODUCTION

For over thirty years, I have served as pastor of Alice Drive Baptist Church. It has been an incredible journey of taking next steps toward Jesus and watching God do what only God can do.

There comes a time for every leader to stop her or his chapter and let the next leader write his or her chapter. That time has come for me. As our church gets ready for our next chapter, God has put three words on my heart: **Reach, Next, and Own.**

For the next twenty-one days, I want our church to enter a time of prayer about **reaching** people for Jesus, preparing for our **next** leader, and **owning** the responsibility for this great church that God has built. I invite you to use this devotional guide each day so we can be spiritually ready for what God has next.

Each day has a passage of scripture to read, a devotional thought, a specific prayer, and space for reflections. I hope you will find this useful.

I want to thank Kelly Parker, my assistant, and Christopher Nygord, our graphic designer, for their help in producing this guide.

With all my heart, I believe the best days of Alice Drive are ahead of us. Jesus told his disciples, "I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest" – John 4:35b. Let us have open eyes and ready hearts to go out into the fields and reap the harvest!

REACH

DAY
1

SCRIPTURE: Acts 1:6-8 - ⁶ Then they gathered around him and asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" ⁷ He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. ⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

DEVOTIONAL: Jesus never intended his disciples to be passive. When they asked him if he was going to restore the kingdom of Israel, it was a request for him to do the work so they could enjoy a new status. Instead, Jesus told them not to focus on such things. Their job was to receive power and to share what they had experienced.

We cannot reach out to those who do not know Jesus unless we have the power of the Holy Spirit. What is this power? It is the power of God living inside of us, giving us insight into people, power that gives us courage to share our stories, and power to provide the supernatural connection for people to hear God's good news.

Do you have the power of the Holy Spirit flowing through you?
Does our church have this power? Are we asking for it?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, please provide me with the power of your Holy Spirit so I may be a witness for you.

Question: What would change in your life if the power of the Holy Spirit truly flowed through you?



REACH

DAY
2



SCRIPTURE: Acts 1:8 - ⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

DEVOTIONAL: In the time of Jesus, people would bring their disputes to the elders of the village gathered at the gate. Witnesses would be present to share what they saw, heard, and experienced.

Jesus commands us to share our story wherever we are. We simply tell what Jesus has done for us, what he has meant to us. Your story may be as simple as: "I grew up in church and started following Jesus when I was very young. When I do life his way, my life is better." It may be more dramatic: "My husband left me. As I was trying to pick up the pieces to carry on, I decided to give my life to Jesus. Jesus got me through that tough time and now helps me every day.

Someone needs to hear your story. Will you be a witness for Jesus?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, please provide me with opportunities to share what you have done for me.

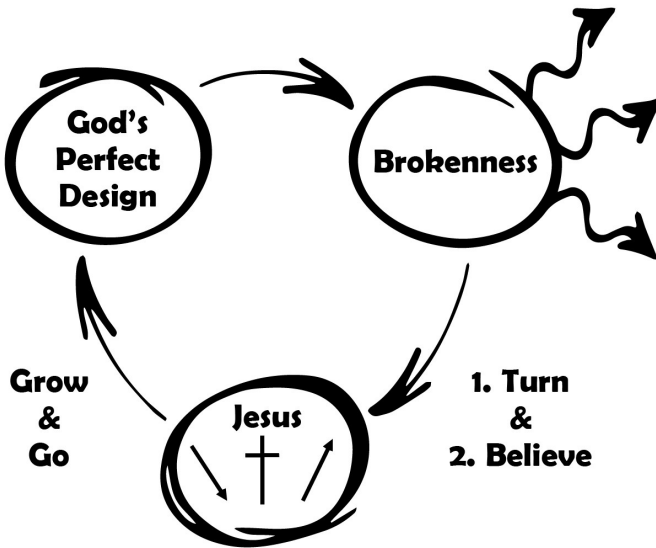
QUESTION: Who needs to hear your story about what Jesus has done for you?



3 CIRCLES PART 1

DAY
3

SCRIPTURE: Genesis 1:31a - ³¹ God saw all that he had made, and it was very good.



DEVOTIONAL: Today we explore a tool that helps us share our story. It is called "3 Circles."

When God finished making the world, he declared it was good. The word good means to be whole, to have integrity. God made the world with a **perfect design**. This is the first circle.

In a world of bad news, we need to help people remember suffering, sin, and evil was never God's intention. God's design of creation was perfect and good.



This is why we praise God and thank God when we see signs and evidence of his goodness. Many of us can even see God's goodness in the homes we grew up in or in the blessings we have experienced.

Ask God to show you his goodness in this world.

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, please help me see the goodness you have made in this world and the goodness you have given me.

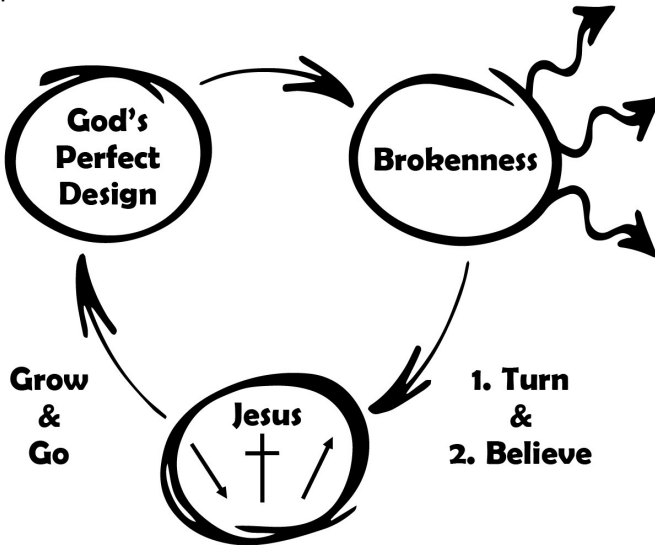
QUESTION: Will you make a list of signs that show you the goodness of God?



3 CIRCLES PART 2

DAY
4

SCRIPTURE: Romans 5:12 - ¹²Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way, death came to all people, because all sinned.



DEVOTIONAL: The second circle of the 3 circles is brokenness. When Adam and Eve ate from the fruit God told them not to eat, they broke God's one rule. Something deep and profound unraveled in the universe. God's perfect design was broken by human choice.

Adam and Eve were not the only ones who sinned. Every human being since has sinned, has broken God's design for life. Isn't it funny that we don't have to teach a child to lie or steal or disobey. That is why Paul says we all sin.



The squiggly lines represent all the ways we try to deal with our brokenness. We check out, we achieve, we try to be good enough, we try to get people to like us. None of these efforts heal our brokenness or the brokenness of our world.

When we share our stories, we need to be real about our personal brokenness. We need to share how our own sin injured us. We might also share how the sins of others injured us. This also means our churches must be safe places, places of grace, where we can be real and accept broken people.

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, give me the courage to share how my own failures and sins have broken my life.

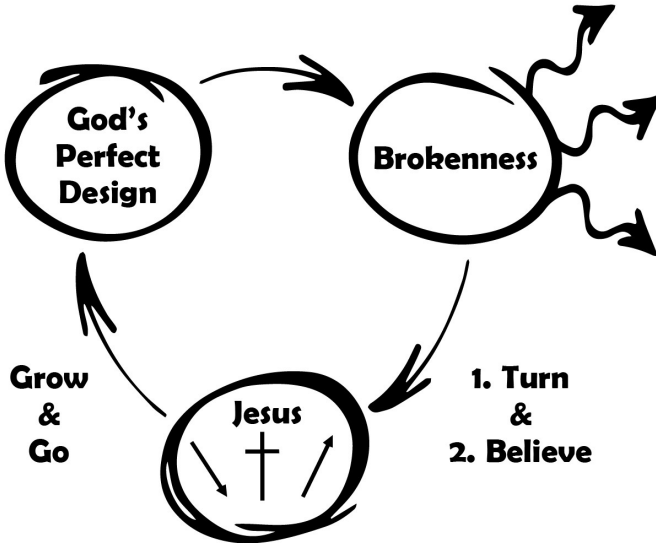
QUESTION: What are the ways your sin has broken your life?



3 CIRCLES PART 3

DAY
5

SCRIPTURE: Romans 5:8 - ⁸ But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.



DEVOTIONAL: The last circle is **Jesus**. Jesus came into the world, broken as it was, and died on a cross so the brokenness in our lives could be forgiven. He rose again on Sunday to show he has the power to restore us to God's perfect design. We grow to be like Jesus and go for him to share his good news.

We must choose Jesus. This means we turn away from our brokenness and believe that Jesus is the only one that restore us. Restoration or redemption means we accept Jesus' payment for our sins, we ask him to take charge of our lives, and we commit to follow him.



When you share your story, tell people when you turned your life over to Jesus. Tell them how Jesus is working your life to restore you to God's design. This might mean you share how Jesus is helping you be more loving, more patient, more joyful, more faithful.

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, Thank you for Jesus redeeming and restoring me. Help me tell this good news to others.

QUESTION: In what way is Jesus growing you so you can be who God created you to be?

A sample prayer for someone to pray to accept Jesus: Father, I confess I have done wrong. Please forgive all my sins. Please come into my life and take charge. From now on, I will follow Jesus.

This prayer is a guide, not a magic formula. What matters is the intent and the direction of your heart. Essential elements of your decision should be: A confession of sin, that you have failed yourself and God; a request for forgiveness; a surrender of your life to God, asking him to take charge; and a commitment to follow Jesus, to do life with him and involve him in every part of your life.



OUR MISSION

DAY
6

SCRIPTURE: **Matthew 28:18-20** - ¹⁸ Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ 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, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

DEVOTIONAL: These verses are often referred to as "The Great Commission." Jesus commands his disciples to go into the whole world and make disciples. To be a disciple is to be an apprentice of Jesus, to adopt his values and his way of doing life. We are to baptize people as a sign of their new beginning and teach them the way of Jesus.

This is why the mission of our church is: **To help as many people as possible take their next step toward Jesus.** We feel the urgency of Jesus' command. We want to share his good news around the world, but especially in the corner of the world where he has placed us.

No matter what the future holds for our church, our mission will not change. We are commanded to change the world, one person at a time.

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, help see people who need help and then help them take their next step toward Jesus.

QUESTION: How do you think our church is doing in helping people take their next step toward Jesus?



ARE YOU CALLED TO GO?

DAY
7

SCRIPTURE: Acts 13:2-3 - ² While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." ³ So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.

DEVOTIONAL: God was at work in the church at Antioch! Leaders and teachers were being developed, spiritual growth was happening, and generosity was increasing.

Then God spoke and said, "I want you to let go of two of your best teachers and send them out." Then Paul and Barnabas went on their first mission trip.

We want every LIFE Group to be involved in missions, through prayer, giving, or serving. You personally may need to take a next step to go share and serve.

Is God calling you to take a mission trip from him? It may not be a long-distance trip. God may call you to go and serve at our Bishopville campus or our Pocalla campus.

We have regular mission trips to our mission partner in Valdosta, Georgia, to work with foster kids and families.

God may want you to go on a trip to our partners in Honduras. Or maybe God is calling you to full-time vocational ministry – to serve on a church staff, or to be a pastor, or to be a missionary.

Will you say yes?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, help me hear your calling for my life.

QUESTION: Is God calling you to serve, to take a mission trip, to give your life to vocational service?





SCRIPTURE: Acts 11:22-23 - ²² News of this reached the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. ²³ When he arrived and saw what the grace of God had done, he was glad and encouraged them all to remain true to the Lord with all their hearts.

DEVOTIONAL: Antioch was the first place the Good News reached across racial and ethnic barriers. Leaders in Jerusalem realized this exploding congregation needed a leader. They gave this assignment to Barnabas.

Every church needs a leader. I have served as pastor of this church for over 30 years, one of the great privileges of my life. Now it is time for a new leader, one who encourage us to be true to our Lord Jesus and be true to our mission.

We need to prepare for our new leader and pray God will prepare him. Whatever is next, God will provide the leader our church needs to take our next steps.

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, prepare our next pastor and help him be ready for this calling.

QUESTION: Will you commit to pray daily for our next pastor?



PLANTERS, WATERERS, AND GOD

DAY
9

SCRIPTURE: **1 Corinthians 3:6-7** - ⁶I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow. ⁷So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow.

DEVOTIONAL: Paul understood he was not to be the forever-leader of the church at Corinth. His job was to plant. Apollos, who came after Paul, watered. Through both leaders, God was at work. Only God can make things grow.

God gave me the joy of seeing his church grow from 280 to over 1600 (in person and online). We relocated. We became multi-site. We are multi-generational and multi-cultural. All of this is God's work.

Now it is time for Apollos. The work of the planter and the waterer are different, but the labor of both is needed. The next challenges for ADBC will be great. God will provide a leader for this next chapter.

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, only you know the future. Only you know the challenges your church will face. Send us the right person for this next season.

QUESTION: Will you think about the challenges the next pastor will face and pray through these challenges?



A NEW LEADER, A NEW CHALLENGE

DAY
10

SCRIPTURE: **Joshua 1:2 - 2** “Moses my servant is dead. Now then, you and all these people, get ready to cross the Jordan River into the land I am about to give to them—to the Israelites.

DEVOTIONAL: God speaks to Joshua bluntly: “Moses my servant is dead.” Moses’ call had been to lead the people of God out of slavery, then to receive God’s law and instruct the people of God. Moses led God’s people for 40 years, even when they were difficult to lead.

Now Joshua must step up as the leader. Imagine trying to follow Moses! But God was clear with Joshua; he had a different mission. His mission was to fight battles and conquer the land God had promised to his people.

Every leader has a mission for a season. The next season for ADBC will require a leader with different skills and a different focus. We must not expect the new leader to be like the old leader. Be ready to accept God’s new leader and do not compare him to the old.

PRAYER: **Heavenly Father, get our church ready for new challenges and for a new leader’s task.**

QUESTION: How do we make room in our hearts for a new leader with a new challenge?



BETTER THAN BEFORE

DAY
11

SCRIPTURE: 2 Kings 2:9 - ⁹ When they had crossed, 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.

DEVOTIONAL: Elijah was a great prophet who could pray and break a drought. He could call down fire from heaven. Kings for miles around were frightened of his power.

Elijah's time was coming to an end, and everyone seemed to know it. When he asked his apprentice, Elisha, what he might do for him before he was taken, Elisha wisely replied he wanted a double portion of Elijah's spirit.

Elisha was wise enough to know he could not be Elijah. With God's help, however, he could receive the Spirit of God. He was bold enough to ask for twice what Elijah had.

Can we be bold enough to ask for a new pastor who has a double portion of God's Spirit? What if God gave us a new pastor who led us twice as well, preached twice as good, and walked two times closer to God than me? Wouldn't that be great!

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, pour out a double portion of your Spirit upon our new pastor.

QUESTION: What would happen if our new pastor led us to double our size?



A CALLING

DAY
12

SCRIPTURE: Acts 16:9 - ⁹ During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, "Come over to Macedonia and help us."

DEVOTIONAL: Pastors often talk about "call." A call from God is an unshakeable sense that God wants you to serve a specific group of people for a specific mission.

Paul has a restlessness about where to go next. He tries to go several different directions, but each time he is blocked. Finally, there is a clear vision of a man in Macedonia (across the Aegean Sea), crying out, "Come help us."

A pastor in Alabama was approached by a church in Texas and invited to be their pastor. He was doing a great work for God where he was, so he declined. Convinced he was the right man, a member of the Search Team stayed up all night praying for God to put a call into this pastor's heart. Early the next morning, the pastoral candidate called the chair of the team and said, "I know I turned you down, but I have not been able to sleep since. God has ignited my heart and I feel called to come be your pastor." That pastor retired after serving that church for 30 years.

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, prepare our next pastor for a new calling.

QUESTION: Will you pray our next pastor will have burning passion to lead our church to an amazing future?





SCRIPTURE: **1 Chronicles 28:9-10** - ⁹“And you, my son Solomon, acknowledge the God of your father, and serve him with wholehearted devotion and with a willing mind, for the Lord searches every heart and understands every desire and every thought. If you seek him, he will be found by you; but if you forsake him, he will reject you forever.

¹⁰Consider now, for the Lord has chosen you to build a house as the sanctuary. Be strong and do the work.”

DEVOTIONAL: David wanted to build a Temple for God, but God told him “No.” There are things I wish God had allowed me to do before retiring; God made it clear I was to leave those tasks for someone else.

Solomon is David’s son and the next King. David plainly tells him to seek God and follow his ways. David also tells him he has a mission: Build the Temple. Be strong and do the work. David must step aside so Solomon can do the work God has for him.

The number one reason pastoral transitions of long-tenured pastors fail is the exiting pastor will not release his power or his position. My promise to you is I will not do that. I want to make room for our next pastor to do the work God has for him.

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, help Pastor Clay end well.
Give our new pastor the strength to do what you have called him to do.

QUESTION: Will you pray for me to end well and make way for the new pastor?





SCRIPTURE: **2 Timothy 4:1-2** - ¹In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: ²Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction.

DEVOTIONAL: Preaching is an essential skill for a lead pastor. Preaching, however, is not about being funny, or preaching loudly. Paul tells Timothy that preaching is about preparation. Good sermons correct our thinking, rebuke our sins, and encourage us to follow Jesus. Good preachers have patience and think through what they say.

There is an old truth about preachers: Any preacher can preach a good sermon; but a good preacher preaches goodness into a church.

Churches can often be misled by someone who is great communicator but is not skilled in preaching, so people grow a character like Jesus. We want a good, wise preacher for our next pastor.

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, give our Search Team great wisdom as they seek our next pastor. Give them ears to hear the best person to communicate your truth to our mission field.

QUESTION: What do you think Paul means by urging Timothy to preach with great patience and careful instruction?



SCRIPTURE: 1 Corinthians 12:27 - ²⁷ Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.

DEVOTIONAL: Paul is not offering the Corinthians an option: Be part of the body of Christ if you want to. He states it as a fact. Every follower of Jesus is to be part of a local church.

A member of ADBC “owns” his role in the body and owns the health of the body. Each of us has a responsibility to pray for the health of our church and be healthy ourselves, so the whole body can be healthy. You know if you stub your toe, your whole body must compensate; you grab your toe, you hop, you holler.

In this time of leadership transition, it is more important than ever for you, part of the body of ADBC, to own your responsibility to serve, invest, and care about the future of our church.

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, show me my place in the body.
Please help me be a healthy member of the body and
own the responsibility of your church.

QUESTION: What does it mean to you to “own” ADBC as part of the body of Christ?



BODY PARTS

DAY
16

SCRIPTURE: 1 Corinthians 12:12-13, 27 - ¹² Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. ¹³ For we were all baptized by ^[c] one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink... ²⁷ Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.

DEVOTIONAL: As part of the body of Christ, your identity changes. You are no longer who people say you are; you have a new role in life. You are part of the body of Jesus.

God calls some people to be platform people: teachers, preachers, worship leaders. God calls other people to be servants: loving children, building ramps, being part of the First Impressions team. God calls some people to be compassion people, to care deeply for those hurting and marginalized. God calls some people to be encouragers, to help people grow their character to be like Jesus. God calls some people to be generous beyond tithing, so God's kingdom can advance. God calls some people to lead, organizing, strategizing, and equipping people to do ministry together.

No matter what God has called you to do in the body, it is important because God says it is. And notice: God never calls anyone to sit on the sidelines.

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, show me my calling.
Help me know how I am to serve in the body.

QUESTION: What has Jesus called you to do?



WHAT BINDS US

DAY
17

SCRIPTURE: 1 Corinthians 12:31b, 13:4-7 – And yet I will show you the most excellent way. ⁴ Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. ⁵ It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. ⁶ Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. ⁷ It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

DEVOTIONAL: It is not enough for us to serve as part of the body or even own responsibility for ADBC. Jesus tells us that by our love for each other, people will know we are his disciples.

Can we be honest? The American church is failing miserably at this. God's people today are known more for their hate than their love.

To love one another means patience and kindness. It means we do not compete with each other, and we do not seek our own way. We are not angry people, and we rejoice in truth. We protect, trust, hope and persevere.

To truly own our responsibility in Jesus' church we must excel at loving one another. How are we doing?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, help me be loving to all I meet, especially my brothers and sisters in Christ at ADBC.

QUESTION: How can you show the love of Jesus at ADBC this week?



SCRIPTURE: **Matthew 25:40** - ⁴⁰ “The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’”

DEVOTIONAL: This verse is from Jesus’ parable about the sheep and the goats. The sheep are astounded to learn when they were serving the least of these, they were serving Jesus. The goats were surprised; they protest they would have served Jesus had they known.

This parable reminds us that every life matters. We are to look for Jesus in every person. We are to help those who cannot help themselves in the name of Jesus. Sometimes this is in organized ministries, like HELPS. Sometimes, it is helping an elderly person change a flat tire. Sometimes it is rocking a child to sleep during a worship service.

You will come into contact with the least of these. Part of owning ADBC is remembering to see Jesus in each person you meet.

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, give me a heart to serve the least of these and then a heart to do it.

QUESTION: Who are the “least of these” that Jesus wants you to serve?



AMBASSADORS

DAY
19

SCRIPTURE: 2 Corinthians 5:20 - ²⁰ We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God.

DEVOTIONAL: A pastor once said, "You are the only Jesus someone knows." That is a frightening thought, especially when we consider how unlike Jesus we are.

This is our calling, however. We are to represent Jesus and we are to implore people to be reconciled to God. Why? Because this is the most important decision a person can make.

To own our church means we own the responsibility of making decisions that represent Jesus well. People, both Christians and non-Christians, look at ADBC as an example of what a church should be.

Former President Jimmy Carter often told of a sermon that changed his life. His pastor said, "If you were on trial for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to convict you?" President Carter said he was struck by the question and was not sure how a jury of his peers would vote.

How would you answer that question? What would people say about our church?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, grow me to be like Jesus so I can represent you well.

QUESTION: What is the reputation of ADBC in our communities? Do we represent Jesus well?



SCRIPTURE: Ephesians 2:21-22 - ²¹ In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. ²² And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

DEVOTIONAL: Jesus wants to build his followers into a living Temple. A temple is place where people expect to meet God. In verse 22, we are told we are built together. The unity of Jesus is stronger than anything that might divide us.

To be united as a church means we must be humble. We must not insist on our way, or believe we are always right.

Whenever I hear someone say, "If that is what the church is going to do, I will stop giving," I cringe. That is a prideful statement that tells me that person still wants to control his money, not give it to God.

True surrender is required for unity in the body of Jesus. In our nation, people are divided over politics, race, and power. Let us show our nation how to be united. Let us be a people surrendered to God and his will.

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, I surrender to you. Put me anywhere in your church you want me to be. Help me be humble – not my will, but yours be done.

QUESTION: Am I willing to let go of my way to build unity in Jesus' church?



SCRIPTURE: Ephesians 3:20-21 - ²⁰Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, ²¹to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.

DEVOTIONAL: As our twenty-one days of prayer ends, let these verses be our benediction.

I believe God wants to do more in ADBC in the coming days than we can ask or imagine. I believe his power is at work in us and among us. To paraphrase John Ortberg, to bring glory to God means people will look at ADBC and say, "What a good God there must be to create a church like that." What a testimony for a church! What a legacy!

As we look to the future, if we continue to **reach**, if we prepare for what God has **next**, and if we **own** the responsibility of being the church God wants us to be, there will be no words for all that God will do in us and through us. Glory be to God.

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, do more in your church at ADBC than we can ask or imagine!

QUESTION: What can I imagine or ask for God to do in our church? What would be beyond that?



AFTERWORD

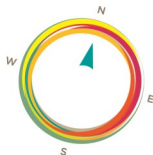
Most books have a forward, but not an afterword. But I want you to know this: I hope, the Lord willing, to live a long time after I retire. I believe there is other work God wants me to do for his people, to help churches take their next step toward Jesus.

In twenty years, or twenty-five years, if I am still alive, I hope that ADBC will still be helping as many people as possible take their next step toward Jesus. I pray for people to Know Jesus, Know Community, Grow Character, and Go Share.

I think I speak the truth here: If in twenty or twenty-five years I am forgotten, but your passion for our mission and vision lives on, I will consider my life to have been well spent in service of Jesus.

I will love these last months we have together. Blessings on you all.





A L I C E D R I V E

baptist church