

People of God

CHURCHWIDE DEVOTIONAL



From the beginning of time, God has pursued a relationship with the people He created. The story of the people of God in the Bible is our story too. Together as Black Rock Church we are God's people in this time and place. Let's start this special year as a church family on the same page through 7 devotional readings tracing the grand story of the Bible from Genesis to Revelation.

- *Look back* to remember the faithfulness of God to generations who've gone before us
- *Look around* at the rich and unique family of God's people who is Black Rock Church today
- *Look ahead* with anticipation to a bright future living out our calling as the people of God

ADAM & EVE and YOU & ME

We were made for connection. The need for connection is at the core of our identity. It is central to our purpose in life and is an inherent part of our nature.

English poet John Donne put it like this, “No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main.”

To understand where our need for connection comes from it helps to start at the very beginning - the book of Genesis.

“***And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good.***” - Genesis 1:31

The Bible begins with the story of creation. God speaks. Things are created. God looks at all He created and sees that it is GOOD. This pattern—repeated throughout Genesis 1—changes in the next chapter. In Genesis 2, we find the first instance of God declaring that something is not good.

“***Then the Lord God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone.”***” - Genesis 2:18

Verse 18, on its own, may seem like a trivial statement. However, within the greater context of the story the reality of God’s words becomes shocking. The reason for this is that Genesis 2:18 was spoken before Adam and Eve sinned.

Think about that for a moment. Before there was sin, God said, “***This is NOT GOOD.***”

Did God make a mistake? No. He did not.
Was Adam at fault? No. This was before Adam sinned.
Was there something wrong with the way God created the Universe? No. Everything was created according to God’s design.

Why, then, did God say, “This is NOT GOOD?”

It was not good because God designed His people for relationship with Himself and with other humans. It was only when Eve was created that Adam had a connection with another person. Without Eve, Adam was not able to fully live in the way God designed. But Adam and Eve's choice to sin by disobeying God, as recorded in Genesis 3, ripples onward to all humans. Since then, sin has infected us all, breaking our connection with God and is the source of frustration in human relationships.

As we'll see however, the rest of the Bible tells the story of God's love for His people and the plan He has always had to bring us into a relationship with Him and one another through Jesus.

“Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.” - 1 Corinthians 12:27

God tells His people again the same thing He said in Genesis 2:18. It is NOT GOOD for us to live in isolation, alone and disconnected from others. We were made for connection. God's people today are meant to be in a community of Jesus-followers creating intentional connections with one another.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1

Which intentional relationships with other Christ-followers are you investing in? If you need help finding ways to connect, scan the QR code to find a group for you.



2

What hesitations do you have about connecting with others in the church? Reach out to Groups Director Young Song (ysong@blackrock.org) to talk more.

Scan the QR code for a quick video to learn more about how Adam & Eve's story connects to the hope we have in Jesus.



FATHER ABRAHAM

If you were a kid in some churches in the 1980s, you might remember the song, *“Father Abraham”*. We sang how Father Abraham had many sons, then pointed to each other and said *“I am one of them, and so are you! So let’s just praise the Lord!”* We spun in a circle, shook an arm or leg, and sang the whole thing over again. It was fun, but I’m not sure we knew how we were *“sons”* of Father Abraham.

When Adam and Eve disregarded God and chose to sin, the good creation God made spiraled into chaos. Wickedness was so widespread that God flooded the earth and everyone, except Noah - *“a man who walked with God”*, and his family was wiped out. Humankind’s problem with sin did not die in the flood, nonetheless, God’s plan to save His people from their sin and set them apart for Himself was carrying on.

One key figure in God’s plan was Abram. He was a descendant of Noah, and in Genesis 12, God calls Abram at the age of 75 to leave his homeland, and journey to a land God would show him. Among other things, God promised to make Abram **“a great nation”** and to bless **“all the peoples of the earth”** through him (Gen. 12:2-3). Abram obeyed God’s call and headed to a land called Canaan.

In Genesis 15, we read that God told Abram: **“Look at the sky and count the stars, if you are able to count them...Your offspring will be that numerous.”** The Bible says **“Abram believed the Lord, and He credited it to him [Abram] as righteousness.”**

Although Abram believed God, because he and his wife Sarai were older and childless they first tried taking matters into their own hands. They tried to accomplish through human effort what only God could do, but in Genesis 17 God confirmed the promised offspring would come through Sarai. God changed her name to Sarah, and Abram’s name to Abraham, which means Father of Nations. God brought life to Sarah’s womb and Isaac was born. Through Isaac, then his son Jacob, and so on, Abraham became the father of God’s people. The rest of the Old Testament details the story of God and His people, and His promise to bless the world through a future descendant of Abraham.

The Gospel of Matthew begins with a list of Abraham's descendants, and Jesus is listed at the end as the completion of God's promise to Abraham. He is the one through whom ***"all the peoples of the earth would be blessed"***.

The Bible explains Abraham was declared righteous - right before God - because he believed God. Those who believe God's promises were fulfilled in Jesus, and put their trust in Him, are Abraham's offspring by faith - they are "sons" with an inheritance in God's kingdom. More importantly than being Abraham's children, they ultimately become God's children. John 1:11-13 explains this:

"He [Jesus] came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, he gave them the right to be children of God, to those who believe in his name, who were born, not of natural descent, or of the will of the flesh, or of the will of man, but of God." - John 1:11-13

If you have placed your trust in Jesus alone to make you right before God, you have received the blessing of God's promise to Abraham. You are part of God's people!

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

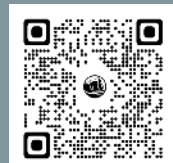
1

How does realizing your roots of faith go back to God's plan through Abraham inspire you to want to know more about God's people throughout the Bible and church history?

2

We see from Scripture that true and lasting connection is found in being part of God's family. Are you sure you are part of God's family through believing in Jesus? Head to blackrock.org/faith for more info.

Scan the QR code for a quick video to learn more about how Abraham's story connects to Jesus.



MOSES & THE 10 COMMANDMENTS

A lot of people think the Bible is a rule book of “dos and don’ts”. The Bible does contain instructions for how God’s people are called to live, but God knew that nobody would be able to perfectly obey his commandments (Romans 3). Since that’s the case, why did God give them to His people?

The story of Scripture reveals a perfect and holy God who rescues sinful people and calls them His own. Through their leader, Moses, God gave His people commands that set them apart from the rest of the world to represent Him. God’s people are to obey the commands for His glory and the good of others.

Just before giving the Ten Commandments, God reminded his people (now called the Israelites) of who He is and who they were:

“I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the place of slavery.” - Exodus 20:2

“I am the Lord your God” tells us God’s commandments were given in the context of relationship. The Israelites were not called to obey in order to become God’s people, but instead because they already were God’s people. The same pattern appears in the New Testament and for us. Obedience flows from a true relationship with God.

But despite God’s provision for His people, the Israelites failed to obey. Their desire to be like everyone else led them astray, and they worshiped false gods of nations around them. God disciplined His people for their rebellion and established priests and sacrifices to cover the people’s sin. Still, these sacrifices couldn’t permanently deal with sin. Rather, they pointed forward to a better once-for-all sacrifice to come, a promised rescue from sin through a new agreement or covenant. We now know this promise was fulfilled through Jesus. He lived in perfect obedience to God’s standard in our place so He could be the perfect sacrifice for our sins.

The Old Testament prophet, Jeremiah, points forward to this new covenant God would make with His people.

“Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the Lord. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.” - Jeremiah 31:31-34

Those who trust in Jesus for the forgiveness of their sins are part of this new covenant people of God. The Holy Spirit lives in them, so the desire and ability to obey God is now within their hearts.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

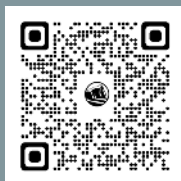
1

Do you approach God’s Word as a rule book to obey to try to earn favor with God, or a revelation of who He is so you can know God through Scripture? Visit the Resource Center on Sundays to pick up tools to help read and understand the Bible better.

2

Jeremiah says God’s new covenant people (Jesus-followers) will have God’s law written on their heart. The Holy Spirit brings understanding of God’s word as we spend time reading and reflecting on what it says. What do we miss out on when we become too busy for consistent time in Scripture?

Scan the QR code for a quick video to learn more about how God’s commands ultimately point to Jesus.



PROPHETS, PRIESTS & KINGS

God established three specific roles to care for the spiritual and practical needs of His people. Prophets declared God's truth as well as His future plans. Priests carried out the sacrificial offerings God had earlier described to Moses for worship and forgiveness of sin. Kings were authority figures making decisions for the security and care of God's people.

Although God's instructions for how his people should live were clear, God's people repeatedly disregarded his design and chose to go their own way. This led to many problems and consequences, including the catastrophic capture and exile of God's people. Just before this low point the prophet Isaiah writes these words,

“How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of the herald, who proclaims peace, who brings news of good things, who proclaims salvation, who says to Zion, “Your God reigns!” The voices of your watchmen— they lift up their voices, shouting for joy together; for every eye will see when the Lord returns to Zion. Be joyful, rejoice together, you ruins of Jerusalem! For the Lord has comforted his people; he has redeemed Jerusalem. The Lord has displayed his holy arm in the sight of all the nations; all the ends of the earth will see the salvation of our God. ... See, my servant will be successful; he will be raised and lifted up and greatly exalted. Just as many were appalled at you—his appearance was so disfigured that he did not look like a man, and his form did not resemble a human being—so he will sprinkle many nations.” - Isaiah 52:7-10, 13-15

The events Isaiah describes had not yet occurred. Verse 13 says, **“See, my servant will be successful...”** A servant works for God. The Bible connects the word servant to the special roles of prophet, priest and king, but it also applied to any of God's people. All were called to serve the Lord with gladness in how they lived. But the particular servant Isaiah is pointing forward to is Jesus – the one who is the perfect prophet, priest and king all in one.

As the perfect prophet, Jesus declared, ***“I have not spoken on my own, but the Father who sent me has given me everything I have said”*** (John 12:49). Jesus announces a good news message of salvation from sin and death through faith in him. Jesus is the perfect king, descended from the royal line of King David and is greatly exalted, but not as ruler of an earthly kingdom. Instead, he is exalted by being lifted up on the cross, beaten and disfigured. Jesus is the perfect priest. His blood shed on the cross is the final sacrifice for sin so that those who trust in him no longer need a priest to sprinkle the blood of sacrifices at the temple altar for their sins.

The prophets, priests and kings in the Old Testament served God and His people, yet each were imperfect humans in their own ways. By studying their lives and words we see the greater reality that Jesus is our ultimate prophet, priest and king.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

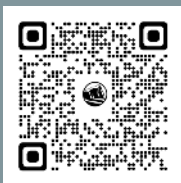
1

Prophets, priests and kings had specific roles. Where and how are you making a difference as a servant because you follow Jesus?

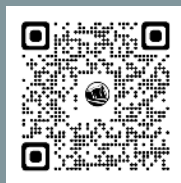
2

In the Bible, God’s people serve because God calls them to. It doesn’t earn them a spot in God’s family. When we serve inside or outside the church, how can we show the right motivation?

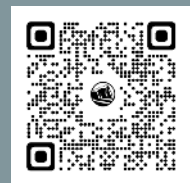
Scan the QR codes below for quick videos about how Jesus is our perfect Prophet, Priest & King.



Prophet



Priest



King

JESUS THE PROMISED ONE

Approximately 400 years after the last Old Testament writings, the Bible introduces Jesus at the start of the New Testament. Born of the virgin Mary, conceived by the Holy Spirit, Jesus is truly God and truly human at the same time. Around age thirty, Jesus announces the arrival of something God promised over 700 years earlier. One day, in a regular synagogue gathering, he stands and reads from Isaiah 61,

“The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor. He then rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. And the eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fixed on him. He began by saying to them, “Today as you listen, this Scripture has been fulfilled.” - Luke 4:18-21

We saw that the prophets, priests and kings served in specific ways. They were also set apart by an anointing ceremony, which means to smear oil on something. The Old Testament word for an anointed person is messiah. With that in mind, we can understand why the eyes of everyone in the synagogue were transfixed in amazement on Jesus. He is claiming something very significant, saying the Spirit of God has anointed him as the fulfillment of the Old Testament promises of a savior-rescuer. He is the specific promised Messiah God’s people waited on for generations.

Jesus selected 12 students, or disciples, to travel with as he announces this new day of freedom and favor for God’s people. Everyone expected political freedom and power, but Jesus will bring a better freedom and restoration from the power of sin and death through the cross.

Since Jesus is God in human form, the disciples got to experience in-person dialogue with God as they traveled and talked to Jesus. Their conversations were a mix of learning and living in everyday life, like in this famous story.

“Late in the day, the Twelve approached and said to him, “Send the crowd away, so that they can go into the surrounding villages and countryside to find food and lodging, because we are in a deserted place here.” “You give them something to eat,” he told them. “We have no more than five loaves and two fish,” they said, “unless we go and buy food for all these people.” For about five thousand men were there.

Then he told his disciples, “Have them sit down in groups of about fifty each.” They did what he said, and had them all sit down. Then he took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up to heaven, he blessed and broke them. He kept giving them to the disciples to set before the crowd. Everyone ate and was filled.” - Luke 9:13-17

The disciples had a real-life concern, so they talked with Jesus about it. Jesus intervenes and turns his attention to heaven acknowledging God in the solution. What an answer to prayer!

The very next story in Luke gives another example of prayer dialogue in action. ***“While he was praying in private and his disciples were with him, he asked them, “Who do the crowds say that I am?” They answered, “John the Baptist; others, Elijah; still others, that one of the ancient prophets has come back.” “But you,” he asked them, “who do you say that I am?” Peter answered, “God’s Messiah.”***

Jesus had a practice of dialoguing with God through prayer privately, but it was such a regular part of life he could easily shift from prayer into conversation with his friends. How amazing it is that we also can have an ongoing dialogue with our savior-rescuer just like the disciples did.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1

Who do you say Jesus is? Do you believe Jesus truly is who he said he was - the one anointed of God, the fulfillment of God’s promises to his people who would die on the cross as the forever sacrifice for sin?

2

Are there opportunities for more dialogue with God through prayer in everyday life you could take advantage of?

LIVING AS THE CHURCH

The first four books of the New Testament (the Gospels) give us the details of Jesus' travels with his disciples. Following three years of teaching, miracles and confronting corruption among the religious leaders of God's people, Jesus arrives in Jerusalem at the time of the Passover celebration. Just as predicted in God's plan all along, Jesus is arrested, given a mock trial and sentenced to death on a cross. It appeared God's rescue plan had failed, but in reality God's plan was fully successful as on the third day Jesus rose from the dead, appearing to the disciples and many others.

Not long after Jesus' victorious rising from the dead, he gathered his disciples and followers as he was about to ascend back to heaven. He spoke these famous words called the Great Commission,

“Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you. And remember I am with you always, to the end of the age.” Matthew 28:19-20

As the disciples dispersed across the world sharing the good news message of Jesus, those who placed their faith in him for forgiveness of sin and restored relationship to God became part of the people of God. Much of the New Testament is letters written to these early Jesus-followers explaining how to live in community with each other and represent God in the world. These letters follow a pattern of first explaining what God has done for His people then discussing what living as God's people looks like. Through this style, the writers make clear that God-honoring living is a response to what Jesus has already done for His people.

Look at what the early church leader Paul says in Romans 12:10-18 about how God's people should treat each other in response to the grace they've been shown by God.

“Love one another deeply as brothers and sisters. Take the lead in honoring one another. Do not lack diligence in zeal; be fervent in the Spirit; serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope; be patient in affliction; be persistent in prayer. Share with the saints in their needs; pursue hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice; weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud; instead, associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own estimation. Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Give careful thought to do what is honorable in everyone’s eyes. If possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone” - Romans 12:10-18

Life as a follower of Jesus isn’t for spectators! It’s a way of life that impacts every moment of every day for the rest of our lives as we serve God by wisely sharing our time and our resources with the right attitude.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

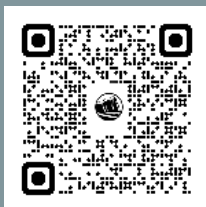
1

Passages like Romans 12 explain how God calls His people to love and sacrificially serve each other. Note ways Paul calls Jesus-followers to do that in these verses. Which ones come naturally to you and which could currently use more attention in your life?

2

Serving on a Team at Black Rock is a great way to live out the actions and attitudes described above. If you’re not already on a Serving Team, there’s a place for you at [blackrock.org/serve!](http://blackrock.org/serve)

Scan the QR code for a quick video about how the Great Commission should impact how we live as the church.



JESUS OUR HOPE

Have you ever wondered why Jesus-Followers gather together to worship? Have you wondered why we sing songs, listen to sermons, fellowship with one another, and everything else that comes with being in church on a Sunday?

The answer is simple: It's all about Jesus. He is the object of our worship, the reason why we gather. Jesus is our focus whenever we lift our voices, direct our attention, fellowship with one another, offer our tithes, and pray. Philippians 2:8-11 says,

“And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

We worship Jesus because of what He has done for us on the cross. In His obedience to God the Father, Jesus paid the penalty for our sin by dying on the cross. When we put our faith in Jesus, we receive salvation and new life. As we gather each Sunday, it's to be reminded of all that Jesus did for us on the cross.

One day, the people of God will no longer gather as different church families spread across the globe. Jesus is coming back to bring his people to our eternal home - a new heaven and a new earth. The last chapter of the Bible describes it like this,

“Then the angel of the Lord showed me the river of the water of life, clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the city's main street. The tree of life was on each side of the river, bearing twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree are for healing the nations, and there will no longer be any curse. The throne of God

and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will worship him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. Night will be no more; people will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, because the Lord God will give them light, and they will reign forever and ever.” - Revelation 22:1-5

While we worship Jesus for all that He did for us on the cross, we also worship Jesus for the hope that we have in Him. We have the blessed assurance that we will see Jesus face to face. On that day, every tear will be wiped away. Every reason for mourning, every pain, every toil and hardship, they will all pass away.

This is the hope we have in Jesus.

We are the people of God who make up Black Rock Church. For 175 years we have been gathering each week to worship together and connect our stories to the story God has been telling since the very beginning of time. As we repeat this practice of worship week by week, remember to fix your eyes on Jesus. Remember the new life of salvation we have because of His sacrifice. Remember the assurance of what is to come. Remember Jesus.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1

When you're worshipping in a service at church what other things are competing for your attention? What routines/boundaries/habits could help your attention focus on Jesus?

2

What does Jesus' sacrifice mean to you? Do those who know you best know what Jesus means to you because you've shared your faith story with them?

The lyrics to the song, "In Christ Alone" beautifully express why Jesus alone is our hope and worthy of worship. Scan the QR code to listen, and worship him today!



This devotional is a quick glimpse into the story of God's people told throughout Scripture. We hope it inspires you to dig deeper into God's Word, to know more of the God who has been calling a people to Himself since the beginning of time. The plan below is a basic 30-day Bible reading plan that highlights more key passages in understanding the grand story of the Bible.

30-DAY BIBLE READING PLAN

- Genesis 1:1-25
- Genesis 2:4-24
- Genesis 3:1-24
- Genesis 6:1-9:17
- Genesis 12:1-8, 15:1-6
- Genesis 22:1-19
- Exodus 12:1-28
- Exodus 20:1-21
- Leviticus 4:1-35
- Psalm 23:1-6
- Isaiah 53
- Luke 1:26-38, 2:1-20
- Matthew 3; John 1:29-34
- Matthew 4:1-11
- Mark 4:35-41
- Mark 5:1-20
- John 6:1-37
- Luke 5:17-26
- John 4:1-26, 39-42
- Luke 10:25-37; 15:11-32
- Luke 18:9-14; John 16:24
- Matthew 6:1-34
- John 11:1-44
- Matthew 20:20-28
- Matthew 26:26-30
- John 18:1-19:16
- Luke 23:32-56
- Luke 24:1-35
- Luke 24:36-53
- John 3:1-21, Matt 7:13-14

