

50 Days to Vitality

*An EPC Prayer Guide for
Revitalizing our Church*



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50 Days to Vitality

Your church has entered the ministry of ***G.O.1–Building Your Church’s Great Commission Matrix***, choosing to shape the future by discerning God’s vision and taking the spiritual and strategic steps needed to make that future come to pass. G.O.1 is a holistic process that will engage the church’s people in many ways over a significant period of time. In fact, this is not an isolated event in the life of the church, but the establishing of a culture, a lifestyle, of vitality that will enable your church to begin building a ministry of health, growth and multiplication. Vitality is a ministry way of life.

50 Days to Vitality calls for a personal commitment on your part to embrace the process fully and to prepare yourself to play a vital role in moving your church forward toward God’s future. It’s important for you to be connected spiritually and strategically to all that will emerge as G.O.1 unfolds. Fifty days (7 x 7 + 1) have been carefully selected to help form the foundation, spanning eight Sundays, a total of seven weeks and a day.

Each of the seven weeks focuses on a particular emphasis that is seminal to the G.O.1 process. On Sunday of each week, a Thought for the Week is presented to establish that week’s emphasis. Monday through Friday feature a Thought for the Day, short Scripture readings accompanied by devotional commentary that connect thematically with that same emphasis. On Saturday of each week, directed prayer is offered, seeking God’s guidance and power as the ministry of the church gains G.O.1 momentum. A Final Thought is presented on Day 50 that serves as a climax to ***50 Days to Vitality*** and as a launch pad to all that follows. An 8-Sunday preaching series throughout would strengthen the effort.

God the Father Almighty and your church deserve your focus and your commitment to ***50 Days to Vitality***. Commit today to give your fifty days.

Week 1: A Study of Nehemiah 1: Vitality Begins – Nehemiah 1:1-11

Week 2: A Study of the Disciplines of Great Commission Churches – Selected Texts

Week 3: A Study of the Great Promise of Matthew 16:13-18

Week 4: A Study of the Great Commandment of Matthew 22:34-40

Week 5: A Study of the Great Commission of Matthew 28:16-20

Week 6: A Study of the Great Witness of Acts 1:8 (6-11)

Week 7: A Study of the Great Mission of Luke 19:10 (1-10) and the Great Multiplication of Matthew 24:14

Week 1: Days 1-7

A Study of Nehemiah 1 – Vitality Begins

Day 1 (Sunday)

Title: Vitality Begins

Text: Nehemiah 1:1-11

Thought for the Week:

Nehemiah, serving a foreign king in Babylon, receives a report concerning the post-exilic Jews back in Jerusalem. The report is not good and pictures the people of God, and His holy city, in a state of decline. Nehemiah's response to this assessment is to spend a number of days weeping, mourning, fasting and praying. Surely this is where church vitality begins.

The portions of Nehemiah's prayer reported to us in Scripture are most instructive. He acknowledges God as the steadfast keeper of the covenant. It's apparent that the condition of the people, the church, is not God's fault. Rather, he recognizes that the cause of this condition rests with the people themselves and even with Nehemiah himself. He intercedes with repentance and confession, reminding God of His promise to restore the people if they return to Him. God truly needs no such reminding, but perhaps Nehemiah reminds himself and the people in order to get his and their feet back on solid ground.

Finally, Nehemiah prays that God will grant him mercy in the eyes of the king. Why? Because Nehemiah has heard the call of God to do something about the condition of the people back in Jerusalem, and the city, himself, but he cannot begin such a campaign without the permission and blessing of the foreign king whom he serves as the valued cupbearer. Nehemiah's prayer will be answered, Jerusalem will be rebuilt, and the people of God, the remnant, will be restored.

When the leaders and congregations of our current reclining and declining churches begin to weep, mourn, fast and pray for the mercy of God, and seek God's vision for their churches, they, like Jerusalem and its people, will be rebuilt and restored. This is the heart of church vitality.

Pray through this Thought for the Week as the Spirit leads you in your heart and in your mind.

Your Thoughts:

Day 2 (Monday)

Title: Reality Check

Text: Nehemiah 1:1-3

Thought for the Day:

Nehemiah, a Jew in exile, has risen to a position of authority in the capital city of Susa in the service of a foreign king, Artaxerxes I. Deeply concerned about his people, the Jews, and their city, Jerusalem, he has occasion to conduct an assessment. The news is not good. The

people are described as being in great trouble and shame, and Jerusalem is virtually in ruins with its defensive wall broken down and its gates destroyed by fire.

Nehemiah has conducted a reality check and the reality is sobering. The people of God are struggling and the city that is the heart of their religious life, the home of the temple, is in a very weak and declined state. As the book of Nehemiah unfolds, we see that Nehemiah is deeply concerned at the condition of the “church” and that he moves to take action.

What about your church? What does a reality check reveal about the condition of the people of God who are the congregation and about the condition of your church’s ministry? Are the wall and gates down? Is the ministry in a weakened or declined state? Are you concerned? Are you ready to move into action?

Pray through this Thought for the Day as the Spirit leads you in your heart and in your mind.

Your Thoughts:

Day 3 (Tuesday)

Title: The Beginning of Vitalization

Text: Nehemiah 1:4

Thought for the Day:

Nehemiah’s response to the reality check is intriguing and instructive, giving us a look at how vitalization truly begins. Nehemiah is deeply moved by the news that his people are struggling and that his city is weak and more vulnerable than ever before, and he chooses to take action. What action! We are told in the text that for some days he wept and mourned, and that he continued fasting and praying. This is as clear a picture of spiritual renewal as we will ever see.

In our day, the thoughts of church people often turn to strategic responses to struggle and decline. The solution is about methods or programs, we think, so we attend a conference or seminar, or we get the latest book on renewal or revitalization. As important as these might be in finding a comprehensive solution, the starting point is spiritual. When the leaders and congregations of our struggling churches seriously turn to God as they weep, mourn, fast and pray, churches will truly begin to vitalize.

Pray through this Thought for the Day as the Spirit leads you in your heart and in your mind.

Your Thoughts:

Day 4 (Wednesday)

Title: How Could We Let This Happen?

Text: Nehemiah 1:5-7

Thought for the Day:

During his days of weeping and mourning, Nehemiah fasted and prayed. These verses give us a glimpse into the prayers of Nehemiah. Note that Nehemiah doesn't shake his fist at God and shout, "How could you let this happen?" Instead, he realizes that the people of Israel have brought this upon themselves. His prayer acknowledges that God is the one who keeps the covenant and steadfast love of his people. He is one who is consistent and reliable. It is they, and Nehemiah himself, who have sinned and acted corruptly. Rather than seeing the Israelites as victims, he realizes that they, and he, are in fact perpetrators as he takes full responsibility.

If our churches are struggling, where should we place the responsibility? Has God failed us and not fulfilled His promises to us? Should He take responsibility for our weakened state? Or should we recognize our complicity and hold ourselves accountable? Perhaps today is the day to enter into true repentance, confession and intercession, following the example of Nehemiah.

Pray through this Thought for the Day as the Spirit leads you in your heart and in your mind.

Your Thoughts:

Day 5 (Thursday)

Title: The Promise of Return

Text: Nehemiah 1:8-10

Thought for the Day:

Who is Nehemiah really calling to remember the word of God? Though he seems to be reminding God of God's own word, could it be that he is actually reminding himself and his fellow Israelites of God's promise of restoration. Though God's love is unconditional, there is a contingency attached to the return of God's promise. The people are to return to Him and keep His commandments. With God's power and redemptive hand, it is never too late.

If God's mighty and redemptive hand is not clearly seen in the ministry of our churches, could it be that we have become complacent or perhaps self-centered to the point that we have sinned, that we have missed God's intent for our churches. But it is not too late if we return to Him and follow His leading as our churches become what He intended.

Pray through this Thought for the Day as the Spirit leads you in your heart and in your mind.

Your Thoughts:

Day 6 (Friday)

Title: His Vision – Our Success

Text: Nehemiah 1:11

Thought for the Day:

Nehemiah prays for success and prays for mercy in the eyes of the king. Why? Apparently during his days of weeping, mourning, fasting and praying Nehemiah has been led by God to an important realization. "Someone must do something about the state of God's people and His holy city, and that someone is me!" But Nehemiah is in no position simply to pull up stakes in the capital city of Susa and head to Jerusalem. He serves as cupbearer to the king, a vital position where he stands between the king and possible death by assassins as the taste-tester of all that might enter the mouth of the king. He cannot even speak to the king without invitation as to speak without invitation is a capital offense. So, Nehemiah turns to the true power, the power of God.

God has a vision of a restored Jerusalem and He has called Nehemiah to be one of His restoration leaders. God's vision, intently bathed in prayer and godly action, is our success. Could it be that God has a vision of a restored 21st century church? Could it be that He is calling you to serve Him in that restoration? May He grant you success!

Pray through this Thought for the Day as the Spirit leads you in your heart and in your mind.

Your Thoughts:

Day 7 (Saturday)

Theme: Vital Prayer

Today is a day for prayers of repentance, confession and intercession. Go to God in prayer with the first chapter of Nehemiah as your inspiration. Seek the Keeper of the Covenant and the Giver of Vision for all that He has in store for you and your church. Pray for mercy and pray for the success of Great Commission vitality in your church.

Your Thoughts:

Week 2: Days 8-14

A Study of the Disciplines of Great Commission Churches

Day 8 (Sunday)

Title: The Disciplines of a Great Commission Church

Text: Romans 12:1-2

Thought for the Week:

The cost of discipleship is explained by the instruction of Jesus to take up one's cross and follow Him (Matthew 10:38; Luke 9:23). What does it mean to take up one's cross and follow Him? The cross of Jesus is the cross of sacrifice, the cross of giving oneself away for the sake of others. As followers of Christ, we, too, must give ourselves away; as Jesus prayed in the garden, "not as I will, but as you will" (Matthew 26:39).

A good place to begin taking up one's cross is Romans 12:1-2. The Apostle Paul tells us that each of us is to become a *living sacrifice*. Unlike Jesus, we might not be called upon to die physically for our faith, but we are called to die to our own volition, or will, as we live for the will of God. Paul refers to this sacrificial living as holy and acceptable to God. In fact, he describes this way of living as our spiritual worship.

Further, Paul informs that living the Christian life calls for nonconformity to the world and transformation of the mind. How? We are transformed as we fill our minds with the word of God. In so doing, we are able to discern God's will.

The practice of sacrificial living, engaged consistently, leads to healthy spiritual disciplines. These habits, while healthy for us individually, are also healthy for us collectively as the church. Great Commission Churches reflect certain habitual practices:

Great Commission Churches Pray with Power – the Discipline of Preemptive Prayer

Great Commission Churches Build on Bible Basics – the Discipline of Basic Bible

Great Commission Churches Raise the Bar – the Discipline of Cost Commitment

Great Commission Churches Reach the Lost -the Discipline of Missional Multiplication

Pray through this Thought for the Week as the Spirit leads you in your heart and in your mind.

Your Thoughts:

Day 9 (Monday)

Title: A Picture of Vision Fulfilled

Text: Nehemiah 6:15-16

Thought for the Day:

There was much to do in restoring God's people and His holy city of Jerusalem, perhaps none more strategic and symbolic as the rebuilding of the wall. This would be strategic because the wall would provide protection, and this would be symbolic because the people of

God would show their enemies, and themselves, that they were making progress in gaining strength and stability. Rebuilding the wall would also have spiritual impact as it would demonstrate that the hand of God was blessing them and their vision of restoration.

Nehemiah 6:15 reveals that the wall was in fact rebuilt and goes on in verse 6:16 to reveal the impact that this accomplishment had on their enemies. As your church embraces Great Commission Vitality, who and what are your “enemies?” How will you know when your “wall” is rebuilt? What will be the evidence of “the help of your God?”

Pray through this Thought for the Day as the Spirit leads you in your heart and in your mind.

Your Thoughts:

Day 10 (Tuesday)

Title: Great Commission Churches Pray with Power – PREEMPTIVE PRAYER

Text: Philippians 4:4-7

Thought for the Day:

In this passage of Scripture, from Paul’s letter to the Christians in Philippi, he tells them to rejoice always and to pray about everything. More than a doctrinal statement, this is a recipe for how to live life in Christ; always rejoicing; always praying. The vital Great Commission church is a praying church, relying on the power of prayer to tap into and release the power of God so that God will accomplish his purposes in our churches and in our lives. Prayer is not to be about religious rites or practices, but is to be heartfelt communication to and from our living God.

Submit all matters of life and ministry to God in prayer, expecting Him to hear, expecting Him to speak, and expecting Him to act. He will hear, He will speak, and He will act, and in so doing your church will be vitalized, and those both inside and outside of the church will be blessed.

Pray through this Thought for the Day as the Spirit leads you in your heart and in your mind.

Your Thoughts:

Day 11 (Wednesday)

Title: Great Commission Churches Build on Bible Basics – BASIC BIBLE

Text: 2 Timothy 3:16-17

Thought for the Day:

We live in a time when many, perhaps most, Christians do not have a full understanding of Scripture, perhaps having never read completely through the Bible. And yet we speak doctrinally of the Bible as being the very Word of God, a word that is the basis of what we believe. The vital Great Commission Church builds its ministry, and its congregation, on the Word of God, being certain to proclaim that word thoroughly and accurately. It is vital that we know what God says in His word and what God means by what He says. This requires a study of all that is contained in the sixty-six books of the Bible.

2 Timothy 3:16-17 informs us that all Scripture is useful, not just highlights of Scripture, or favorite passages, but ALL Scripture. From cover to cover, from Genesis to Revelation, it is all God's word and all must be read and studied. Then and only then are we fully competent and equipped.

Pray through this Thought for the Day as the Spirit leads you in your heart and in your mind.

Your Thoughts:

Day 12 (Thursday)

Title: Great Commission Churches Raise the Bar – COST COMMITMENT

Text: Luke 14:25-27

Thought for the Day:

These verses are surely strange and cryptic. Does Jesus really want and expect us to hate our own father, mother, spouse, children, brothers, sisters, and even our own lives? Not in the sense that we normally assign to hate. Jesus is saying that our love of Him, and our commitment to Him because of that love, should be so intense and focused that any love and commitment to others would be so much less by comparison that we might characterize that lesser love and commitment as hate. It is a matter of priority, and who is to get the highest priority in our lives? Jesus is to be our ultimate priority, above all others, even or especially ourselves.

We are encouraged and challenged to bear our own crosses and to follow Him. Our crosses are different than His cross, and my cross might be different than yours. But there is a commonality and that is sacrifice. We are to love Jesus Christ so much that we are willing to give Him our ultimate commitment by living sacrificial lives. Imagine a church where sacrificial commitment is a common characteristic. That's a vital Great Commission Church.

Pray through this Thought for the Day as the Spirit leads you in your heart and in your mind.

Your Thoughts:

Day 13 (Friday)

Title: Great Commission Churches Reach the Lost – MISSIONAL MULTIPLICATION

Text: Luke 15:21-24

Thought for the Day:

Chapter 15 of the Gospel of Luke provides three teachings by Jesus concerning finding things, and people, that are lost. First there is the shepherd who finds his lost sheep, then there is the woman who finds her lost coin, and finally there is the father who finds his lost son. In every case, there is celebration and Jesus makes it clear that there is rejoicing in heaven whenever someone comes to faith, whenever someone who is lost is found.

These and other Scriptures press the point again and again of how important lost people are to God, and how important it is for the people of the church to make God’s priorities our priorities. Yet, many churches go through the motions of ministry year after year reaching few if any with the saving message of the gospel, and if they grow at all they grow by transfer and not by professions of faith. Sadly, many churches are content with this ineffective witness, but the vital Great Commission Church reaches the lost.

Pray through this Thought for the Day as the Spirit leads you in your heart and in your mind.

Your Thoughts:

Day 14 Saturday:

Theme: Vital Prayer

Today is a day for prayers for the leaders and members of your church to establish or build on the Disciplines of Great Commission Churches. When these four habitual patterns of praying with power, building on Bible basics, raising the bar of commitment and reaching the lost are clearly present in your church, vitality will result. Pray for God to make these behaviors characteristic of the people of your church, and pray for the success of Great Commission vitality in your church.

Your Thoughts:

Week 3: Days 15-21

A Study of the Great Promise – Matthew 16:13-18

Day 15 (Sunday)

Title: The Great Promise

Text: Matthew 16:13-18

Thought for the Week:

Salvation rests squarely on the identity of Jesus Christ. Jesus asks, “Who do the people say that I am?” Then He turns to the more pointed question, “Who do *you* say that I am?” Simon responds, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

With the identity of Jesus clearly established, Jesus promises that upon *this* rock, He will build his church. What rock? Simon, who will become known as Peter, a name derived from the Greek word for rock, will play a vital role, but he is not *the* rock. That rock is the revelation by God the Father through God the Spirit that God the Son, Jesus, is the Christ, the Son of the living God.

The promise is two-fold; first, that the true identity of Jesus will be revealed again and again, and, second, that as each man, woman or child comes into knowledge of this revelation, the church will be built. The Vital Church is about the ministry of proclaiming that Jesus is the Christ to those who have yet to come to Him as Lord and Savior.

Pray through this Thought for the Week as the Spirit leads you in your heart and in your mind.

Your Thoughts:

Day 16 (Monday)

Title: What Do They Say?

Text: Matthew 16:13-14

Thought for the Day:

Caesarea Philippi was named for Caesar. How ironic that Jesus, God the Son who has become a man, enters the region named for Caesar, the man who desired to be god. The identity of Jesus is the subject of conversation as He asks His disciples to tell Him what the people are saying about Him. Who do the people think that Jesus is? The response of the disciples is that the people are saying that He is John the Baptist, or Elijah, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets. It’s interesting to note that the people, though not understanding fully, knew that Jesus was not just an ordinary man. They knew there was something special, something anointed and powerful about Him.

Is the uniqueness of Jesus Christ clearly visible in the life of your church? Is the power of Christ showing itself in the everyday ministries of the church, or is the anointing of Jesus as the Messiah more doctrinal than practical? If we were to ask the people who live near your church who Jesus is, based on what they have seen of Him through your church, what would they say?

Pray through this Thought for the Day as the Spirit leads you in your heart and in your mind.

Your Thoughts:

Day 17 (Tuesday)

Title: What Do You Say?

Text: Matthew 16:15-16

Thought for the Day:

The ultimate question that we all must answer is the question that Jesus puts to His disciples. He asks, "Who do *you* say that I am?" The answer to this question is the key to eternal life. To know by faith that Jesus is the Son of God, the Savior of the world, the One who died as the penalty for sin and who was resurrected in power over death is to have eternal life. To know Him as anything else, or not to know Him at all, is to have eternal death. Jesus is the dividing line. Belief in Him leads to life, while disbelief leads to death.

Are you clear in what you believe about Jesus Christ? Does your church make it clear to those who live in the surrounding neighborhoods?

Pray through this Thought for the Day as the Spirit leads you in your heart and in your mind.

Your Thoughts:

Day 18 (Wednesday)

Title: Which Came First?

Text: Matthew 16:17

Thought for the Day:

When asked the question, "Who do you say that I am?" Simon has correctly answered that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God. Jesus then tells Simon (Peter) that he is blessed. So, which came first, the right answer or the blessing? Did Simon receive the blessing because he answered correctly or did he answer correctly because he had been blessed? The verse goes on to show that Simon answered correctly because he had been blessed in the form of a revelation from God the Father that Jesus is the Christ. Without this revelation, Simon would have been left to speculate in his own strength, but with the revelation from God the Father through God the Spirit that God the Son is the Christ, he was able to answer correctly and

truthfully concerning the identity of Jesus.

If you were asked the question, "Who do you say that Jesus is?" what would you answer? How do you know that you would answer correctly? Are you prepared to let others in on what you know about Jesus?

Pray through this Thought for the Day as the Spirit leads you in your heart and in your mind.

Your Thoughts:

Day 19 (Thursday)

Title: Jesus Will!

Text: Matthew 16:18a; 1 Peter 2:5-8

Thought for the Day:

Jesus will do what? He will build his church on the rock. Who or what is the rock upon which the church of Jesus will be built? The text suggests that Simon, now known as Peter or *Petros*, a derivative of the Greek word *petra*, meaning rock, is in fact the rock upon whom the church will be built. True, Peter will play a significant role in the founding of the church, but he is, after all, just a man. The true rock is the revelation by God the Father through God the Spirit that God the Son is the Christ, the Savior of the world. Every time a man, woman or child on this planet receives that revelation, that blessing from God, the church is built, one person; one soul at a time.

Peter, in his letter of 1 Peter, uses much stone imagery, making sure to point out to disciples then and now that Jesus is the cornerstone of the church, the One of whom the prophets spoke. The church is not a physical house but a spiritual house built with living stones.

Pray through this Thought for the Day as the Spirit leads you in your heart and in your mind.

Your Thoughts:

Day 20 (Friday)

Title: Hell Will Not!

Text: Matthew 16:18b; 1 John 4:1-4

Thought for the Day:

The church is the house of life while hell is the house of death, seeking to destroy all that is good and righteous. Though death is well represented in this world through sin and the mortality that was birthed from sin, death will not ultimately prevail. The attacks of hell on the true church will be defended, and the attack on hell itself will prevail through Christ.

As the Apostle John tells us in 1 John 4, the spirit of the antichrist is in the world already, but “he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.” Through Christ, the church, the body of true believers, will overcome and prevail.

Pray through this Thought for the Day as the Spirit leads you in your heart and in your mind.

Your Thoughts:

Day 21 (Saturday)

Theme: Vital Prayer

Today is a day for prayers for the work of the Holy Spirit in your church and community as He brings the revelation that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God. Pray for God to bless the ministry of outreach and evangelism in your church, bringing many to a saving relationship with Jesus Christ. And continue to pray for the success of Great Commission vitality in your church.

Your Thoughts:

Week 4: Days 22-28

A Study of the Great Commandment – Matthew 22:34-40

Day 22 (Sunday)

Title: The Great Commandment

Text: Matthew 22:34-40

Thought for the Week:

Jesus summarizes the Ten Commandments by giving two: Love the Lord your God with everything that you are and everything that you have, and love your neighbor as yourself. These two in combination are commonly known in church circles as the Great Commandment. If you've been around the church any time at all you have probably heard the Great Commandment mentioned many times.

Doctrinally, all Christian churches acknowledge the Great Commandment and many describe themselves as Great Commandment churches. Unfortunately, right doctrine (orthodoxy) does not always lead to right behavior (orthopraxis). The real issue in regard to the Great Commandment is the issue of application. How is uncompromising and wholehearted love for God and love for neighbor being expressed in your church? What churches say, or print on the front of their bulletins or in values or mission statements, is not really what the Great Commandment is all about. It's about love in action. Vital churches live the Great Commandment. They don't just talk about it.

Pray through this Thought for the Week as the Spirit leads you in your heart and in your mind.

Your Thoughts:

Day 23 (Monday)

Title: Putting Jesus to the Test

Text: Matthew 22:34-35; Malachi 3:6-10

Thought for the Day:

The Sadducees and the Pharisees, the religious leaders of the Hebrew community, opposed Jesus throughout His ministry, and the incident recorded in this passage in Matthew is no exception. A lawyer, or scribe, was an expert in the law of the Israelites which was in fact the law of God, contained in the writings of Moses and the Prophets. This lawyer was not seeking information but was seeking to test Jesus in the hope that He would fail in the eyes of the people. How foolish to test the Son of God in this way.

There is a proper way to test God, as seen in Malachi 3. God, speaking through the prophet Malachi, invites such testing, revealing that the one who tests God by keeping God's statutes will be one who is blessed.

Pray through this Thought for the Day as the Spirit leads you in your heart and in your mind.

Your Thoughts:

Day 24 (Tuesday)

Title: A Great & First Commandment

Text: Matthew 22:36-38; Deuteronomy 6:4-6

Thought for the Day:

Jesus is asked to identify the great commandment in the Law and Jesus answers. Essentially, Jesus quotes Deuteronomy 6:4-6 known as the Shema. This instruction to love God with all that you are and all that you have has been the basis of the relationship between God and His people for thousands of years. Why? When someone makes loving God the priority in life, all else falls in place in proper perspective and in proper emphasis.

This vertical love toward God should be clearly evident in the life of the believer and in the life of the church. How will we as individuals demonstrate our love for God? How will we as a church demonstrate our love for God, not in what we say, but in what we do?

Pray through this Thought for the Day as the Spirit leads you in your heart and in your mind.

Your Thoughts:

Day 25 (Wednesday)

Title: A Great & Second Commandment

Text: Matthew 22:39; Leviticus 19:17-18

Thought for the Day:

Jesus continues to answer the question by identifying a second great commandment. This instruction to love our neighbor as we love ourselves has been God's basis for the relationship between people for thousands of years. Imagine a world where this commandment truly held sway.

This horizontal love finds its biblical roots in Leviticus 19, but finds its theological and moral roots in the very character of God. How will we as individuals demonstrate our love for

neighbor? How will we as a church demonstrate our love for neighbor, not in what we say, but in what we do?

Pray through this Thought for the Day as the Spirit leads you in your heart and in your mind.

Your Thoughts:

Day 26 (Thursday)

Title: Citizens in Christ

Text: Matthew 22:40; Ephesians 2:19-21

Thought for the Day:

Jesus indicates at the close of this passage in Matthew that all the Law and the Prophets, in other words, all of what we know as the Old Testament, depend on the two commandments to love God and love neighbor. In essence, these two commandments summarize the Ten Commandments found in Exodus 20.

In Ephesians 2, the Apostle Paul instructs that the church, the household of God, is built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, which is the foundation of Scripture. And what is the foundation of this *foundation*? It's the love of God and the love of neighbor. When we and our churches are built on this foundation, we become fellow citizens with the people of God, the house of God that is being built, with Jesus Himself as the cornerstone.

Pray through this Thought for the Day as the Spirit leads you in your heart and in your mind.

Your Thoughts:

Day 27 (Friday)

Title: A New Covenant

Text: Jeremiah 31:31-34

Thought for the Day:

The Law of God is the foundation of His relationship with His people, summarized in the love of God and the love of neighbor. In the original expression of this covenant, this relationship, the law was written on tablets of stone and obedience to this *external* law was taught and expected.

In Jeremiah 31, God speaks through the prophet of a new covenant that will come one day, a covenant in which the law is written on the heart, an *internal* law that guides the believer's relationship to God and obedience to his law. That day has come in the person of Jesus Christ, and the writing of this law on the heart is being accomplished by the Holy Spirit, poured out upon believers soon after the ascension of Christ. The follower of Christ who loves God with all his heart, loves with a heart that carries the inscription of the very law of God.

Pray through this Thought for the Day as the Spirit leads you in your heart and in your mind.

Your Thoughts:

Day 28 (Saturday)

Theme: Vital Prayer

Today is a day for prayers of love, prayers that we would truly love God and love our neighbors, vertical and horizontal love that has no limits and no conditions. Pray that the law of God that is written on our hearts would truly have dominance in our lives, and that through our love of God and neighbor God would be pleased and that many would be brought into the kingdom. And continue to pray for the success of Great Commission vitality in your church.

Your Thoughts:

Week 5: Days 29-35

A Study of the Great Commission – Matthew 28:16-20

Day 29 (Sunday)

Title: The Great Commission

Text: Matthew 28:16-20

Thought for the Week:

The disciples had been directed to go to Galilee following the death of Jesus, and it was there, on a mountainside, that He found them. Jesus was about to ascend into heaven, but before His miraculous exit, He would leave them final instructions.

He reminded them that the authority under which He served as God the Son was authority granted Him by God the Father, and in this same authority He commissioned them for ministry. They were to go and make disciples of all nations, not just the Jews, not just those in and around their homes, but they were to take the gospel message of the person and work of Jesus Himself to the whole world. As those from the nations heard this message, the Holy Spirit would reveal that Jesus is the Christ and the church would be built.

This Great Commission was guaranteed by the promise from Jesus that He would be with them forever, that they would never be alone in their ministry of making disciples. To be a disciple is to make other disciples, not just to continue to be taught, or continue to teach already-made disciples. The vital church makes new disciples, living the Great Commission in the authority of Jesus Christ.

Pray through this Thought for the Week as the Spirit leads you in your heart and in your mind.

Your Thoughts:

Day 30 (Monday)

Title: Worshipper or Doubter?

Text: Matthew 28:16-17

Thought for the Day:

Following the resurrection of Jesus, the disciples numbered eleven as Judas was no longer with them. They had been instructed that Jesus would come to them in Galilee, so to Galilee they went. Did they really believe that Jesus would be raised from the dead and that He would come to them, or was Galilee simply home, a logical place to go following the death of their leader? Consider the inner turmoil, the inner debate, that must have been going on in the minds and hearts of the eleven. They were, after all, just people like you and me.

So, they went to the familiar mountain site to which they had been directed and Jesus appeared, just as He said He would. Some worshipped, some doubted, and some probably worshipped and doubted at the same time. Where are you, where is your church, in the tug of war between worship and doubt? When Jesus does what He says He will do, are you surprised; do you doubt? Or do you worship?

Pray through this Thought for the Day as the Spirit leads you in your heart and in your mind.

Your Thoughts:

Day 31 (Tuesday)

Title: The Authorized Version

Text: Matthew 28:18; Daniel 7:13-14

Thought for the Day:

Perhaps you've seen a King James Bible that carried the description *The Authorized Version* printed on the title page. Jesus is God the Son, the Person of the Trinity that came as a man to dwell among us. He informs that all authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Him. By whom? He has been given this authority by God the Father. He is The Authorized Version.

A glimpse of this authority is seen in Daniel 7:13-14. Jesus Christ is the One who came and who was given dominion over all things, an everlasting dominion. He is establishing a kingdom that cannot be destroyed.

Pray through this Thought for the Day as the Spirit leads you in your heart and in your mind.

Your Thoughts:

Day 32 (Wednesday)

Title: What Part of "GO" Do We Not Understand?

Text: Matthew 28:19; Isaiah 6:1-8

Thought for the Day:

The clear command from Jesus Christ, the One who has been given all authority in heaven and on earth, is to GO! And yet most of the people of God who populate our churches go nowhere. We STAY in our churches, hold our services, and run our programs, mostly for ourselves. Already-Christian people might transfer into our churches if our worship services and programs catch their attention, but rare is the church that is truly making new disciples and baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Consider the call of Isaiah in Isaiah 6:1-8. The Lord asks the question, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" Isaiah answers, "Here am I! Send me." In Matthew 28, Jesus is not

asking “Whom shall I send?” He is saying, “Go!” Why are we still sitting in the comfort and safety of our pews? What part of “GO” do we not understand?

Pray through this Thought for the Day as the Spirit leads you in your heart and in your mind.

Your Thoughts:

Day 33 (Thursday)

Title: Learning vs. Living

Text: Matthew 28:20a; 1 John 2:1-6

Thought for the Day:

The Great Commission says that we should teach. Teach what? Learn what? Often even seasoned Christians respond by saying that we are to teach and learn all that Jesus has commanded. That makes sense and even sounds correct, but that is not what the Great Commission is saying. We are told in this commandment to teach disciples how to *observe* or *obey* all that Jesus commanded. Knowledge and obedience are two very different things. It's not enough to learn the commandments; rather, we are to live them.

1 John 2:1-6 gives us a glimpse of what it means to obey, to live the commandments of Jesus Christ. Keeping, or obeying, His commandments is an indication that we are truly following Him, following the path that He walked. In this obedience, says 1 John 2, the love of God is perfected and is an indication that we are living *in* Him, meaning that we are walking His walk in a right relationship with Him. The priority of the Great Commission is to go beyond learning into living all that Jesus commanded.

Pray through this Thought for the Day as the Spirit leads you in your heart and in your mind.

Your Thoughts:

Day 34 (Friday)

Title: Immanuel! God with Us!

Text: Matthew 28:20b; Isaiah 7:14

Thought for the Day:

The Great Commission closes with the guarantee from Jesus that He will always be with us; His presence will always accompany us. This occurs through the agency of the Holy Spirit who lives in our hearts and is ever-present. In Isaiah 7:14, the prophet Isaiah speaks of the Messiah who will come through virgin birth. His name is to be called Immanuel, meaning *God with us*. Jesus, who is God the Son, was indeed born into space and time and lived as a man among mankind. After Jesus had ascended into heaven, God the Holy Spirit was poured out on the believers and took up residence in the hearts of those who follow Christ. Through the Holy Spirit, then, God continues to be with us.

In the life of the true believer, Christ is present every second of every day. There is no time when the Spirit of Christ through His Holy Spirit is not with us. How might we live, what might we accomplish, by fully grasping the significance of the ever-presence of Immanuel, Jesus Christ who is with us?

Pray through this Thought for the Day as the Spirit leads you in your heart and in your mind.

Your Thoughts:

Day 35 Saturday:

Theme: Vital Prayer

Today is a day for prayers of awareness and relationship, prayers that we would truly grab hold of the promise and significance that every second of every day in the life of the believer is spent in the presence of Christ. Pray that we would understand the responsibility and opportunity that is ours when our lives are lived in the presence of Jesus. How might we live differently in light of this reality? Continue to pray for the success of Great Commission vitality in your church.

Your Thoughts:

Week 6: Days 36-42

A Study of the Great Witness – Acts 1:8

Day 36 (Sunday)

Title: The Great Witness

Text: Acts 1:6-11

Thought for the Week:

Like many of us, the disciples have misunderstood what Jesus is up to and are asking questions that are not relevant to the plan of God. They have wrongly assumed that the kingdom of God so often mentioned by Jesus is an earthly, physical kingdom. Since they are thinking in temporal terms, they question Jesus about the timing of things.

Jesus informs them that these matters are known only to God the Father. In other words, it's none of their business. What is their business is how they will be used when the Holy Spirit is poured out upon them. From that point on, they are to be witnesses to a lost world concerning the gospel message of Jesus. This appears to be the final statement by Jesus before He ascended into heaven. Everything that Jesus said is of great importance, but perhaps none more so than these final words.

At that moment, however, the disciples seem more focused on the ascent of Jesus into heaven than on His last words, but soon the Holy Spirit would come upon them and they would begin their ministries of witness. The vital church bears witness to the work, the person, and the love of Jesus Christ as He brings salvation to the lost through this same Holy Spirit who was poured into the disciples soon after the ascension of Christ.

Pray through this Thought for the Week as the Spirit leads you in your heart and in your mind.

Your Thoughts:

Day 37 (Monday)

Title: Need to Know Basis

Text: Acts 1:6-7

Thought for the Day:

It seems that the disciples have missed the point. Having witnessed the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus, they are putting two and two together and coming up with, well, not four. Having seen what God has done, they are speculating as to what God will do, and this speculation has an agenda, their agenda to restore the physical kingdom, now occupied by the Romans, to Israel. They have misunderstood that the mission of Jesus Christ is to seek and save the lost.

They asked Jesus for a timeline for this restoration, and are promptly told that there is no need for them to have this information as God's timing is His and His alone. Where should the thoughts of the disciples be? What actions should they be undertaking? If it's not their place

to know the times or seasons fixed by the Father, what is it their place to know? What should they be thinking and what should they be doing? What should we be thinking and doing?

Pray through this Thought for the Day as the Spirit leads you in your heart and in your mind.

Your Thoughts:

Day 38 (Tuesday)

Title: The Power of Witness

Text: Acts 1:8

Thought for the Day:

In a court of law there is no more powerful evidence than the testimony of an eyewitness. The first-person account of what was seen and heard carries great weight with judge and jury. It seems that much of the testimony that is coming from the church these days concerning the truth and power of God is not eyewitness testimony but is more often what the court would classify as *hearsay* or third-party testimony. Many Christians are not experiencing the power of God in their lives, but they hear about what God is doing elsewhere. Their doctrine or theology might be very sound, but life in the power of the Holy Spirit is not being realized.

Jesus told the disciples that they would be His witnesses when the Holy Spirit came upon them. This witness would be two-fold. First, there would be the internal witness of living in the Holy Spirit as God's Holy Spirit was resident in their hearts. Second, there would be the witness that they would be to those around them of the power of God in their lives. Are we truly eyewitnesses to the power of God, or are we more likely guilty of hearsay testimony?

Pray through this Thought for the Day as the Spirit leads you in your heart and in your mind.

Your Thoughts:

Day 39 (Wednesday)

Title: Don't Just Stand There

Text: Acts 1:9-11

Thought for the Day:

When Jesus ascended into heaven following His resurrection, it seems quite natural that the disciples would stand gazing into heaven, perhaps watching for the last glimpse of Jesus before He disappeared. How often is it that people see someone taken up into heaven? The text seems to suggest that these men failed to see the two men standing by them in white robes. These *men*, obviously supernatural beings, inform the disciples that Jesus would one day return in the manner in which he was taken.

The disciples appear to have little thought at that moment about the return of Jesus as they were transfixed on the spectacle before them, the Messiah rising to meet the clouds. If they are not to be looking into heaven, what should they be doing? Surely there is a time to gaze at the majesty of Jesus Christ, but the assignment is to be His witnesses.

Pray through this Thought for the Day as the Spirit leads you in your heart and in your mind.

Your Thoughts:

Day 40 (Thursday)

Title: So Help Me God

Text: 1 John 4:13-15

Thought for the Day:

The Apostle John, in his first letter, connects with the promise of Acts 1:8 that we will be Christ’s witnesses when, just as with the disciples, the Holy Spirit comes upon us. He speaks of a reciprocal abiding, or living, as we live in God the Holy Spirit, and God the Holy Spirit lives in us. Because of this mutual abiding, we understand that God the Father sent Jesus, God the Son, to be the Savior of the world.

With this Spirit-enabled understanding, we then become the witnesses spoken of in Acts 1:8, testifying to the objective reality that Jesus is the Son of God and the Savior of the World, and to the subjective reality that Jesus is our Savior, having forgiven us of our sins and having paid for our sins on the cross.

Pray through this Thought for the Day as the Spirit leads you in your heart and in your mind.

Your Thoughts:

Day 41 (Friday)

Title: Witness Protection

Text: Hebrews 12:1-2

Thought for the Day:

What enables us to stay the course over the span of life, remaining faithful as witnesses in the face of the many challenges that come our way? First, there is the testimony of the thousands of witnesses who have gone before us. No, they are not in the bleachers of heaven witnessing what we do here on earth. They have gone to heaven before us as faithful witnesses to the love and power of God. This great cloud of witnesses encourages us to remain faithful on our earthly watch, inspired by their faithfulness and the legacy they have left behind.

Second, and more importantly, we are looking to Jesus, who founded our faith in Him and who perfects our faith through the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit. We are not alone as we endure anything that might be placed before us, and we know that one day we will join those witnesses who have gone ahead, as we all fix our eyes on Jesus.

Pray through this Thought for the Day as the Spirit leads you in your heart and in your mind.

Your Thoughts:

Day 42 (Saturday)

Theme: Vital Prayer

Today is a day for prayers for an empowered witness and testimony, prayers that we would truly offer eyewitness testimony to the power and love of God through Christ. Pray that we would indeed live, or abide, in the power of the Holy Spirit who has come to live in our hearts as true believers. Continue to pray for the success of Great Commission vitality in your church.

Your Thoughts:

Week 7: Days 43-49

A Study of the Great Mission of Luke 19:10 and
A Study of the Great Multiplication of Matthew 24:14

Day 43 (Sunday)

Title: The Great Mission & Multiplication

Text: Luke 19:1-10; Matthew 24:14

Thought for the Week:

What is the mission of the church? Is it reasonable to assume that the mission of the church is tied to the mission of Jesus Christ? Jesus says in Luke 19:10 that he came to seek and to save the lost. He says in Matthew 24:14 that this good news must be proclaimed throughout the whole world.

Surely, then, our mission as the church is to join Jesus in this search and rescue mission, in His mission of proclamation. And yet, year after year, many if not most Christian churches in the United States see virtually no one come to Christ by profession of faith. The search is not truly undertaken so the saving never takes place, the proclamation goes unheard.

A question must be asked: How important are lost people to God? Lost people are so important that Jesus came to earth to seek and to save them, spending His life establishing a seeking church before dying for the sins of the lost so that they could in fact be saved. This is the good news that must reach the whole world.

The vital church is on the search and rescue mission of Jesus, making His priority our priority, making His good news known. How important are lost people to us?

Pray through this Thought for the Week as the Spirit leads you in your heart and in your mind.

Your Thoughts:

Day 44 (Monday)

Title: To See Jesus

Text: Luke 19:1-4

Thought for the Day:

Jesus is passing through Jericho. Why? He is on his way to Jerusalem where He will die on the cross. Surely there is much on His mind. But a small, rather inconsequential man named Zacchaeus wants to see Jesus. Zacchaeus is much reviled by the average person living in Jericho because he is a tax collector, collecting, if not extorting, whatever he can from the Jewish population to give money to their occupiers, the Romans, lining his own pockets along the way.

But on this day, Zacchaeus is not concerned with taxes, fellow Jews or the occupying Romans. He is determined to see Jesus. The text tells us that he ran ahead of Jesus and

climbed a tree, as he was short of stature and couldn't see over the crowd. One wonders how long it has been since Zacchaeus ran or clawed his way to the top of a tree. But on this day, nothing will stop him from seeing Jesus. Why is seeing Jesus so important?

Pray through this Thought for the Day as the Spirit leads you in your heart and in your mind.

Your Thoughts:

Day 45 (Tuesday)

Title: To Be Seen by Jesus

Text: Luke 19:5

Thought for the Day:

It's not so surprising that Zacchaeus wanted to see Jesus. After all, Jesus is the Son of God, the Messiah, the man whose fame had spread throughout the land. This is the Jesus who heals diseases, casts out demons and teaches with such spiritual authority that crowds are amazed.

What is surprising is that Jesus wants to see Zacchaeus, calling him by name and insisting that He not only wants to speak to Zacchaeus, but that He *must* stay at Zacchaeus' home that day. Remarkable! Jesus, on His way to the cross, stops to spend time with a non-descript, disliked man. What is Jesus thinking?

Pray through this Thought for the Day as the Spirit leads you in your heart and in your mind.

Your Thoughts:

Day 46 (Wednesday)

Title: Mixed Reaction

Text: Luke 19:6-7

Thought for the Day:

When Zacchaeus joyfully accepted the invitation to spend time with Jesus, we are told that the crowd *grumbled*. Why? They grumbled because Zacchaeus was a tax collector and he was getting the focus of Jesus' attention. They considered it *unclean* to associate with this Roman collaborator. It seems that their grumbling was directed more toward Jesus than toward Zacchaeus. After all, they had no high expectations of the small tax collector, but they

were indignant that Jesus would single him out and invite Himself to Zacchaeus' home of all disgusting places.

Jesus, however, doesn't live by society's self-prescribed pecking order. He doesn't seek out the self-righteous, but seeks out the unrighteous to bring His righteousness to them. Oddly, Zacchaeus is ahead of the pack, for in seeking Jesus, he has been found.

Pray through this Thought for the Day as the Spirit leads you in your heart and in your mind.

Your Thoughts:

Day 47 (Thursday)

Title: Repentance in Action

Text: Luke 19:8-9

Thought for the Day:

If ever there was a true repentance, it was the repentance of Zacchaeus as he stood in the light that shined on him from Jesus. Convicted to the core, Zacchaeus offers to give half his wealth to the poor and to repay anyone he had defrauded fourfold, restitution that went far beyond conventional standards. Zacchaeus is not making this offer to buy his way into heaven, it's his natural, or perhaps supernatural, response to the movement of Jesus Christ in his life.

Jesus, knowing that true conviction has come to Zacchaeus, announces that salvation has come to the home of Zacchaeus that day. He is a son of Abraham in two ways: first, as an ethnic Jew, but second, and more importantly, as a true believer in Jesus Christ.

Pray through this Thought for the Day as the Spirit leads you in your heart and in your mind.

Your Thoughts:

Day 48 (Friday)

Title: The Mission of Jesus

Text: Luke 19:10; Mathew 24:14; Matthew 9:35-38

Thought for the Day:

Why did Jesus stop on His way to the cross, where He would pay the price for the sins of millions, to spend time with this single, solitary man, Zacchaeus? He stopped because Jesus came to seek and to save the lost, and Zacchaeus was one of the lost. Jesus is on a search and rescue mission. Will we join Him?

There is a sense in which Jesus needs our help. Surely, He is capable as He is God the Son, but God the Father has chosen to accomplish His purpose of growing and building His kingdom through the church, through us. It's through us, the church, that the gospel will be proclaimed throughout the world to the nations.

As we learn in Matthew 9, there is no harvest problem for the harvest is plentiful, but there is a labor shortage. There is no shortage of laborers who *can* work to bring the harvest in, but there is a shortage of laborers who *will*. Will you?

Pray through this Thought for the Day as the Spirit leads you in your heart and in your mind.

Your Thoughts:

Day 49 (Saturday)

Theme: Vital Prayer

Pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send laborers into His harvest. Pray that your church will join Jesus in His mission to seek and to save the lost, that you yourself will join Jesus in His search and rescue mission. Pray that on this very day salvation will come to the houses of your church's community and to homes throughout the world. Continue to pray for the success of Great Commission vitality in your church.

Your Thoughts:

Day 50

Theme: The Vision of God

Day 50 (Sunday)

Title: Behold! The Math (Rhymes with Wrath) of God!

Text: Acts 2:42-47; Revelation 7:9-10

Final Thought:

There are church growth critics in the church today who accuse those who are pressing for growth in the church of being preoccupied with shallow statistics of increased giving and increased attendance, nickels and noses as these stats are sometimes known. Is this a danger? Absolutely! But is God concerned about numbers? Absolutely!

Numerous Scripture passages reveal God's interest in growth, growth that includes numbers. God's covenant that runs the breadth of Scripture tells Adam, Noah, Abraham and many others to be fruitful and multiply. A familiar passage of Scripture in the New Testament, Acts 2:42-47, concludes with the statement that God added to the number daily those who were being saved.

When the Apostle John shares his remarkable vision in the Book of Revelation, he peers into the throne room of heaven and declares:

After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number from every nation, from all tribes and people and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes with palm branches in their hands, and crying with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!"

Vital Great Commission churches are not afraid to measure their effectiveness by the number of people they connect with, the number of people who come to Christ through their ministries, the number of people who grow to maturity through their discipleship ministries, and the number of people who are equipped and sent from the church to minister in the community and beyond. Why? Because behind the numbers are the eternal souls of God's highest creation, the men, women and children who bear His image.

Behold! The Math of God!

Pray through this Final Thought as the Spirit leads you in your heart and in your mind. Amen.

Your Thoughts:

Beyond *50 Days to Vitality*

Now that you have completed your *50 Days to Vitality* you should feel a sense of genuine accomplishment. You are doing your part to serve God and support the vitalization efforts of your church leaders. Hopefully you have learned a great deal in the process and have moved closer in your relationship with God. Well done!

Consider this fifty-day investment analogous to the days that Nehemiah spent in weeping, mourning, fasting and prayer. In other words, this is the starting line of vitalization, not the finish line. Though you rightly should have a sense of accomplishment, you should not have a sense of arrival for the journey to vitalization has just begun.

Continue to work, continue to support, continue to serve, and continue to pray for all that God might do through the ministry of your church in your community at a time when so many in your community need the love of Jesus in their lives.

Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest" (Matthew 9:37-38).

Are you willing to be a laborer in God's harvest? The time is now. Amen!