



5 Daily Devotionals (From October 18th Sermon)

Day 1: What Is Taking First Place?

Key Verse: “You shall have no other gods before me.” — Exodus 20:3 (ESV)

Reflection

It's easy to think of idolatry as worshiping a statue or bowing before a false god. But idols can take much more familiar forms: our relationships, careers, possessions, personal desires, or even our reputation. Anything we place above Jesus can become an idol.

In Matthew 12, the Pharisees struggled with Jesus because He challenged their authority and exposed their sin. Rather than humbly receiving His teaching, they became jealous and resistant. Their desire to protect their position became more important than recognizing the Savior standing right in front of them.

We can fall into the same trap. When God's Word challenges our choices, do we listen and repent, or do we look for reasons to justify ourselves? Sometimes we don't reject Jesus because we doubt His existence. We resist Him because we don't want to surrender something we love.

The good news is that Jesus calls us back, not to condemn us without hope, but to forgive and restore us. He alone deserves first place because He gave His life to make us His own.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, show me the things I have placed above You. Forgive me for the times I have followed my own desires instead of Your Word. Help me turn away from my idols and trust Your goodness. Take first place in my heart, and teach me to live each day in Your grace. Amen.

Day 2: The Sign That Changes Everything

Key Verse: “For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.” — Matthew 12:40 (ESV)

Reflection

The religious leaders demanded a sign from Jesus. Despite His teaching and miracles, they wanted more proof. Jesus pointed them to the sign of Jonah: His own death and resurrection.

The resurrection is the foundation of our faith. Jesus did not come merely to make our lives easier or give us inspiring advice. He came to rescue us from sin, death, and the devil. At the cross, He bore the punishment our sins deserve. On Easter morning, He rose victorious, declaring that sin and death would not have the final word.

We sometimes ask God for signs, especially when life feels uncertain. We want reassurance that He hears our prayers, that He will heal someone we love, or that everything will turn out as we hope. God welcomes our prayers, including our cries for help. Yet our confidence does not rest on receiving the outcome we desire. It rests on what Jesus has already accomplished for us.

When doubts arise, return to the promises of Scripture. Remember your crucified and risen Savior. His resurrection assures you that His promises are trustworthy, even when you cannot see what tomorrow holds.

Prayer

Risen Lord Jesus, thank You for giving Your life for my sins and rising again to defeat death. When I am afraid or uncertain, turn my eyes toward Your cross and empty tomb. Strengthen my faith through Your Word, and help me rest in Your promises. Amen.

Day 3: A Heart That Turns Back to God

Key Verse: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” — Matthew 3:2 (ESV)

Reflection

Jesus reminded His listeners of the people of Nineveh, who repented when Jonah preached God’s warning. Even though Jonah was a reluctant messenger, the people heard the message and turned from their wickedness. Yet Jesus, who was greater than Jonah, stood among people who often refused to listen.

Repentance is more than feeling guilty or promising to do better. It means recognizing our sin, turning away from it, and returning to the Lord for mercy. We cannot earn forgiveness by cleaning up our lives or proving that we are good enough. We come to God with empty hands, trusting the forgiveness Christ won for us.

Sometimes we try to change our behavior through sheer determination. We may break a destructive habit, repair a damaged relationship, or make better choices. These efforts can be valuable, but lasting spiritual renewal is not simply a self-improvement project. We need Jesus at the center of our lives, continually receiving His forgiveness and strength through His Word and the gifts He gives His Church.

When God’s Word exposes something in your life that needs to change, don’t run away from Him. His call to repentance is an invitation to return to the Savior who loves you.

Application

Take a few quiet minutes today to examine your heart. Is there a sin you have been excusing or a command of God you have been resisting? Confess it honestly to the Lord. Then remember His promise of forgiveness in Christ. If you need help, speak with a trusted pastor or Christian friend who can encourage you with God’s Word.

Day 4: Don't Leave Your Heart Empty

Key Verse: “Abide in me, and I in you.” — John 15:4 (ESV)

Reflection

In Matthew 12:43–45, Jesus describes an unclean spirit returning to a house that has been swept clean but left empty. The picture warns us that outward improvement alone cannot solve our deepest spiritual problem. Removing a destructive habit is not the same as receiving the new life Christ gives.

We often focus on what we want to eliminate from our lives. We want to stop worrying, overcome temptation, leave behind unhealthy habits, or become more patient. Those are worthwhile desires. But Christian growth is not merely about removing what is wrong. It is about living in the forgiveness and strength of Jesus.

We cannot defeat sin by relying on our own determination alone. We need God's grace, His Word, and the work of the Holy Spirit. Through Baptism, God has joined us to Christ and given us His promise. As we hear Scripture, receive the Lord's Supper, pray, and gather with fellow believers, God continues to strengthen our faith and direct our lives toward Him.

You may feel spiritually weak today. You may even have stumbled in an area where you thought you had grown stronger. Do not despair. Return to Christ. He is not asking you to save yourself. He is your Savior, and He invites you to abide in Him.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, I confess that I cannot overcome sin by my own strength. Forgive me through Jesus, and keep me close to Your Word. Holy Spirit, strengthen my faith, guard me against temptation, and help me walk in the new life You have given me through Christ. Amen.

Day 5: You Are Part of God's Family

Key Verse: "Whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother."
— Matthew 12:50 (ESV)

Reflection

When Jesus was told that His mother and brothers were waiting to speak with Him, He pointed to His disciples and described them as His family. Jesus was not teaching that our earthly families are unimportant. Rather, He was showing that belonging to God's family is a gift of eternal significance.

Through faith in Jesus, we are brought into a relationship with God that lasts forever. Our identity does not depend on our achievements, popularity, family background, or ability to make ourselves worthy. We belong to Christ because He has redeemed us and called us His own.

This truth also changes how we see the Church. Fellow believers are not simply people who happen to attend the same service. They are brothers and sisters in Christ, people with whom we share the forgiveness and hope of the Gospel. We are called to encourage one another, pray for one another, forgive one another, and carry each other's burdens.

Putting Jesus first doesn't mean loving our families less. It means receiving His love so that we can love them more faithfully. His grace gives us strength to forgive, patience to serve, and courage to pursue reconciliation.

Today, remember that you are not alone. In Christ, you belong to God's family, both now and forever.

Prayer

Father, thank You for making me Your child through Jesus Christ. Help me put You first in my heart and relationships. Teach me to love my family faithfully and to care for my brothers and sisters in Christ. Give me a forgiving heart, a willingness to serve, and joy in the hope of eternal life with You. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Small Group Discussion Guide

Matthew 12:38–50 | Putting Jesus First

Big Idea: Jesus is more than someone who makes our lives better. He is our Lord and Savior, who died and rose again to forgive our sins. When other priorities compete for our hearts, He calls us to repentance and draws us back to His grace.

Opening Question

What is something that can easily take up more of your time, attention, or energy than you intended?

Scripture Reading

Read Matthew 12:38–50 together.

Supporting Bible Verses

- 1 Samuel 18:6–12 — Saul's jealousy of David shows how fear and envy can take control of our hearts.
- Exodus 20:3 — God calls us to have no other gods before Him.
- Jonah 3:5–10 — The people of Nineveh hear God's warning and respond with repentance.
- 1 Corinthians 15:3–4 — Christ died for our sins, was buried, and was raised on the third day.
- John 15:4–5 — Jesus teaches that we can bear fruit only by abiding in Him.
- Ephesians 4:32 — Because God forgives us in Christ, we are called to forgive one another.
- Galatians 6:2 — We are called to bear one another's burdens.

Discussion Questions

1. What competes with Jesus for first place?

The religious leaders demanded more signs from Jesus, but their problem was deeper than a lack of evidence. Their pride, jealousy, and desire to protect their position kept them from receiving Him.

- What good things—or sinful desires—can become more important to us than Jesus?

- How can we recognize when we are resisting God's Word because it challenges something we want?

2. Why is the sign of Jonah so important?

Jesus pointed to His death and resurrection as the ultimate sign of who He is. Our faith rests not on getting the answers or outcomes we want, but on what Christ has accomplished for us.

- When life is difficult, do you tend to seek a sign from God or turn to His promises?
- How does Jesus' resurrection give you hope even when circumstances do not change?

3. Why isn't changing our behavior enough?

Jesus describes a house that has been put in order but left empty. Outward improvement alone cannot rescue us from sin or reconcile us to God. We need Christ Himself, who forgives us and sustains us through His Word and Spirit.

- Why is it possible to change a habit without addressing the deeper needs of the heart?
- How do worship, Scripture, prayer, and Christian community help keep us rooted in Christ?

4. What does it mean to treat the church like family?

Jesus identifies His disciples as His spiritual family. Because we belong to Him, we are called to care for one another with patience, forgiveness, and love.

- What is one practical way our group can support someone who is struggling?
- Is there a relationship where you need to offer forgiveness, seek reconciliation, or show greater care?

Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father, forgive us for the times we put our own desires ahead of You. Thank You for sending Jesus to die for our sins and rise again so that we may have forgiveness and eternal life. Through Your Holy Spirit, keep us rooted in Your Word and strengthen our faith when we face doubt, temptation, and fear. Help us put Christ first and love one another as members of Your family. Remind us daily that we belong to You and that Your grace is greater than our failures. In Jesus' name, Amen.