

DARE TO LIVE A LIFE OF PURPOSE

pur·pose

/ˈpərpəs/



NOUN:
YOUR VERY EXISTENCE
WRAPPED UP
IN THE THINGS THAT
you ARE HERE TO FULFILL.

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BEGIN

Over the next 21 days of prayer and fasting, we will be examining both the life and the lifestyle of Jesus. During these next three weeks, we will be learning not just how He prayed, but also what He teaches us about prayer. During this time, we will discover the rhythms and habits Jesus incorporated into His life in order to remain in constant communion with His Heavenly Father. So, as we seek to walk in the way of Jesus, He will be not only our savior and teacher, but also our example of how to truly be free. To do this, we will explore several spiritual disciplines which we modeled by Jesus. These include the practices of silence, solitude, stillness, simplicity, slowing down, and sabbath. These ancient practices, though they are not often valued in our world, can help us gain a deeper intimacy with Jesus.

WEEK ONE

Our main focus during the first week of prayer and fasting will be to experience a change of heart before God. For it is during these times of focused prayer that God desires to transform our lives. So while we will pray for spiritual breakthroughs, for ourselves and for others, our primary aim this week is to seek Jesus' genuine transformation in our inner world. This inner world is what Scripture refers to as the heart. The Hebrew word for heart, "Lev," refers to the inner self. "Lev" is the private world of our thoughts, will, emotions, longings, and desires. In the private world of our heart is there where our life with God is nurtured. This inner world is the part of ourselves that no one else sees. It is the "**green pastures and still waters**" where God "**restores our soul**" (Psalm 23:2-3). Our inner world is the core of our spiritual life, and it is only properly cultivated by time alone with God in prayer. Our time of prayer and fasting begins here, looking inward and inviting God to meet with us.

DAY 1: YOUR INNER WORLD

“When you pray, don’t be like the hypocrites who love to pray publicly on street corners and in the synagogues where everyone can see them. I tell you the truth, that is all the reward they will ever get. But when you pray, go away by yourself, shut the door behind you, and pray to your Father in private. Then your Father, who sees everything, will reward you. “When you pray, don’t babble on and on as the Gentiles do. They think their prayers are answered merely by repeating their words again and again. Don’t be like them, for your Father knows exactly what you need even before you ask him!”

– Matthew 6:5-8

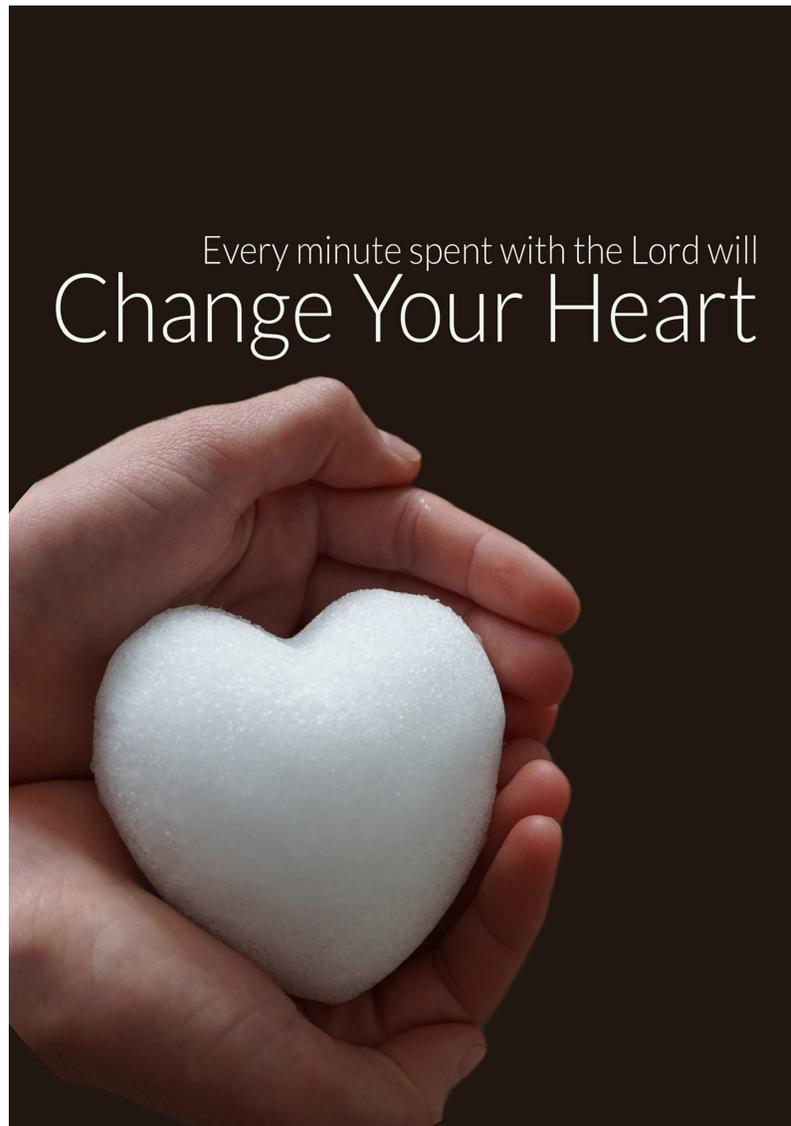
REFLECT – In this passage, it seems that Jesus is rebuking those who love to pray in public. He rebukes those who pray so that they would become the center of attention. Now His point isn’t, as some have tried to argue, that public prayer is always wrong. There can be great power that comes when believers unite in public prayer. But that’s a different type of prayer than the prayer that is offered during our private time with God. The type of prayer Jesus condemns is when a prayer is offered without an authentic heart. In prayer, we must allow our hearts to be transformed, which is why Jesus encourages us to spend time in private with our Heavenly Father. It is this alone time with God that we are seeking during our time of prayer and fasting.

It is impossible to read what the New Testament says about prayer and not see that it is essential to spiritual health and transformation. Jesus taught this spiritual reality, but He also modeled it. Jesus often left the

crowds to spend time alone with His Heavenly Father. In fact, it was this time in private that enabled Him to do everything He had to do publicly. Therefore, in order to be follower of Jesus, we must be actively and daily developing our prayer life. And in many ways, our prayer life is our relationship with Jesus.

The two simply cannot be separated. We cannot claim to have a personal relationship with Jesus if we do not pray. Prayer is how we foster and grow in our walk with Him, which should be the goal of all followers. Our steps to follow Jesus flow from our times of private prayer. That is how our inner world, or heart for God, is formed. And it is ultimately how we are transformed to be more like Him.

This is the reason Jesus instructed His believers to have their prayer times be private. Jesus explained that when we get away by ourselves and shut the door (either literal or figurative) behind us, there is an intimacy that is crated. We must make time in our busy schedules to spiritually separate yourself from the world's distractions, so you can more intimately interact with God. And



DAY 2: INSIDE OUT

“Our Father in Heaven, may your name be kept holy. May your Kingdom come soon. May your will be done on earth, as it is in Heaven. Give us today the food we need, forgive us our sins, as we have forgiven those who sin against us. And don’t let us yield to temptation, but rescue us from the evil one.”

– Matthew 6:9-13

REFLECT – We refer to this as the Lord’s Prayer. Chances are, you have heard these words at some point in your life, maybe even before you were a follower of Jesus. And memorizing this prayer is often times one of the first things new believers are taught to do upon becoming a Jesus follower. Yet, because it is so familiar, it can be easy to miss some of what Jesus intended for us to learn from praying this way. His words in this prayer are for both internal and external change.

- Praying for God’s Kingdom to come and for His will to be done on earth as it is in Heaven is to genuinely see the world around us transformed. However, it also aligns our hearts with God’s. We need His Kingdom to come in our lives and for His will to be done in us first. It is a prayer for inner transformation and from that inner transformation, we will get to see the world around us be transformed.
- Praying for the food we need reinforces our reliance upon God in every part of our lives.
- To forgive those who have wronged us, we first need to be forgiven.
- Being guarded against temptation means receiving help dealing with the circumstances we face, and some of the greatest temptations we face are from what’s inside.

Jesus explains **“But the words you speak come from the heart—that’s what defiles you. For from the heart come evil thoughts, murder,**

adultery, all sexual immorality, theft, lying, and slander. These are what defile you. Eating with unwashed hands will never defile you.” –

Matthew 15:18-20.

Inward change precedes outward change. Therefore, we must pray for both. However, much of our prayer life tends to be focused on people and circumstances, which is a good thing! But we need to develop the kind of private prayer life where we allow God to transform us from the inside out. As we grow in this and live life more like Jesus, God will use us in greater measure to impact the world around us as He makes the earth more like Heaven.

RESPOND – Begin praying for the ways God wants to cultivate the inner world inside of you. Pray for your world to become more like Heaven and that God’s will is done in and around you. Follow Jesus’ example as you seek inside-out transformation.

Pray – Lord, You are so worthy of all praise. I want to be more like You. I pray for Your will to be done in me and around me as I become more like You. Cultivate the kind of heart You want me to have. I trust You with all the details of my life. Provide all that I need internally and circumstantially. Forgive me for the ways I’ve fallen short. And help me stay guarded against sin in both my heart and in my actions. Transform me from the inside out.

DAY 3: A RIGHT HEART

BEGIN – Relationships are built on a foundation of communication, and the same is true in our relationship with God through Christ. Following Jesus, with all it entails, requires personal, intimate interaction with Him. This includes carefully reading and applying His words in Scripture, worshiping Him, confessing sin to Him, and asking for His guidance and direction in our lives. But to do this, it means we must regularly quiet our hearts to hear from Jesus. Throughout the Bible, the importance of the heart is seen repeatedly. The term is used nearly 1000 times in Scripture! When our hearts are submitted to God and developed the right way, it floods into the rest of our lives. The impact on our lives and faith is invaluable. Jesus has much to say to us about the condition of our hearts. Let's look at one example.

“A tree is identified by its fruit. If a tree is good, its fruit will be good. If a tree is bad, its fruit will be bad. You brood of snakes! How could evil men like you speak what is good and right? For whatever is in your heart determines what you say. A good person produces good things from the treasury of a good heart, and an evil person produces evil things from the treasury of an evil heart.”

– Matthew 12:33-35

“Create in me a clean heart, oh God. Renew a loyal spirit within me.”

– Psalm 51:10

REFLECT – Jesus makes it abundantly clear that what fills our hearts matters. A right heart is the foundation of a faithful life. It determines the direction we go as followers of Jesus. I would even go so far as to say: there is nothing more important than the condition of our heart before God. That means it is more important than our human relationships, careers, finances, even our personal mission and calling. And those things are so incredibly important—they are our reason for living and being. But we will fall short in all those areas of life if we do not build a solid spiritual formation in our inner world.

But like a garden, the inner world of the heart requires ongoing maintenance, because that’s the only way to ensure the Fruit of the Spirit (**love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control** – Galatians 5:22-23) is growing. And what’s just as important, is making sure that the wrong elements are not growing. In other words, the seeds of sin and disfunction must be pulled out by the root. If the garden of our heart is not maintained, the weeds of this world will overgrow while the Fruit of God’s Spirit is choked out. Therefore, the key question becomes: How do we develop a right heart? That should be our primary desire as Christians..

RESPOND – Focusing inward. Submit your whole self to God and allow Him to form a right heart in you. Pray these words from Psalm 51:10, **“Create in me a clean heart, oh God. Renew a loyal spirit within me.”** Ask God to reveal any areas where you are producing bad fruit, and

DAY 4: A CLEAN HEART

BEGIN – In a world full of sin and distractions, it can be a challenge to remain pure before God. The seeds of brokenness and sinful behavior, hide deep down in a secret place within us. That’s why the greatest battles we face are often internal, as our greatest spiritual battleground is in our hearts. But when our inner world is in proper order from spending time with Him, the brokenness of the world can never corrupt us.

Jesus called to the crowd to come and hear. “All of you listen,” he said, “and try to understand. It’s not what goes into your body that defiles you; you are defiled by what comes from your heart.’

– Mark 7:14-15

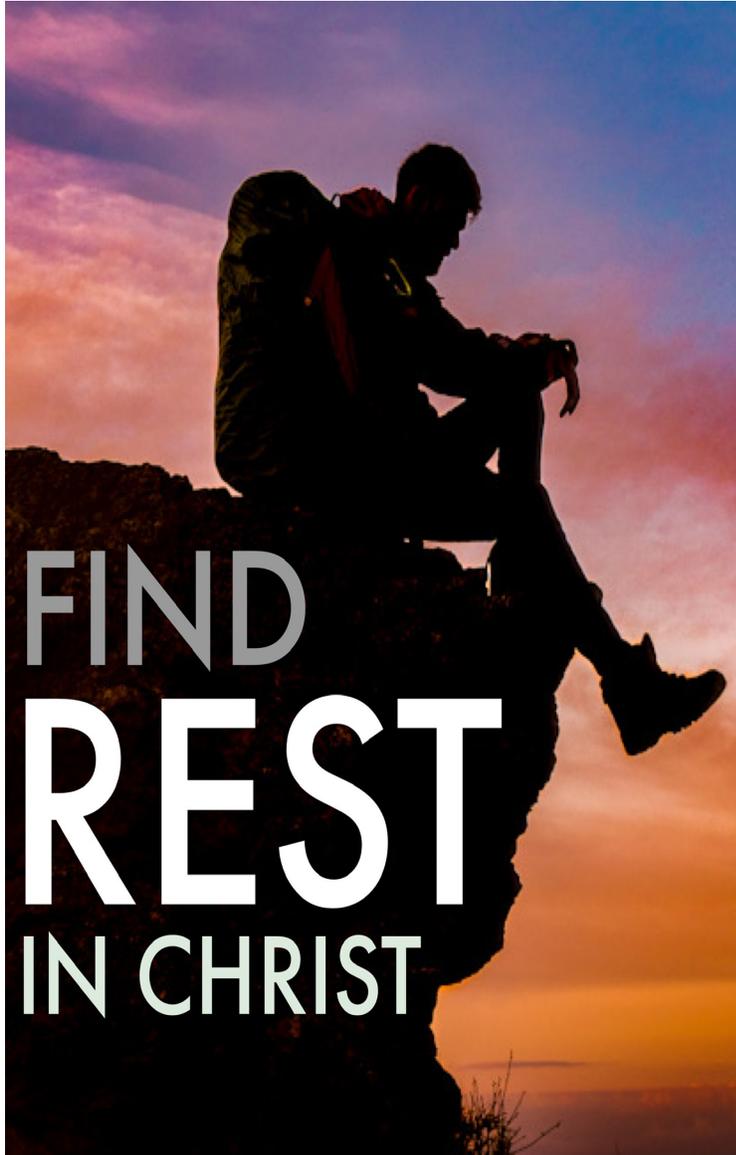
Then he added, “It is what comes from inside that defiles you. For from within, out of a person’s heart, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, wickedness, deceit, lustful desires, envy, slander, pride, and foolishness. All these vile things come from within; they are what defile you.”

– Mark 7:20-23

REFLECT – We all need Jesus to reshape our hearts to be more like Him, because it is the condition of our hearts that matters most to God. And it is for this reason, that we are focusing our attention inward during our first week of prayer and fasting. Our ability to live like Jesus flows from the inside out. It takes alone time with God to surrender the elements inside of us that are not aligned with His will and way. It is always what is inside of us that needs the most correction. This is why we take time and energy through prayer and fasting to bring our hearts before God and ask Him to change us. Consider what an undefiled heart before God

DAY 5: THE INVITATION

BEGIN – This week, we are delving into the inner world of the heart as the secret place where we meet with God and where our spiritual foundation is formed. Our prayer focus thus far has been on building that foundation during our time alone with God, which is necessary for a life of faithfulness. But to do this we must follow the example Jesus modeled



by building a rhythm of life around prayer. Jesus embraced a way of living that was radically different from how most of us do life today. In his approach, there is a secret truth of how to live and experience the freedom and fullness of life that most of us cannot even fathom in our overly-fast, hectic, very full daily lives. The good news is that Jesus invites us into this new way of living. For the next three days, we will focus our time of prayer and fasting around the incredible invitation Jesus gives us in Matthew 11:28-30. Let's explore what this

new way of living looks like.

Then Jesus said, “Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy to bear, and the burden I give you is light.”

– Matthew 11:28-30

REFLECT – We begin today by focusing on verse 28, **“Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.”**

Now one more time, but slower. Okay, one final time, but even more unhurried. Try and absorb Jesus’ words. Personalize them. When you read **“I will give you rest,”** substitute it by says **“You Jesus, give me rest.”** Say it out loud. Experience the freedom Jesus is offering you right now in that rest. Are you weary? Are you carrying heavy burdens? Jesus is inviting us into a different kind of life. It is no understatement to say His way is superior to ours. His way is freely offered. Jesus’ way is freely available to all of us. And His way begins by simply coming to Him and learning to do life differently. Because it is in that new place, where we exchange our burdens for rest. It is where we truly find the fullness of life from the inside out: in our hearts and then in our daily experiences.

To be Jesus’ disciple is to accept His invitation and to follow His example. It means organizing our lives around three basic goals: Be with Jesus; Become like Jesus; Do what Jesus would do if He were you. We must organize our entire lives around following Him. It’s not part of us but the whole self that we submit to His will and way. And His way is precisely what we need. It is how we exchange our heavy burdens for rest. There is a cost, but what we gain is much greater in this life and the one to come.

DAY 6: SOUL AT REST

BEGIN– If you want to experience the life of Jesus, you have to adopt the lifestyle of Jesus. That is our aim; not only to hear and apply the words of Jesus but to follow His example in the way we live. That means organizing our lives around three basic goals: be with Jesus, become like Jesus, and do what Jesus would do if He were you. How would He respond to the pressures you face today? How would He engage in your relationships? What would be different about the ways He would spend His time, energy, and attention today? Today is our second day of digging into Jesus' life-giving invitation in Matthew 11. Yesterday, we explored His invitation to exchange our weariness and heavy burdens for rest. Let's look further into what it means to find rest for our souls and spend time experiencing it for ourselves.

Then Jesus said, "Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy to bear, and the burden I give you is light."

– Matthew 11:28-30

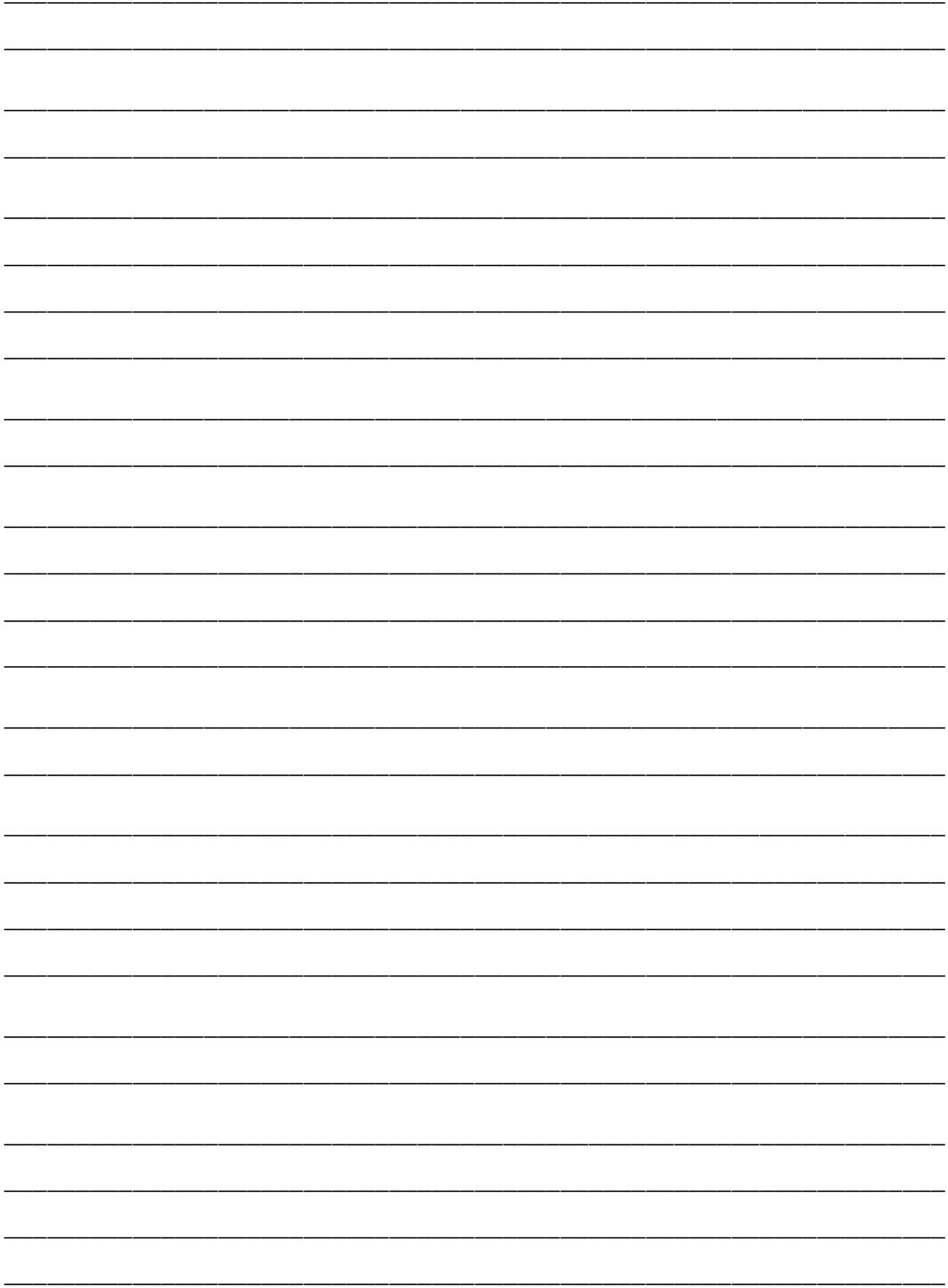
REFLECT – What rest for your soul would even look like? How would it feel? How would it be different from what you normally experience? Now, it's time to ask yourself a difficult question: Is this kind of rest for your soul even possible in your current lifestyle? Or are you so busy, distracted, or both, that being able to stop long enough to spend time with God seems impossible? The reality is that this is how many of us go through life. But experiencing the rest Jesus offers requires allowing ourselves to learn from both in His words and His ways. And for real rest to be experienced, it takes spending very real time with Jesus. It takes time to

undo many of the patterns of the world we've consciously or subconsciously adopted that are not compatible with His ways. The theologian Dallas Willard once wrote: "In this truth lies the secret of the easy yoke: the secret involves living as [Jesus] lives in the entirety of his life—adopting his overall lifestyle.... Our mistake is to think that following Jesus consists in loving our enemies, going the 'second mile,' turning the other cheek, suffering patiently and hopefully—while living the rest of our lives just as everyone else around us does. It's a strategy bound to fail."

Experiencing rest for your soul requires a different way of living. In biblical language, the soul is your whole person—your essence, inside and out. The beginning of having rest for your soul comes from spending time alone with God in prayer. As we have seen, that is where your heart and soul are formed to be like Him. It is the first and best step we can take to experience His rest and move forward on our journey of following Jesus and living life His way.

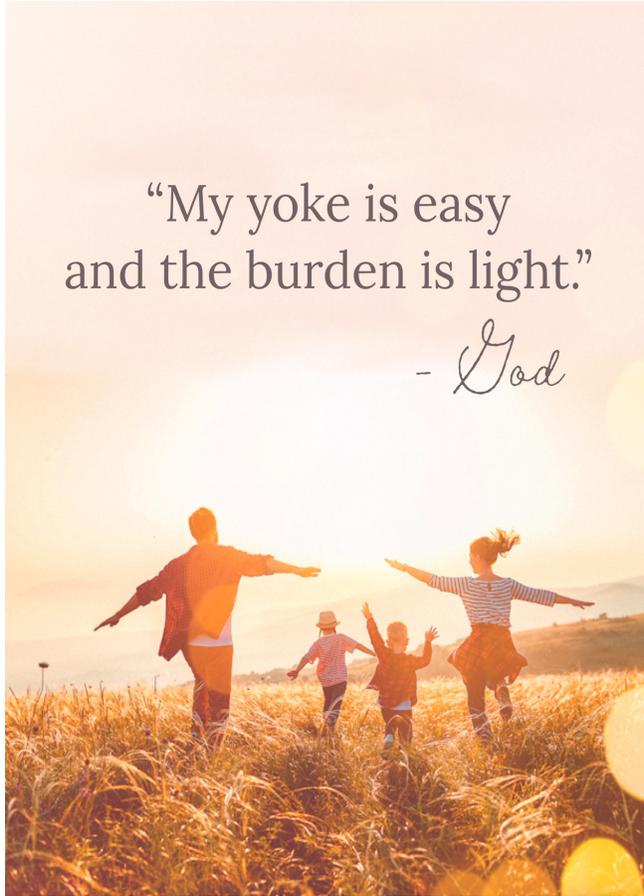
RESPOND – You enter into rest for your soul by being with Jesus. Ask Him to teach you His ways of doing life and to help make your heart and soul like His. Keep asking Him to trade your weariness and burdens for rest. Take a few moments, breathe deeply, and focus all your attention on Jesus. Pray about the parts of your life that are incompatible with His way and ask for help changing them.

PRAY – Jesus, I bring all of myself to You today. I want to learn from you and do life your way. Help me find your humble and gentle heart. Take my heavy burdens and exchange them for your rest. Show me how my lifestyle is incompatible with yours and keeps me from the rest you promise. I give you all of me.



DAY 7: EXCHANGING BURDENS

BEGIN – As we come to the end of our first week of prayer and fasting, let's reflect on the work God has been doing in us to cultivate a new and



right heart. But this is only done by spending time alone in prayer. In doing this, our goal is to be with Jesus, to seek to become like Him in each part of our lives and live as He would if He were in our shoes. But we can't do that unless we prioritize time with Him in prayer. Times of prayer and fasting give God even more access to work in us and transform us to be more like Him. This is our third day of carefully exploring Jesus' invitation to a life of rest found in Matthew 11. He offers to exchange our

burdens, and our way of living, for something new. In its place, He gives us His yoke. Let's examine what that means.

Then Jesus said, “Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy to bear, and the burden I give you is light.”

– Matthew 11:28-30

**Give your burdens to the Lord, and he will take care of you.
He will not permit the godly to slip and fall.**

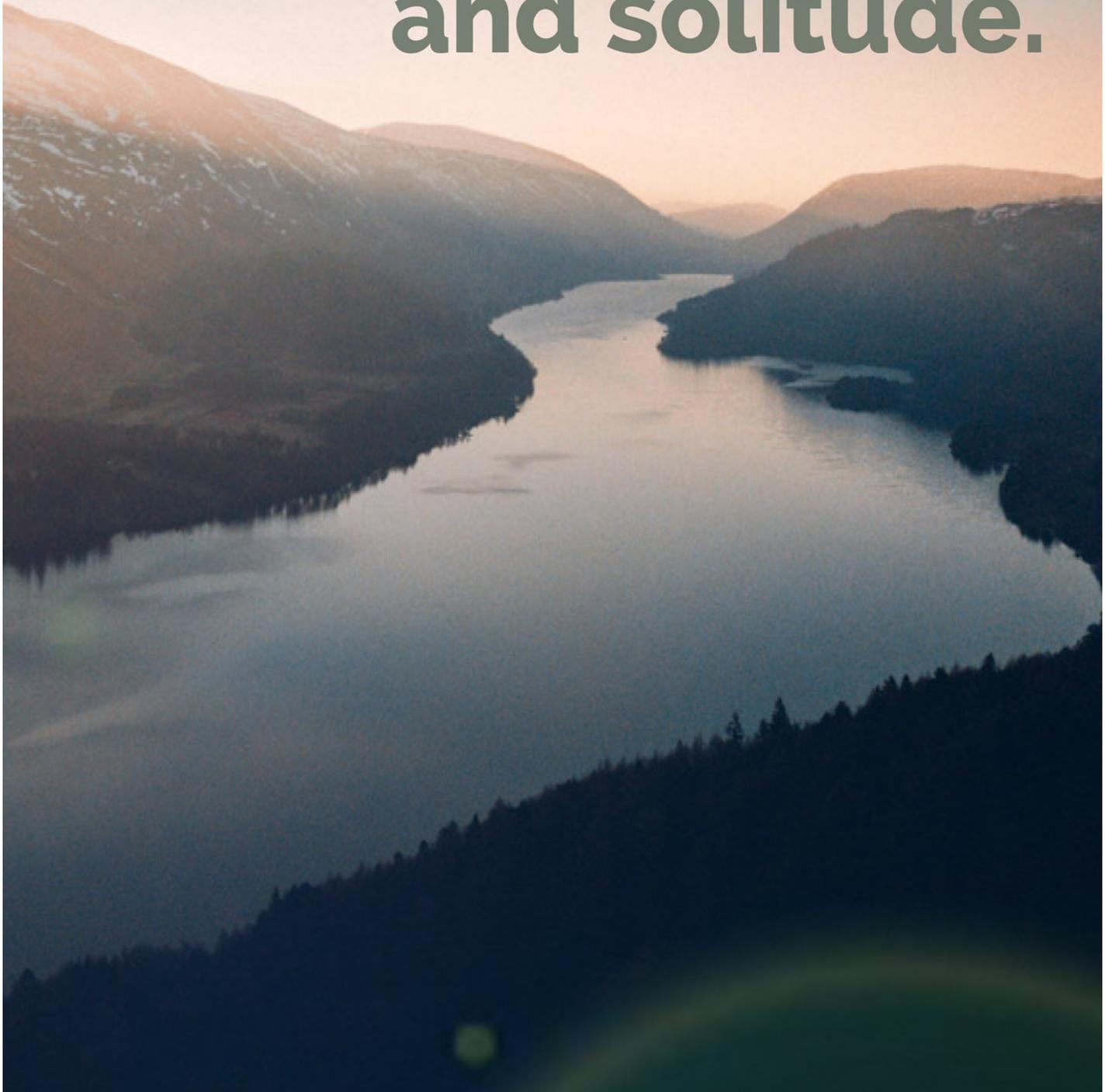
– Psalm 55:22

REFLECT – Jesus 'yoke is a new way to live, but what does that mean? A yolk was a farming instrument - a tool for productivity. It went around the neck of two oxen so they could walk side by side to plow fields and carry heavier loads. In short, a yoke is for work, not rest. Jesus meant His yoke is a new way to go about life. And when we take Jesus 'yoke, it means doing life at His pace and in His way. Imagine how much better that would be than trying to go through the challenges of life on our own. Max Luccado writes, "Jesus doesn't offer us an escape. He offers us something far better: 'equipment.' He offers His apprentices a whole new way to bear the weight of our humanity, and with ease. But the only way this will happen is if we are by His side. Jesus says we are like two oxen in a field, tied shoulder to shoulder. Now Jesus is doing all the heavy lifting. We are moving at his pace – slow, unhurried, and present in the moment. We are also full of love and joy and peace."

Jesus tells us that an easy life isn't an option; but an easy yoke is. Life will never be without burdens. The question is how do we go about living that life. And the secret to the life Jesus offers is that we do it with Him. We aren't alone, and it's not all up to us. He lifts our heaviest burdens when we choose to follow Him and do life His way. That is why we pursue closeness with Jesus through time alone in prayer. It is where we learn to follow His pace by better aligning our heart and soul with God.

RESPOND – Ask Jesus to show you how to live with His yoke, and doing life His way. Meditate on the words of Psalm 55:22. Keep asking God to align your heart and soul with His.

Divine STRENGTH IS RENEWED
in times of
silence, **stillness**
and **solitude.**



WEEK TWO

DAY 8: SILENCE AND STILLNESS

BEGIN – This week, we will be exploring specific habits Jesus adopted in His own life: silence, stillness, and solitude. While these disciplines may be new to you, as they are to most modern Americans, they have been practiced by Jesus followers for centuries. But to experience the full life of Jesus, we must also adopt the lifestyle of Jesus. Which leads us back to adopting the habits that Jesus practiced personally, and is what we find in today's text from Mark.

“Before daybreak the next morning, Jesus got up and went out to an isolated place to pray. Later Simon and the others went out to find him. When they found him, they said, “Everyone is looking for you.” But Jesus replied, “We must go on to other towns as well, and I will preach to them, too. That is why I came.” So he traveled throughout the region of Galilee, preaching in the synagogues and casting out demons.”

– Mark 1:35-39

REFLECT – In the verses preceding this one, Mark 1:21-34, Jesus has had a long, full day. But this marks the beginning of His public ministry. And as word spread about this Man who was healing the sick and casting out demons, people began flocking to see Jesus in droves. According to Mark 1:33, **“The whole town gathered at the door to watch.”** After such a successful launch to his ministry, it would make sense for Jesus to capitalize on the moment and focus on building His following, right? But instead, Jesus got up early, left town and spent time alone in prayer. And when Simon finally found Jesus to tell Him that His teaching and

presence were in high demand, Jesus 'told him that it was time to leave. Think about how different His actions are from what most of us would do in His shoes. It defied logic and strategy.

But that is precisely why it was so crucial for Jesus to spend time alone in prayer. After being surrounded by the noise and chaos of the crowd, Jesus needed to be alone. What Jesus needed was to slow down and find a quiet place to spend some time in prayer. He recognized it was time to walk away from the crowd for His own emotional, spiritual and physical wellbeing. And it was this time alone in prayer that prepared Him for all the activity and busyness He would encounter the rest of the day.

Therefore, if we are seeking to be more like Jesus, which is at the foundation of what it means to be a Christian, we must prioritize time alone with God. But we can only do this if we periodically remove ourselves from rest of the world. The habits of silence and stillness help us remove ourselves from the world we live in. By embracing physical silence and stillness, we can come to a state of peace and quiet in our hearts. Now these are postures, outward actions, but they represent an inner condition. Now this really isn't anything new. Christians routinely incorporate postures into their worship and prayer lives. We raise our hands in worship as a sign of surrender to God; we bow or kneel down as a sign of reverence; we stand up as a show of respect. And in a similar way, the postures of silence and stillness help us avoid an overly-hurried life and experience God's presence while we pray. So let's follow Jesus ' example and spend time alone with God, away from the noise and distraction we face in the rest of our lives.

RESPOND – Spend some time alone with God by calming the noise and activity inside you. Then spend some time breathing deeply. Once you have quieted you heart and mind, simply be with God for ten minutes

DAY 9: ALONENESS

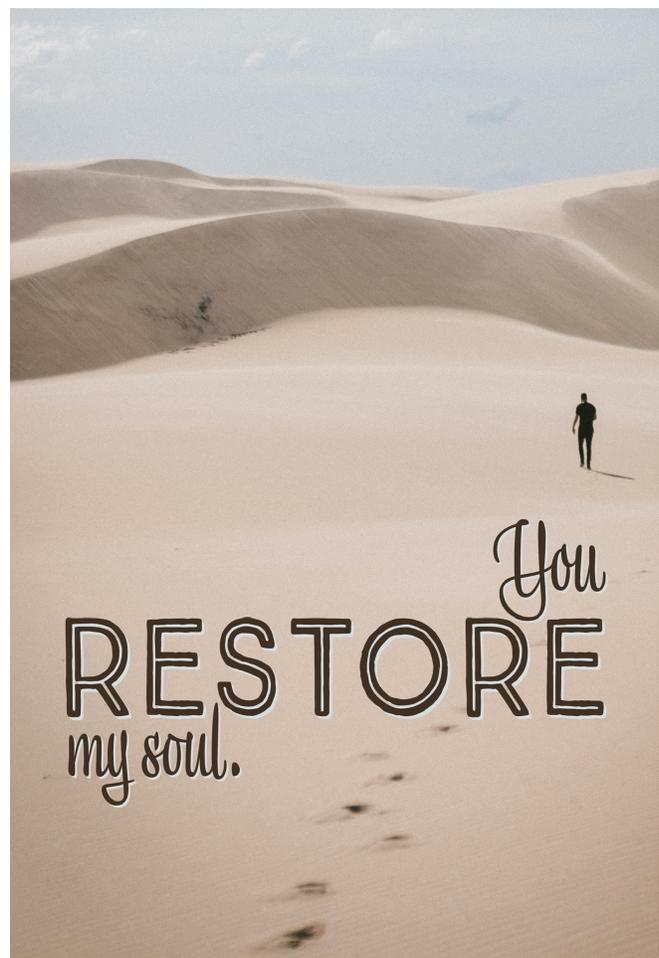
BEGIN – During our second week of prayer and fasting, we are working to incorporate habits Jesus models for us. Not only did Jesus teach others to pray, but the practices of silence, stillness, and solitude were ingrained into His own routine. They are not only spiritual disciplines, but rather postures. This week we are seeking to become physically silent, still, and alone to help us come to a place of inner silence, stillness, and aloneness with God. But this isn't easy. We live in a world full of distractions and temptations. And therefore, building up the heart's inner world requires regularly getting away from the outside world. Let's continue exploring how Jesus adopted this principle into His life and ministry.

After leaving the synagogue that day, Jesus went to Simon's home, where he found Simon's mother-in-law very sick with a high fever. "Please heal her," everyone begged. Standing at her bedside, he rebuked the fever, and it left her. And she got up at once and prepared a meal for them. As the sun went down that evening, people throughout the village brought sick family members to Jesus. No matter what their diseases were, the touch of his hand healed every one. Many were possessed by demons; and the demons came out at his command, shouting, "You are the Son of God!" But because they knew he was the Messiah, he rebuked them and refused to let them speak. Early the next morning Jesus went out to an isolated place. The crowds searched everywhere for him, and when they finally found him, they begged him not to leave them.

– Luke 4:38-42

REFLECT – This is the same event we saw unfolding Mark 1, but this time it is told from Luke’s perspective. Jesus just had an intense day of ministry. He had been performing miracles and setting people free from demonic affliction. This was by no means easy work. So, to continue doing what He was on earth to do, Jesus needed to temporarily get away from the crowd. It may seem counterintuitive, but He needed to get away from them to best serve people. No matter what the world around Him wanted, Jesus knew He had to have time alone with His Father.

There is incredible power that comes from these times of silence and solitude. It is a momentary escape from the world around us. But we do this not because we want to totally isolate ourselves from the world, but rather so that we can best love and serve those around us. The Greek word for isolated place is “*érēmos*”, which translates as desert or wilderness. It’s a place that is undisturbed, with no one around. Ironically this is also where God richly gives His presence and provision to those who come seeking Him. For Jesus, it was a place of real spiritual strength, not weakness. It is where He was restored. It was in being alone with His Father that enabled Jesus to do what He came to do.



not to tell anyone what had happened. He said, “Go to the priest and let him examine you. Take along the offering required in the law of Moses for those who have been healed of leprosy. This will be a public testimony that you have been cleansed.” But despite Jesus’ instructions, the report of his power spread even faster, and vast crowds came to hear him preach and to be healed of their diseases. But Jesus often withdrew to the wilderness for prayer.”

– Luke 5:12-16

REFLECT – Once again, Jesus is traveling about the country side, doing the miraculous. He is setting people free, both physically and spiritually. Crowds of people are constantly coming to him, just wanting to be in his presence and to hear his teaching. That’s what any public figure would want, right? And yet, once again, we see Jesus going off to pray alone. Why did Jesus withdraw to the wilderness so often? Well, Jesus was constantly in demand, and these healings of both physical and spiritual illnesses, were Jesus’ mission. But this ministry was unsustainable without intentional times of rest. Therefore, Jesus made solitude a habit. However, habits take time to develop. They don’t happen in a day; they happen in the daily. They are not one-time choices. They occur through the series of small decisions we make repeatedly. When we create new habits, especially those of spiritual disciplines, it’s okay not to be perfect. The goal is to put them into practice over time.

RESPOND – Think and pray about what a habit of solitude could look like in your life. Write down a plan and put it into practice in your life. Consider when, where, how long, and what kind of environment is best for you to pray in this way each day. Make a commitment to keep prioritizing this time.

DAY 11: STOP TO GO FORWARD



BEGIN – This week, we are discovering three prayer postures we see Jesus integrate into His life: silence, stillness, and solitude. All three are seen throughout Scripture. And each is an essential component of developing a private prayer life and cultivating a godly inner world. And to do this, Jesus shows us a better way of living in Matthew 11. He says,

“Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy to bear, and the burden I give you is light.”

– Matthew 11:28-30.

One day soon afterward Jesus went up on a mountain to pray, and he prayed to God all night. At daybreak he called together all of his disciples and chose twelve of them to be apostles. Here are their names: Simon (whom he named Peter), Andrew (Peter’s brother), James, John, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James (son of Alphaeus), Simon (who was called the zealot), Judas (son of James), Judas Iscariot (who later betrayed him).

When they came down from the mountain, the disciples stood with Jesus on a large, level area, surrounded by many of his followers and by the crowds. There were people from all over Judea and from Jerusalem and from as far north as the seacoasts of Tyre and Sidon. They had come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases; and those troubled by evil spirits were healed. Everyone tried to touch him, because healing power went out from him, and he healed everyone.

– Luke 6:12-19

REFLECT – Before a key ministry moment, Jesus stopped what He was doing to be still and spend time in prayer. Even when there was much to do, Jesus took time for stillness. This was His habit of solitude on display. Becoming still requires being alone. But doing so takes intentionality. Consider the spiritual benefits of being still. What could God do in and through us if we would just stop and wait for Him rather than rushing around to get everything done. My guess would be that we probably wouldn't miss going at our normal pace? In this passage we are told that as soon as Jesus came down from the mountain, people were waiting on Him. But the best thing He could do for them was get away and be strengthened. Then He could tend to their needs. So what can we learn from this? Think about all the events and activities that are happening all around us. Which ones are actually important? And what only feels urgent? Like Jesus, each day, we need to stop in order to really go forward. When we stop to receive from God, we are in a place to best love and serve others.

RESPOND – Ask God to help you stay centered on Him in the midst of busyness. Find moments to stop and be still throughout your day. Invite Him to keep drawing near to you in those moments.

DAY 12: DEALING WITH INTERRUPTIONS

BEGIN – We have talked a lot this week about how Jesus regularly practiced silence, stillness, and solitude with God before a major ministry moment. This discipline is also wise for us to incorporate into our daily lives. We need to intentionally seek times of silence, stillness and solitude with God in prayer. And this is especially true when we have difficult or taxing situations ahead of us. Sometimes we deal with circumstances that are beyond our control. Emergencies and crises arise, forcing us to stop and deal with the situation at hand. In these moments, it's not always possible to slow down and be still. Jesus experienced these moments in life. In Matthew 14:1-12 tells the story of John the Baptist's death. On top of having an influential ministry, he was also Jesus' cousin. So when Jesus heard about everything that had happened, He naturally wanted to be alone. As we will see, an interruption in the form of a massive crowd prevented that alone time from happening. Let's see how He responded.

When Jesus heard the news, he left in a boat to be alone. But the crowds heard where he was headed and followed on foot from many towns. Jesus saw the huge crowd as he stepped from the boat, and he had compassion on them and healed their sick. That evening the disciples said, "This is a remote place, and it's already getting late. Send the crowds away so they can go to the villages and buy food for themselves." But Jesus said, "That isn't necessary—you feed them." "But we have only five loaves of bread and two fish!" they answered. "Bring them here," he said. Then he told the people to sit down on the grass. Jesus took the five loaves and two fish, looked up toward Heaven, and blessed them. Then, breaking the loaves into pieces, he gave the bread to the disciples, who

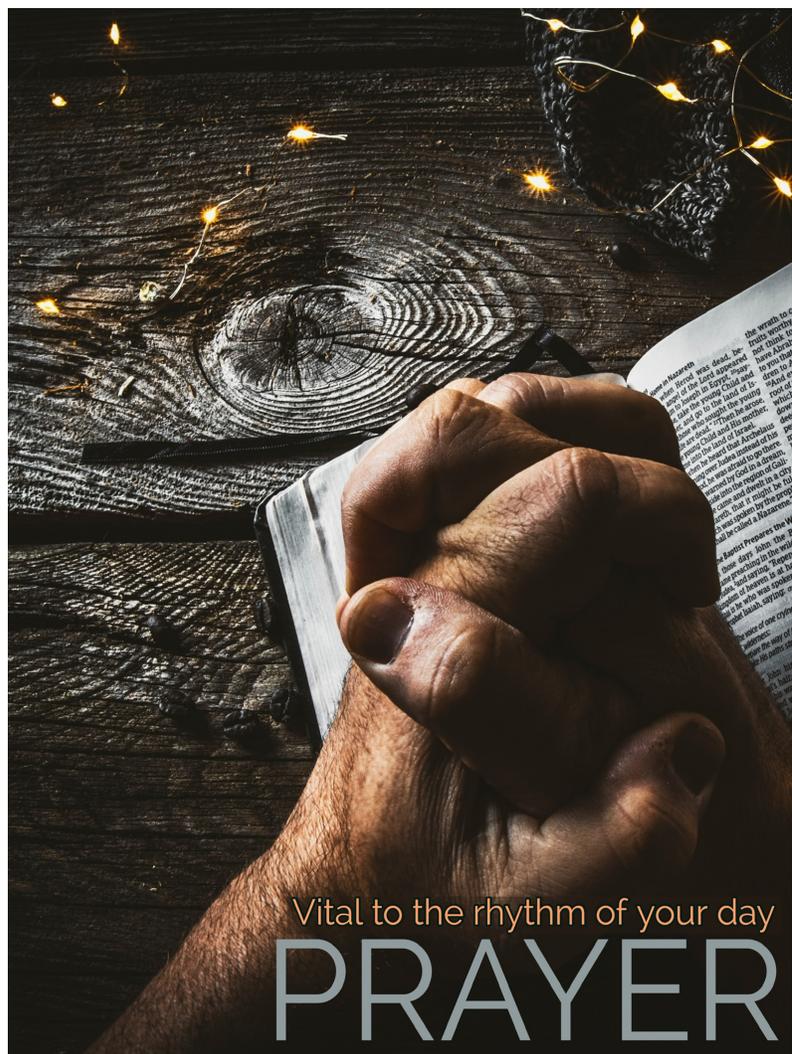
distributed it to the people. They all ate as much as they wanted, and afterward, the disciples picked up twelve baskets of leftovers. About 5,000 men were fed that day, in addition to all the women and children!

– Matthew 14:13-21

REFLECT – When Jesus heard about the death of John the Baptist, all He wanted to do was be alone with God. But thousands of people followed Him to this remote area where He was going to pray. Now in this

moment, Jesus had a choice. He could have avoided the crowds and fled or embraced them. In spite of His own emotional and spiritual needs, Jesus chose compassion, allowing himself to be interrupted. The result was possibly His most famous miracle, the feeding of the five thousand. Sometimes, life happens, and we cannot have the alone time we crave. We can prioritize it when we are able, but it's not always

up to us. But regardless of what is happening around us, we must keep our eyes fixed on Jesus. And when we have a healthy rhythm of alone



Vital to the rhythm of your day
PRAYER

DAY 13: DEALING WITH STRESS

BEGIN – Today we are continuing with the story we began yesterday in Matthew 14. In this passage, Jesus encountered interruptions and stress just as we do. Interruptions and stressful situations will always come up, whether in first-century Israel or modern-day America. So we are focusing on developing the prayer habits of Jesus by prioritizing silence, stillness and solitude with God. This will help us create a healthier heart and soul before the Lord, which is precisely what we need when pushed to the limit.

Immediately after this, Jesus insisted that his disciples get back into the boat and cross to the other side of the lake, while he sent the people home. After sending them home, he went up into the hills by himself to pray. Night fell while he was there alone . . . After they had crossed the lake, they landed at Gennesaret. When the people recognized Jesus, the news of his arrival spread quickly throughout the whole area, and soon people were bringing all their sick to be healed. They begged him to let the sick touch at least the fringe of his robe, and all who touched him were healed.

– Matthew 14:22-23, 34-36

REFLECT – Rather than taking time to celebrate the momentous miracle (feeding the 5000), Jesus sent the crowds and His disciples away. Then, He went off by himself to pray. Let's remember: while Jesus was fully divine, He also was fully human, so after a long day of ministering to thousands, Jesus had to be utterly exhausted. Thus, before He could pour out again, He first had to be filled up. Jesus needed self-care, and He received it by spending time with the Father. It required wisdom and courage to walk away from the crowd at the height of His popularity to take time for solitude.

But this is often very different than how we would handle this kind of situation. We are likely to tell ourselves there will be time to be replenished later. We convince ourselves that we should capitalize on our momentum while we have it. But Jesus knew better. As the crowds quickly flocked to Him again the next morning; as life continued full steam ahead, Jesus' time alone enabled Him to continue His public ministry. And if Jesus required time for solitude with the Father, how much more do we need it?

RESPOND – Ask yourself if stress drives you towards God or away from God. The next time you experience stress, how can you follow Jesus' example? Spend time in prayer to be centered and be prepared to face whatever life brings your way.

PRAY – Jesus, I want to live as you did. I want to pursue time with you amid the stress and interruptions around me. You are my refuge. Help me to be able to withstand the storms I will face in this life. Help me learn, embrace, and apply the habits of silence, stillness, and solitude. I follow your example, and I give you my life.

“Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted there by the devil. For forty days and forty nights he fasted and became very hungry. During that time the devil came and said to him, ‘If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become loaves of bread.’ But Jesus told him, ‘No! The Scriptures say, “People do not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.”

– Deuteronomy 8:3

Then the devil took him to the holy city, Jerusalem, to the highest point of the Temple, and said, ‘If you are the Son of God, jump off! For the Scriptures say, “He will order his angels to protect you. And they will hold you up with their hands so you won’t even hurt your foot on a stone. (Psalm 91:11-12).”’ Jesus responded, ‘The Scriptures also say, “You must not test the Lord your God.”

– Deuteronomy 6:16

Next the devil took him to the peak of a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. ‘I will give it all to you,’ he said, ‘if you will kneel down and worship me.’ ‘Get out of here, Satan,’ Jesus told him. ‘For the Scriptures say, “You must worship the Lord your God and serve only him.”

– Deuteronomy 6:13

Then the devil went away, and angels came and took care of Jesus.”

– Matthew 4:1-11

REFLECT – It seems like the devil is bullying Jesus during His moment of weakness. Jesus was hungry, alone, and as susceptible to temptation as He would ever be, right? But the devil was wrong. Fasting didn't make Jesus weak; it made Him stronger. The wilderness was where Jesus went to spend time with God. Physically He may have been depleted, but spiritually, He was renewed. When Satan attacked, Jesus was ready. There is a vital lesson we can draw from this account: The power to conquer spiritual attacks comes from the strength we gain in the wilderness.

Prayer and fasting make us more powerful. Being physically and spiritually reliant on God makes His presence in our lives that much more essential. In 2 Corinthians 12:10 Paul writes, **“That’s why I take pleasure in my weaknesses, and in the insults, hardships, persecutions, and troubles that I suffer for Christ. For when I am weak, then I am strong.”** How is God wanting to strengthen you during this period of prayer and fasting? Also, be aware of the spiritual reality of Satan's attacks on you. It will likely be in subtle ways you don't recognize at first. But because Jesus is with you, you have all you need to overcome them. Fasting and prayer, along with God's Word, make you strong.

RESPOND – So consider the ways the devil is most likely to tempt you. How have you been spiritually attacked in the past? How can your time of prayer and fasting give you the strength you need to overcome it? What spiritual breakthrough does God want to do in your life as you fast? Ask God to help clarify the answers.

Pray – Lord, give me wisdom and understanding to see the ways Satan is attacking me, especially in subtle ways. In Jesus 'name, I pray those attacks be thwarted. I belong to You. Strengthen me in every way during this season of prayer and fasting, as I declare my need and reliance upon

You. I pray that You would break through in my life in greater ways and that I would see You working in and through my life in greater measures because of this time I give to You. In Jesus 'name.

A young child with blonde hair, wearing a teal shirt, is being held up by two hands from the bottom corners of the frame. The child is smiling broadly and looking towards the camera. The background consists of a lush green field in the foreground, a line of evergreen trees in the middle ground, and a range of blue mountains under a cloudy sky in the background. The overall scene is bright and cheerful.

REAL LIFE

is found in God alone

WEEK THREE

DAY 15: THE POWER OF FASTING

BEGIN – During our third week of prayer and fasting, we will continue exploring both the life and lifestyle of Jesus. Our goal is not just to hear His words, but to also live as He lived. However, living this way is inherently unnatural to us and directly opposed to our fast-paced modern world. We simply can't live this way on our own. The only way to live like Jesus, and to truly understand His teaching, is with the power and guidance of the Holy Spirit. But there is good news. God wants nothing more than to empower and guide us into this kind of life. Peter explains:

“By his divine power, God has given us everything we need for living a godly life. We have received all of this by coming to know him, the one who called us to himself by means of his marvelous glory and excellence.”

– 2 Peter 1:3

We have already received divine power and everything we need, but often times we are unable to access it. This is where fasting comes in. Fasting helps us break free of that which has a hold on us. Whether it's something spiritual, emotional, or physical, fasting gives us the spiritual “oomph” we need to better access the divine power we have already been given. And when we fast we are increasing our dependence on God by replacing food—or whatever we choose to fast from—with more prayer.

When Jesus saw that the crowd of onlookers was growing, he rebuked the evil spirit. “Listen, you spirit that makes this boy unable to hear and speak,” he said. “I command you to come

out of this child and never enter him again!" Then the spirit screamed and threw the boy into another violent convulsion and left him. The boy appeared to be dead. A murmur ran through the crowd as people said, "He's dead." But Jesus took him by the hand and helped him to his feet, and he stood up. Afterward, when Jesus was alone in the house with his disciples, they asked him, "Why couldn't we cast out that evil spirit?"

– Mark 9:25-29

"When you fast, don't make it obvious, as the hypocrites do. They try to look miserable so people will admire them for their fasting. I tell you the truth, that is the only reward they will ever get. But when you fast, comb your hair and wash your face. Then no one will notice that you are fasting, except your Father, who knows what you do in private. And your Father, who sees everything, will reward you."

– Matthew 6:16-18

REFLECT – In Mark 9:25-29, we learn an important truth about fasting and prayer, and it is powerful. If you read the entire story in Mark 9, Jesus' disciples had tried, and failed, to cast a demon out of the boy in this story, so Jesus has to step in and do it for them. Then in verse 29 Jesus explains why they failed. He reminds them that prayer and fasting are a prerequisite for this kind of work. So the disciples were incapable of doing what they needed to do simply because they had not devoted themselves fully to prayer and fasting. In other words, they were trying to rely upon their own power, rather than accessing the divine power they had already been given. But why had they not taken this necessary step in doing the work of God. Because prayer and fasting take time, energy,

and attention. These are the most important resources we have, which is why these resources are often given to what we do to make money. That being said, it is that which has our time, energy, and attention that controls us. So at times, we must slow down, empty our schedules of all their busyness, seek God and recommit our most precious resources to what's really important. And when we do this, God promises that we will receive all we need to experience the life we are being called to.

Now fasting isn't easy. If it were, the disciples would have been more equipped for the task they were given. But incredible spiritual breakthroughs can occur when we sacrifice our wants and needs to pursue greater intimacy with God through deliberate and focused times of fasting. When we fast, we are making space for something more; something better. But we want to be intentional about filling that space with Jesus. This is the purpose of fast, but there is also a danger. You must resist the temptation to use your fasting as an opportunity to make yourself look good. This time of fasting isn't another fad diet plan, or even something you do for health. It is meant to be a tool in helping you reconnect with your Heavenly Father. Also your fasting doesn't need to be shared publicly. Don't tell more than a handful of people that you're doing it. Instead, focus on giving God glory for helping you through it. The greatest reward of fasting is having deeper intimacy with God. That's what we seek first. We can know He is faithful to hear us and respond when we do.

RESPOND – Focus your heart on being seen by God, not by people. Spend time thanking God for seeing you and being with you. In your heart, draw near to Him and enjoy being with Him. Then, pray for spiritual breakthrough in the areas of need for you and those close to you. Breakthroughs follow intimacy, so seek both!

DAY 16: IT'S SIMPLE

BEGIN – Simplifying is trendy. Just google “minimalism” and see how many millions of hits come up. Spoiler alert: it’s a lot. The concept behind the minimalism movement is that people have become so overwhelmed by the amount of stuff in their personal space that they feel compelled to

GOD HAS ALREADY
GIVEN US EVERYTHING
NEEDED TO LIVE A
GODLY LIFE.



change. Minimalists want to fundamentally change the way they live so that what they own will not own them. Now while this is largely noble, it is hardly new. Jesus advocated for, and personally modeled this way of living. Now wealth and possessions are not inherently wrong. Now Jesus had plenty to say about money, possessions and stuff. And not all of what He had to say about these things were bad. After all, it was a group of wealthy

women who funded much of His ministry. But what Jesus had a lot to say about was how the accumulation of wealth and possessions absolutely make it more difficult to follow Jesus 'example of simplicity. It's not a question of what we have; it's whether or not it has us. It's about where our ultimate treasure lies.

“Don't store up treasures here on earth, where moths eat them and rust destroys them, and where thieves break in and

steal. Store your treasures in Heaven, where moths and rust cannot destroy, and thieves do not break in and steal. Wherever your treasure is, there the desires of your heart will also be.

“Your eye is like a lamp that provides light for your body. When your eye is healthy, your whole body is filled with light. But when your eye is unhealthy, your whole body is filled with darkness. And if the light you think you have is actually darkness, how deep that darkness is!

“No one can serve two masters. For you will hate one and love the other; you will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and be enslaved to money.”

– Matthew 6:19-24

REFLECT – Living like Jesus requires having an entirely different set of values than the world around us. It requires us to break free from things like individualism, personal achievement, and the pursuit of wealth and possessions. It means being content with the lives even though everything in our culture is telling us to pursue more. Social media, advertising campaigns, even the lifestyles portrayed in TV and movies are all designed to move us away from simplicity. Billions of dollars are made by creating a desire in you to want what you don't have. Therefore, it takes intentionality to ensure our treasure is in Heaven instead of earth.

We must ask ourselves, “Are my eyes fixed on what is temporary or eternal? How will living like Jesus change what I value and prioritize?” Or as Paul explains to Timothy, **“true godliness with contentment is itself great wealth”** – 1 Timothy 6:6.

aren't you far more valuable to him than they are? Can all your worries add a single moment to your life?

“Why worry about your clothing? Look at the lilies of the field and how they grow. They don't work or make their clothing, yet Solomon in all his glory was not dressed as beautifully as they are. And if God cares so wonderfully for wildflowers that are here today and thrown into the fire tomorrow, he will certainly care for you. Why do you have so little faith?

“So don't worry about these things, saying, ‘What will we eat? What will we drink? What will we wear?’ These things dominate the thoughts of unbelievers, but your Heavenly Father already knows all your needs. Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need.”

– Matthew 6:25-33

REFLECT – Jesus equates money and possessions with worry. Why do you think that is? Is it possible true freedom is found in simplicity? That seems to be the case in Jesus' description of reality in this passage. He urges us not to worry but rather to live simply. While there is a movement towards embracing simplicity today, many followers of Jesus have lived that way for centuries. Instead of worrying, Jesus tells us to first seek God's Kingdom and live righteously. That means trusting God, pursuing God, and living according to what God says is right. Essentially, it's being like Jesus. That's the real cure for worry. If we want to live a stress free life, that is done through a life of prayer and devotion.

DAY 18: GIVING UP CONTROL

BEGIN – There are many “benefits” to following Jesus. There’s the promise of eternal life, as well as His promise to be with us always. And as we explored previously, Jesus invites us into a better way of living. He invites us to a life defined by love, joy, peace. Christ is our firm foundation; His words hold the key to life. But we cannot forget there is still a cost to following Jesus. He was willing to suffer on a cross for us and asks us to take up a cross for Him. Jesus gave up His life for ours and asked us to lay down our lives for Him. His kingdom and His ways are opposite from the world around us. The crux of the matter is that following Jesus means giving control of our lives to Him. And while Jesus’ way is the better way, giving up control isn’t easy.



So as we near the end of our 21 days of purpose, let’s consider again the cost of following Jesus. During your time of fasting, you have been intentionally sacrificing time and comfort for Him. But why? Probably because you have found that Jesus is worth it. So today let’s think back to how He’s changed us. Let’s think back to how He has drawn near to us when we didn’t deserve it. We don’t just take time to pray and fast because it’s a healthy discipline. Do it

because Jesus is worthy of all our devotion, now and forever. Prayer and fasting remind us to put Him first, which is where He belongs.

Jesus warned his disciples not to tell anyone who he was. "The Son of Man must suffer many terrible things," he said. "He will be rejected by the elders, the leading priests, and the teachers of religious law. He will be killed, but on the third day he will be raised from the dead." Then he said to the crowd, "If any of you wants to be my follower, you must give up your own way, take up your cross daily, and follow me. If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake, you will save it. And what do you benefit if you gain the whole world but are yourself lost or destroyed?"

– Luke 9:21-25

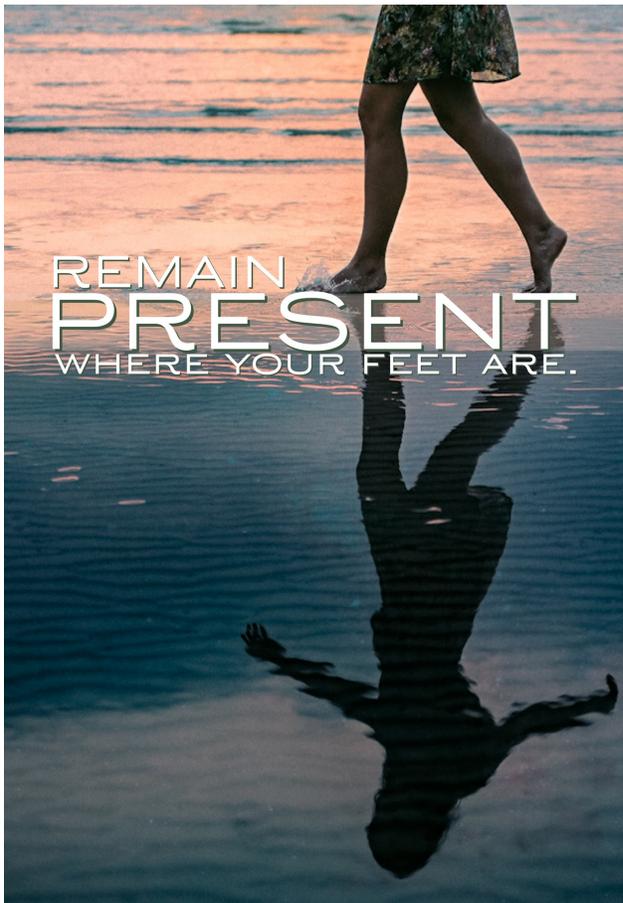
REFLECT – This passage holds within it one of the most well-known teachings of Jesus. It demonstrates the upside-down nature of God's kingdom. What matters most to the rest of the world is not what matters to God. Instead of pursuing our own gain, we must seek Jesus and follow His example of sacrifice. We must lay down our own goals and plans, while focusing on Christ's. It means refusing to live a lifestyle defined by our accomplishments and the accumulation of stuff. What is Jesus calling you to lay down so you can fully follow Him with all the parts of your life?

RESPOND – How can you intentionally simplify your life. Is there some possessions or amenity that is drawing your attention away from Christ? What about a personal or professional pursuit that is taking up all your time and focus? In your prayer time today, ask God to help you remain content and to be fully satisfied in Christ alone.

PRAY – Jesus, I lay down my life for you, as you laid down your life for me. I pick up my cross to follow you because you hung on a cross for me.

DAY 19: A MINISTRY OF PRESENCE

BEGIN – One of the underrated habits we see happening in the life of Jesus is His ability to just slow down and just be present in the moment. Now on the surface, this may not sound like that big of a deal, especially



compared to the all-night prayer sessions, His forty days of fasting, and all the healings and the casting out of demons. When compared to these things, slowing down doesn't appear to be one of Jesus' more remarkable traits. However, if you consider how much Jesus accomplished in His few short years of ministry. If you consider His very busy schedule and how in demand He was. And all this was compounded by the pressure placed upon Him by others. Yet, Jesus still prioritized

the need to still slow down and be present with people who were genuinely hurting. In the passage below, Jesus was in the midst of a crisis involving a prominent leader. It was urgent, with no time to spare. And yet, He takes time anyway to be present with someone in need.

Jesus got into the boat again and went back to the other side of the lake, where a large crowd gathered around him on the shore. Then a leader of the local synagogue, whose name was Jairus, arrived. When he saw Jesus, he fell at his feet, pleading fervently with him. "My little daughter is dying," he said.

“Please come and lay your hands on her; heal her so she can live.”

Jesus went with him, and all the people followed, crowding around him. A woman in the crowd had suffered for twelve years with constant bleeding. She had suffered a great deal from many doctors, and over the years she had spent everything she had to pay them, but she had gotten no better. In fact, she had gotten worse. She had heard about Jesus, so she came up behind him through the crowd and touched his robe. For she thought to herself, “If I can just touch his robe, I will be healed.” Immediately the bleeding stopped, and she could feel in her body that she had been healed of her terrible condition.

Jesus realized at once that healing power had gone out from him, so he turned around in the crowd and asked, “Who touched my robe?” His disciples said to him, “Look at this crowd pressing around you. How can you ask, ‘Who touched me?’” But he kept on looking around to see who had done it. Then the frightened woman, trembling at the realization of what had happened to her, came and fell to her knees in front of him and told him what she had done. And he said to her, “Daughter, your faith has made you well. Go in peace. Your suffering is over.”

– Mark 5:21-34

REFLECT – Despite being in an urgent situation with Jairus, who was a political and religious leader in the community; despite being in the middle of a crowd, Jesus was still willing to slow down and pause for the sake of this woman. In this story we can see Him clearly model what it

means to be present in the moment. If we don't come to a place of silence and stillness in our inner world, we rarely will be able to hit pause in our lives. But because Jesus was willing to slow down and be present, He was able to heal her, not only physically, but also spiritually. His ministry of presence set her free from not only her physical ailments, but also her guilt and shame. And as we read stories like this, a spiritual truth becomes very clear: We cannot live like Jesus if we are never willing to slow down and be present in every moment. So if we want to be like Jesus and be present in the lives of people then we must develop a discipline that is very difficult - patience. So how do we proactively become more patient in our lives. Well it is just like any other discipline. We must practice patience in tangible ways. So start by doing very intentional small things. Get in the longest line at the store. Drive the speed limit and come to a complete stop at stop signs. Write a letter on paper instead of email. Do something that forces you to slow down, be patient, and be present in the moment without looking at your phone to occupy your attention. Then use your moments of slowing down to turn your attention to Jesus and be present with Him wherever you are.

RESPOND – Ask God to help you slow down, look around and see opportunities to bless someone. Consider how you will practice patience this week as you force yourself to slow down. Write down some ideas in the space below and then develop a plan and fully commit to following through with a ministry of presence.

PRAY – “Lord, I want to follow Your example of being present. Amid urgency, help me slow down to hear Your voice and see as You see. Help me prioritize my time alone with You over my to-do list. Through this period of prayer and fasting, help me see the need of others around me whom You want to touch through me. I'm open to whatever You have for me today. Amen.”

with her hair. So the two sisters sent a message to Jesus telling him, "Lord, your dear friend is very sick." But when Jesus heard about it he said, "Lazarus's sickness will not end in death. No, it happened for the glory of God so that the Son of God will receive glory from this." So although Jesus loved Martha, Mary, and Lazarus, he stayed where he was for the next two days. Finally, he said to his disciples, "Let's go back to Judea."

– John 11:1-7

REFLECT – You likely know how this story ends—if you don't, read the rest of the story through John 11:45. Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead, a foreshadowing of His own resurrection. But let's not focus on the end of the story, like we often do. Try to put yourself into the beginning of the story. Jesus hears that Lazarus is sick, yet He stays put for two more days. Even in an emergency, Jesus was not in a hurry. Now, that was partly because He knew what was coming. However, when we examine the Gospel accounts, we can see Jesus was never hurried. He didn't exert control over circumstances, even though He had the power to do, and He wants the same from us. So in the whirlwind of activity, how can we follow Jesus' example and what can we learn from living like this?

Think of a time during your week when you tend to rush; now intentionally plan to keep yourself from hurrying, even when you have things to do. Can you imagine what a weekday morning would look like without feeling hurried to get the kids to school and then get to work. Or when you leave the office at rush hour to make dinner and get out the door to the next activity. When you feel the tug of hurry in your inner world, take a moment to stop and pray. It's just that simple. Every time

you feel the rushing wind of this world swirling in your mind, stop what you are doing, and pray.

RESPOND – In your private time with God, ask that your heart be prepared for the circumstances when you are most likely to rush. Ask God to help you turn moments of hurry and worry into times of prayer. Take some time and meditate on this passage from Philippians when Paul says, **“Don’t worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. Then you will experience God’s peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.”** – Philippians 4:6-7.

PRAY – “Lord, I want to live life Your way, even when it doesn’t make sense from my point of view. I want to yield control over to You. I give you control of my schedule, tasks, and all that I have to do. Help me live without hurry, to slow down and be present with You. Help me to replace control over my life with faith. Work in me and through me during this time of prayer and fasting. Amen.”

DAY 21: THE GIFT OF SABBATH

BEGIN – On our final day of prayer and fasting, we will look at one last habit we would be wise to adopt into our lives. In a way, it encompasses all the habits we have witnessed in Jesus 'life over the past 21 days. While God's people have practiced it for over three thousand years, it is still largely misunderstood – even ignored in our church culture today – the discipline of Sabbath's rest. Sabbath comes from the Hebrew word "Shabbat," which literally means to stop. This means that the Sabbath is simply a day to stop: stop working, stop worrying, stop wanting, just stop. The purpose is to stop activity for just one day a week to delight in and reflect on the awesomeness of God. But Sabbath is more than just a day; it is a way of being in the world. It is how we cultivate restfulness in our lives. That restfulness helps us live the rest of the week differently.



But in Jesus 'day, the purpose of the Sabbath had become lost. After centuries of failing to live up to God's commandments, the Pharisees zealously followed the Old Testament law. They went so far as to add additional requirements to it. But we see several instances when Jesus deliberately breaks the religious leaders 'rules regarding the Sabbath to

show them how they were missing the point. Let's read one such example.

One Sabbath day as Jesus was walking through some grain fields, his disciples began breaking off heads of grain to eat. But the Pharisees said to Jesus, "Look, why are they breaking the law by harvesting grain on the Sabbath?"

Jesus said to them, "Haven't you ever read in the Scriptures what David did when he and his companions were hungry? He went into the house of God (during the days when Abiathar was high priest) and broke the law by eating the sacred loaves of bread that only the priests are allowed to eat. He also gave some to his companions."

Then Jesus said to them, "The Sabbath was made to meet the needs of people, and not people to meet the requirements of the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is Lord, even over the Sabbath!"

– Mark 2:23-28

REFLECT – Jesus makes it clear the Sabbath is for us. It's a time once a week to do all we've learned about over the past three weeks. Sabbath was a time to practice silence, stillness, solitude, simplicity. Sabbath was a time to slowing down and just be present with God so He can show you how to be present in your everyday life. Sabbath is not an additional requirement meant to cause us difficulty or frustration. In fact, it is part of Jesus' easy yoke. It is His gift to us.

Now I believe it is important to note that Sabbath and a day off are not the same thing. We all need a day off to run errands, do laundry, get groceries, etc. Sometimes, days off are more work than actual workdays.

