



40 DAYS *Devotional*

LENT SEASON 2022

40 DAYS DEVOTIONAL

Introduction: Tuesday

You Can't Grow a Garden in a Day

Spiritual Growth is a process - you can't grow a garden in a day - but you won't grow a garden at all unless you start.

Sanctification = The process of becoming more like Jesus.

2 Peter 3:18

'But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen.'

"Oh begin! Fix some part of every day for private exercise. You may acquire the taste which you have not; what is tedious at first will afterward be pleasant. Whether you like it or not, read and pray daily. It is for your life; there is no other way; else you will be a trifler all your days. . . Do justice to your own soul; give it time and means to grow. Do not starve yourself any longer. Take up your cross and be a Christian altogether. Then will all the children of God rejoice (not grieve) over you, and in particular yours." - John Wesley to a young preacher

In the same way you can't grow a garden in a single day, you can't become like Jesus with a single decision.

In the same way you can't grow a garden without water, you can't grow your spirit without prayer.

In the same way your plants won't grow without nutrients from the soil, you can't feed your soul without nutrients from God's word.

In the same way growing a successful garden depends on providing the right conditions for the process of growth to thrive, growing our spiritual lives depends on providing the right conditions for God to grow us.

In the same way you will never grow a garden just by wishing one will grow, you will never be more like Jesus just by wishing to be more like him.

"OH BEGIN! - Whether you like it or not, read and pray daily. It is for your life; there is no other way; else you will be a trifler all your days." — John Wesley

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Introduction: Tuesday

Make the commitment TODAY to God and to yourself that from today until at least Easter Sunday you are going to set aside time everyday to bring yourself into God's presence through reading His word and in prayer.

PS - If you don't know where to start you can follow this simple pattern.

Growth Challenge: Read and Pray

Bible reading - Since it is the first of March read Psalm 1 today and read chapter 1 of the Gospel of John. Ask God to open your heart to what the Scripture might be saying. (Tomorrow read Psalm 2 and chapter 2 of John and so on)

People have found the following questions helpful to process what they read:

What does this passage say about God? What does this passage say about people? If what I read today is true, how might I adjust my life or thinking in response to these truths?

Prayer

Set a 5 minute timer and sit quietly in God's presence. (This will probably be hard at first if you haven't done this before) You can breathe the prayer "Be with me Jesus" as you quiet yourself. As thoughts come into your mind and capture your attention (and they will) release them to Jesus and return to your prayer of "Be with me Jesus". The goal of this prayer is not to accomplish anything other than quieting yourself in God's presence.

When the timer goes off, spend what time you need to talk to God about what you have on your plate for the day, what you're anxious about, prayers for others, and anything else that comes to mind. Invite Jesus to be involved in your whole day.

Finish your prayer time with the Lord's prayer.

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Introduction: Wednesday

Ashes Reveal Who We Are

Ashes remind us of our limitations - we are made from dust and will return to dust

Ecclesiastes 12:6-7

“Remember him—before the silver cord is severed, and the golden bowl is broken; before the pitcher is shattered at the spring, and the wheel broken at the well, and the dust returns to the ground it came from, and the spirit returns to God who gave it.”

Psalm 103:13-22

“As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him; for he knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust.

The life of mortals is like grass, they flourish like a flower of the field; the wind blows over it and it is gone, and its place remembers it no more.

But from everlasting to everlasting the Lord’s love is with those who fear him, and his righteousness with their children’s children—

with those who keep his covenant and remember to obey his precepts.

The Lord has established his throne in heaven, and his kingdom rules over all.

Praise the Lord, you his angels, you mighty ones who do his bidding, who obey his word. Praise the Lord, all his heavenly hosts, you his servants who do his will. Praise the Lord, all his works everywhere in his dominion.”

Praise the Lord, my soul.

Ash Wednesday is a day for us to humble ourselves before God and put our lives into perspective. It’s a day to make the commitment to do the work to prepare ourselves to meet the Risen Jesus at Easter.

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Introduction: Wednesday

Growth Challenge: Fast from Spiritual Indifference

I am suggesting that this year our entire church would fast from spiritual indifference, spiritual settling, and a lack of spiritual disciplines. To fast from indifference would mean that we would forgo indifference and would actively engage in the process of spiritual growth. Fasting from settling would mean that we wouldn't allow ourselves to be satisfied with where we are and would trust that God wants to and can grow us more like Jesus. Fasting from a lack of spiritual disciplines would be to commit to actively engaging the means of grace that God has provided so that we are more available to be changed into his likeness.

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Introduction: Thursday

A Season for Everything

We need to have realistic expectations - everything moves from seeds to seedlings to flowers to fruit in their own time

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

There is a time for everything,

and a season for every activity under the heavens:

a time to be born and a time to die,

a time to plant and a time to uproot,

a time to kill and a time to heal,

a time to tear down and a time to build,

a time to weep and a time to laugh,

a time to mourn and a time to dance,

a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them,

a time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing,

a time to search and a time to give up,

a time to keep and a time to throw away,

a time to tear and a time to mend,

a time to be silent and a time to speak,

a time to love and a time to hate,

a time for war and a time for peace

If you are growing a garden you know that there is an order to the process. Every plant in the garden makes a natural progression from seed to seedling to flowering plant to fruit to decline to death in their own time. We see the same process in the development of our physical bodies. Every human grows from embryo to fetus to infant to child to adolescent to adult to decline and death in their own time.

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Introduction: Thursday

The same order is true of our spiritual life. Every person goes from sinner to repentance to forgiven to baby christian to adolescent to adult in the process of becoming more like Jesus. The difference is rather than experiencing a decline and death we end the process with a fulfillment of life in God's presence. All of that is to say that we would be wise to set our spiritual growth expectations accordingly. No matter how much we may want to skip the seedling stage and go straight to fruit, or how much we may want to skip the spiritual infant stage and go straight to spiritual adult you can't. You have to submit yourself to the process God put in place.

And of course there is no correlation between physical maturity and spiritual maturity.

Growth Challenge: Find your Season

So spend some time today in prayer specifically asking God to show you where you are in your growth journey. Also understand that it is possible to be mature in one area and immature in another depending on many factors. So stay open and don't be discouraged if God points out some places we need to grow up a little.

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Introduction: Friday

The Goal is Relationship

Legalism and trying to control the outcomes - those are your enemies and you need to be on guard against their attacks - grace is for you.

Mark 7:8-13

You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to human traditions.”

And Jesus continued, “You have a fine way of setting aside the commands of God in order to observe your own traditions! For Moses said, ‘Honor your father and mother,’ and, ‘Anyone who curses their father or mother is to be put to death.’ But you say that if anyone declares that what might have been used to help their father or mother is Corban (that is, devoted to God)— then you no longer let them do anything for their father or mother. Thus you nullify the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And you do many things like that.”

It is a human frailty to want to turn the means into the ends. We can certainly do that as we begin to practice spiritual disciplines. Disciplines are much like the exercises we do to get in shape. The goal is not to work out, the goal is to get in shape. The goal of spiritual disciplines is not to make us holy, the goal is to open our hearts to an intimate relationship with the God who will make us holy.

It is a human temptation to try to use our disciplines to try to control our outcomes with God. Our thinking goes something like, when I read my Bible and pray the right ways God will certainly reward me with blessing. It's amazing how many of us have some view of God as a heavenly vending machine. We think that if we insert the coins of prayer, Bible study, church attendance, and giving somehow God will be obligated to give us what we want.

The enemy of our souls wants us to focus on the means instead of the ends while trying to control the outcomes of our relationship with God.

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Introduction: Friday

Growth Challenge: Bring it to God

Today, spend time in prayer asking God to help you to focus on knowing him and not on how well you might or might not be performing any discipline.

Release the outcomes of your relationship with God to him.

Climb up into God's lap and let God give you what he knows you need rather than what you think you need.

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Introduction: Saturday

Spiritual Disciplines are not One Size Fits All

During this study you will engage these practices individually and collectively - and your process will be as unique as you are.

Psalm 139: 1-6

*You have searched me, Lord,
and you know me.*

*You know when I sit and when I rise;
you perceive my thoughts from afar.*

*You discern my going out and my lying down;
you are familiar with all my ways.*

*Before a word is on my tongue
you, Lord, know it completely.*

*You hem me in behind and before,
and you lay your hand upon me*

You are unique. There has never been and there will never be anyone else exactly like you. No one else will relate to God the same way you do and no one else will be able to reflect God's glory to the world quite the way you can.

The process you have to go through to achieve intimacy with God will use similar means as everyone else's process. But how the Holy Spirit and you weave those processes into the tapestry of intimacy will be unique to you alone. God is big enough to interact with, parent, lead, mold, relate to, shape, and grow you individually. Your journey will be as unique as you are.

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Introduction: Saturday

Growth Challenge: Ask God to Reveal Your Uniqueness

Ask God to show you how to best relate to Him in the ways best suited to your relationship with Him. Ask God to help you as you experiment with different ways of interacting with various spiritual disciplines for the next 37 days.

I want to close this week by reminding you that new habits and new ways of relating to God take time. It's okay if it all feels a little awkward. It's okay if it all feels a little forced. It's okay if you haven't had any lightning bolt moments or if you don't feel differently. Like any habit you are trying to develop, the more you practice the more you'll improve. So hang in there and keep at it. Little by little is the name of this game for most of us.

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Week of Prayer: Tuesday

Praying Scripture

Psa 119:97,130

Oh, how I love your law!

I meditate on it all day long.

...The unfolding of your words gives light.

Sometimes we find ourselves at a place in life where we are searching for God's guidance and longing for his help. We twist and turn and bend over in order to figure out what to say in prayer or how to approach the Father. We act like a plant straining to find the sunlight.

In those times, we need to look no farther than God's word to us. The Bible not only tells us what God says to his people, but it also tells us what to say to God. Scripture can give us words to pray when we don't know what to say. It is like sunlight for our souls. God's word shines light on our deepest desires and needs. It reveals who we truly are and how we can relate to our creator. If we would bend ourselves toward God's word, then we'll find words of prayer provided for us. When we allow God's word to shape and direct our prayers, we can be confident that we are in alignment with his will. And we can be confident that he will answer our prayers in love.

Growth Challenge:

One of the prime examples of praying scripture is using the Lord's prayer. Take some time to read through Jesus' prayer and reflect on each phrase. Then spend 5-7 minutes praying this prayer. Read the prayer out loud; then repeat it in your own words. Ask God to make these things real in your own life today.

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Week of Prayer: Tuesday

Matt 6:9-13

*“Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
And forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from the evil one.”*

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Week of Prayer: Wednesday

Centering Prayer

“Prayer is not primarily saying words or thinking thoughts. It is, rather, a stance. It’s a way of living in the Presence.” — Richard Rohr, Everything Belongs

Psalms 62:1-2

Only in God do I find rest;

my salvation comes from him.

Only God is my rock and my salvation—

my stronghold!—I won’t be shaken anymore.

Before we can do, we must be. Before we can bear fruit, we must be a branch. We have to stay connected to the vine and acknowledge who we are in relation to Jesus Christ.

In our busy and challenging lives, it is so difficult for us to just be in the presence of God. Oftentimes, even our prayers are filled with busyness and exasperation, and we miss out on the opportunity to just sit at the feet of our creator. When we actually take the time to sit, we can find true rest and peace.

God invites us to center our lives on him — the rock of our salvation. One way we can do that is through the practice of centering prayer.

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Week of Prayer: Wednesday

Growth Challenge:

Centering prayer is the practice of opening oneself to God's presence and trying to release all thoughts and distractions to the Lord. In centering prayer, try to let the thoughts and emotions that come to the surface of your mind "drift away down a river of God's love," and then, focus solely on God's presence with you.. Think of centering prayer as more of a posture than an action.

Some steps to practice Centering Prayer

- ✦ Find a quiet place where you can be alone and undisturbed.
- ✦ As you prepare, choose a simple word or phrase that can help you fix your attention on God's presence if you get distracted. For example: "Almighty," "Jesus," "Good Shepherd," etc.
- ✦ Take time to be quiet and breathe deeply; then center yourself in God's presence
- ✦ As your thoughts/emotions come, do not shun them or deny them, but allow God's love to guide them away.
- ✦ Rest in the center of God's love. Trust that the Holy Spirit is connecting you with God's presence in you.
- ✦ As you finish, offer yourself to God. Resist the urge to quickly move on to prayer requests or daily tasks.

Today, try out centering prayer for 3-10 minutes. Then reflect: How can this practice help you connect with God in a new or renewed way?

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Week of Prayer: Thursday

Confessional Prayer

1 John 1:5-9

This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.

If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

Upon first glance, a single parasite, pest, or diseased cell doesn't seem so bad. But left alone, it grows, festers, and multiplies until the plant is eventually killed. For those who follow Jesus, sins of any size or manner can harm our relationship with God in the same way. Sometimes, that harm can go unseen for a long time. Regular confession is a necessary and good thing for our souls.

The difficult truth is that even though we know confession is a good thing to do, we often don't want to embrace the practice of it. We rationalize, excuse, or deny the things in our hearts that do not align with God's will. We think to ourselves, "it's not so bad." We hide something in the dark, because it is easier than stepping into the light.

Jesus died on the cross so that we could receive freedom from sin. When we fail to confess our sins, we reject that opportunity to step into freedom. We think we are taking the easy way out, but we are doing more harm to ourselves in the long run. Yet, when we do confess, we open ourselves to the healing light of God's grace. We receive nourishment for our souls, and we can grow once again.

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Week of Prayer: Thursday

Growth Challenge:

Make time for confessional prayer. As you begin, ask the Lord to help you be honest with yourself and with him. Then go through these steps in prayer:

- ✦ Acknowledge God's holiness and your general need for God's grace in your life (Isaiah 64:6).
- ✦ Confess any specific sins that you are already aware of (1 John 1:9).
- ✦ Ask God's light to pierce through any defenses or blind-spots you have (Psalm 139:23-24), and then ask these questions of the Lord:
 - ✦ Are there any parts of my life that I am holding back from you?
 - ✦ Who do I have a broken relationship with, or who have I hurt recently?
 - ✦ Is there anything else I need to confess to you?
- ✦ Ask for God's grace and forgiveness for everything you have confessed. Claim that forgiveness, and trust in God's love for you (Romans 8:38-39).
- ✦ As you conclude your prayer time, commit to obeying whatever the Lord has asked you to do as a result of this prayer time.

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Week of Prayer: Friday

Fixed Hour Prayer

Daniel 6:7, 10

"...the king should issue an edict and enforce the decree that anyone who prays to any god or human being during the next thirty days, except to you, Your Majesty, shall be thrown into the lions' den."

Now when Daniel learned that the decree had been published, he went home to his upstairs room where the windows opened toward Jerusalem. Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God, just as he had done before.

Through the discipline of prayer, we do many things. We sit in God's presence. We seek the Lord's provision and deliverance. We listen for the wisdom of the Almighty. During the Babylonian exile, the Israelite Daniel's prayers were more than that. As he endured the struggles of exile and assimilation into Babylonian culture, Daniel prayed routinely throughout the day to declare that his God was the true king.

Daniel was committed to regular prayer, and his prayers were an act of defiance. Through his commitment to pray throughout the day, Daniel declared that he would not submit to the Babylonian culture. He would stop, bow down before the Lord, and offer his praise to God no matter what. He would not be too busy or get overwhelmed by the habits of others around him. He was obedient to continue praying three times a day, and his refusal to give in to the patterns of the world kept the lions' mouths shut.

Praying the Divine Office, praying three times a day, or praying at the top of every hour can be a stretching and humbling discipline. For many people, this is not a practice we are familiar with. Yet, when we commit ourselves to regularly scheduled times of prayer throughout the day, we are standing in opposition to the busyness, greed, and selfishness of the worldly culture. We declare that right now, God is more important than what we are doing, and we praise him.

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Week of Prayer: Friday

Growth Challenge:

Make a commitment this day or this week to pray at set times throughout your day. Pick a goal that will stretch you but not be unrealistic. You can choose to pray 1 additional time during your day, you can choose to pray every hour on the hour, or anything in-between. Set an alarm/reminder on a device, and pray in whatever manner best helps you connect with the Lord when the time comes. You can commit to 5 minutes of silence & listening prayer, praying Scripture, or spontaneous words of worship — whatever works for you. Your goal is to stop your routine, declare that the Lord is bigger than your work, and connect with a God who loves you.

If you would like to investigate outside resources to help with this discipline, please consider:

- ✦ The Divine Office (available as an app and in various forms online)
- ✦ The Divine Hours by Phyllis Tickle, © Image, 2006

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Week of Prayer: Saturday

Intercessory Prayer

James 5:13-16

Is anyone among you in trouble? Let them pray. Is anyone happy? Let them sing songs of praise. Is anyone among you sick? Let them call the elders of the church to pray over them and anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise them up. If they have sinned, they will be forgiven. Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.

To intercede means to “go between,” or to “mediate.” Intercessory prayer is more than just asking God for things; it is about more than just a list of requests. The act of intercessory prayer means to go between God and someone else, to mediate for both parties in a time of trouble. A mediator has to see things from both parties’ perspective in order to bring them closer together. When we intercede for others in prayer, we strive to put ourselves in the shoes of the Lord and the one we love.

Intercessory prayer is about praying for God’s will to be done in the life of another. We ask God how to pray for someone, and we ask God what his desire is for that person. In some sense, we pray on God’s behalf.

At the same time, intercessory prayer allows us to go to God and speak in support of the person we love. We cry out for healing, breakthrough, or redemption. We ask God to provide for that person even if that loved one doesn’t know the Lord at all. We pray on the other’s behalf.

In intercessory prayer, we humbly step between God and the other. We ask God to bring them closer together. Then, we trust that in his infinite love and power, God can bring miraculous change for someone else.

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Week of Prayer: Saturday

Growth Challenge:

Set aside intentional time to pray for others today. Make a list of people to pray for, and work through the list. As you pray, ask God to help you see the situation from his perspective, and pray that God's will be done in that person's life.

Or, you can try spontaneous intercessory prayer. As people come to mind, or as you interact with people throughout the day, take a moment to pray for them. Ask God: what is your prayer for this person? Listen, and then pray for God to make it happen.

An optional extra challenge: Continue to pray for those same people each day for the next week.

40 DAYS DEVOTIONAL

Week of The Bible: Tuesday

Finding Value in the Bible

Do you have to read the Bible? Well... no actually. You are allowed to not read the Bible and call yourself a Christian. That seems like a weird statement, but technically it's true. You can do a lot of things I wouldn't recommend and call yourself a Christian. We're not here to find the minimum requirements of being a Christian, however; we want to be disciples of Jesus.

The Bible is one unified Story that leads to Jesus and if you want to be a disciple of Jesus you need to know the full story. Beyond the Bible itself Church history helps us see the value of scripture. The history of the church tells the story of the thousands of people that came before us who literally died to make the Bible publically available and accessible. Battles were fought over this, people martyred, and millions upon millions of hours given to the translation of the Bible. All of this so that we could have access to it. It's that important.

Why would people give their lives for a bunch of old books? The Bible isn't just some random stories that provide good advice for your life. The Bible is the story of God's unceasing, eternal, and redemptive love chasing after humanity- chasing after YOU!

So yes, you don't have to read the Bible. No one is going to knock your door down and force you to read it, but if there is a chance that it is even a fraction as valuable as I have described- don't you think it's worth a read? Jesus thought it was worth his time.

Luke 14: 6-21

Jesus went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:

*“The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
because he has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.*

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Week of The Bible: Tuesday

*He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners
and recovery of sight for the blind,
to set the oppressed free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."*

Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him. He began by saying to them, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."

Growth Challenge: Study the Bible

- Open your Bible or Bible app and find this scripture.
- Write out the scripture that Jesus quoted. Circle and underline things that stood out to you. Write out questions you have about this quote.
- Contemplate what it means that Jesus is fulfilling this scripture and that all scripture is connected. Think about how blessed we are to have access to scripture. Pray.
- Make it a practice to ask questions and write out scripture when you're studying if it's helpful.

40 DAYS DEVOTIONAL

Week of The Bible: Wednesday

Understanding the Bible

“The wisdom of what a person says is in direct proportion to their progress in learning the holy scriptures--and I am not speaking of intensive reading or memorization, but real understanding and careful investigation of their meaning.” — Saint Augustine of Hippo

How do you begin to understand the Bible? Well it all starts with seeing the Bible as both a unified story and a library of different books. Every book of the Bible has a unique context and most of them tell you exactly what those contexts are. Anything written by Paul is a letter written to a specific church in a specific place and time. Reading the Psalms you'll see that it's poetry that is written by many different people. Genesis has both poetry and narrative. The whole Bible is full of distinctive books with special attributes to consider.

One way we can look at each book of the Bible is that it has three contexts we should consider:

1. Original context: Who it was originally written by and who was the original audience.
2. Biblical context: Where it fits into our Bible. Consider positioning and chronology.
3. Christian context: How it fits into our lives in light of what Christ has done.

If we want to grow in biblical understanding it's important that we do our best to investigate the Bible and truly understand it in all of its contexts.

Use your physical Bible or digital Bible to read Psalms 22

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Week of The Bible: Wednesday

Growth Challenge: Apply the context of Psalms 22 through thoughtful questions

- ✦ Original Context- Who is authorship attributed to here?
- ✦ What kind of literature are the Psalms? Does that change the way you read it at all?
- ✦ Biblical context- What book is this verse located in?
 - Psalms 22:1 is famously repeated in Matthew 27:46 and Mark 15:34 by Jesus himself while he was about to die on the cross. It stands to reason that Jesus was referring to the whole chapter of Psalms 22 when we quoted Psalms 22:1.
 - Based on all of Psalms 22- What else was Jesus referring to? Think about how Jesus is actually fulfilling the call of a king like David was trying to do. Pay special attention to 22:6-8 and the human emotions Jesus must have been feeling.
- ✦ Christian Context- How can we apply Psalms 22 and other Psalms knowing how Jesus used it?
 - How much more impactful are Jesus' words knowing the context of the Psalm he was referring to?
 - Knowing that Jesus used the Psalms to call out to God what does that mean for us? Can we use the psalms the same way?

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Week of The Bible: Thursday

Connecting to the Bible

“For [reading the Bible] to make the deep, life-changing, Kingdom-advancing sense it is supposed to, it is vital that ordinary Christians read, encounter, and study scripture for themselves, in groups and individually.”
— NT Wright

Do you ever find yourself having a hard time connecting to the Bible? That’s pretty common and I would even say that it’s expected at some point in your faith walk. When you consider that the Bible is ancient wisdom literature written over the course of thousands of years by people who are from drastically different cultures than us, it’s easy to see how that could happen. The good news is that there are practices we can do to feel more connected to the Bible.

Today we are going to try out a practice that you may or may not be familiar with. This practice is a meditation known as Lectio Divina. The Latin phrase “lectio divina” may be translated as “divine reading”. It is rooted in liturgical celebration that dates back to early monastic communities. It’s been a proven way of meditation for over a millennium and it will help you connect to the Bible. I know it sounds intimidating, but I promise- it’s easy! Let’s get started.

Growth Challenge: Practice Lectio Divina

To practice Lectio Divina-

1. Read this scripture below slowly. Imagine yourself in the words and pay attention to what sticks out to you.

Philippians 4: 4-9 Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

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Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.

2. Read the scripture again.
3. Pray to God about what sticks out to you.
4. Listen for direction from God.
5. Repeat this practice several times as God leads you.

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Week of The Bible: Friday

Living with the Bible

“A Bible that is falling apart usually belongs to someone that isn’t” — Charles Spurgeon

There isn’t just one right way to read the Bible. I really wish I could hand you a perfect Bible study method ordained by God, but it doesn’t exist. The best advice I can give is that the Bible should be an important part of our lives. The Bible is often referred to as meditation literature. That means that the Bible requires us to invest our lives into it and with life long investment we will be rewarded with greater understanding. The goal however isn’t for us to master the word of God, but rather to have the word of God to master us.

How much the word of God will master us is dependent on how much we are willing to learn. To learn from the Bible we must have a growth mindset. A growth mindset means being open to the idea of learning new things, being proven wrong, and letting ourselves be challenged by new ideas. The truth is that if we think we think that we can’t learn something new about the Bible we are flat out wrong. If we assume that we have it all figured out then instead of growing closer to God we will actually hinder our relationship with God by thinking that he can’t change us and teach us new things.

So the solution is to wipe our minds everytime we read the Bible, right? Absolutely not. Even if that were possible it is much better to bring who we are into our study. When we approach the Bible we should bring our lives and experience to the table and use them. The next and more important step is to allow God to challenge our views and expectations when we come to the Bible. Let’s practice that.

Matthew 6:33 – “But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.”

What does this verse mean on its own? Have you been taught anything about this verse before?

This verse starts with the connecting verb “but” this means that you should be connecting Matt 6:33 to the section before it. The section before it is “The Sermon on the Mount”. The words “all these things” are referring to The Sermon on the Mount.

40 DAYS DEVOTIONAL

Week of The Bible: Friday

Growth Challenge: Learn something new.

Matthew 6:33 tells us that if we seek first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness then we will be given the ability to follow his sermon on the mount teachings.

- ✦ Read the Sermon on the mount - Matthew 5-7 in your own Bible or Bible app.
- ✦ One common interpretation of Matthew 6:33 is that it is saying we can have whatever we want if we follow Jesus. Is this correct?
- ✦ What are we promised if we “seek first his kingdom and his righteousness”?

Going forward, do your best to understand the scripture surrounding popular verses.

40 DAYS DEVOTIONAL

Week of The Bible: Saturday

Enjoying the Bible

“For me, the Bible is a labyrinth that is worth a lifetime’s worth of discovery and I’m constantly learning things that I never thought to think before. And so for me, that’s where the action is. It’s actually in this content that is pretty central to all the streams of the Christian tradition and it’s like this treasure trove that’s right there that isn’t often explored for the way it’s worth.” — Dr. Tim Mackie

The Bible is complicated... And water is wet. If you’re going through this devotional you are probably well aware of the complexity of the Bible by this point. Complicated things can be enjoyable and oftentimes the more complicated something is the more room for enjoyment it has. It’s true- Think about a good movie or TV show that gets better every time you rewatch it. The Bible manages to be so complex that a lifetime worth of study can’t fully uncover all of its treasures while telling a story so simple that a child can be moved by it. Yes it is complicated, but it can speak to anyone. The goal of reading the Bible is to get closer to God and the incredible thing is that God will speak to us in new ways every time we read it. That can be just by reading one verse at a time or by intensive study. Both are important. So today I just want us to enjoy some scripture with you. This won’t be intensive work, but it will require your attention. The goal for today is to enjoy your Bible. Let’s get started.

Growth Challenge: Take Scripture with you

Write down one or both of these verses and put it somewhere you will see it daily. Consider the devotional thoughts and questions. If you want to go deeper- read these in context.

Colossians 3:12-15

Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

40 DAYS DEVOTIONAL

Week of The Bible: Saturday

What does it mean to “put on love”?

Psalm 37

Trust in the Lord and do good; dwell in the land and enjoy safe pastures.

Take delight in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart.

Commit your way to the Lord; trust in him and he will do this:

He will make your righteous reward shine like the dawn, your vindication like the noonday sun

Does this verse mean that we get whatever we want?

What will our desires look like if we trust in God and delight in the Lord?

What does God want? Consider the life of Jesus.

40 DAYS DEVOTIONAL

Week of Solitude & Silence: Tuesday

Solitude as a Mindset

“In solitude, we confront our own soul with its obscure forces and conflicts that escape our attention when we are interacting with others... We can only survive solitude if we cling to Christ there. And yet what we find of him in that solitude enables us to return to society as free persons.” — Dallas Willard

Being alone terrifies a lot of people. The truth is that it is uncomfortable to be left alone with our own thoughts and feelings because dealing with them is often painful. This fear drives us to do whatever we can to make sure we never feel lonely. We want to attend events, make plans, and keep the constant stream of visual and auditory noise going. Social media, radio, TV, and phones all serve to distract us.

What if we could learn to actually want solitude and seek it out? What if, by practice, we could get comfortable enough with solitude that we could learn to embrace solitude anywhere we go? Having solitude as a mindset means we search for those times of solitude because instead of fear they bring about peace and freedom.

Do you want to know why you're afraid of solitude? It's because you're afraid that loneliness will be too much to bear alone. The difference for Christians is that we are not alone in solitude. In fact silence and solitude is where God often meets us. Solitude is not loneliness. Solitude is a way to meet God. God is speaking, but how can we hear him if we don't give ourselves the silence to listen?

1 Kings 19:11-13

The Lord said, “Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by.”

Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper. When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave.

Then a voice said to him, “What are you doing here, Elijah?”

40 DAYS DEVOTIONAL

Week of Solitude & Silence: Tuesday

Growth Challenge: Look for solitude

- Look for opportunities today to cut out a routine and seek out solitude.
- Sit in silence in the car on the way somewhere, sit in silence in the morning or at night.
- Give yourself space to hear from God and meet him in the silence.

40 DAYS DEVOTIONAL

Week of Solitude & Silence: Wednesday

Eliminate Hurry

“To walk with Jesus is to walk with a slow, unhurried pace. Hurry is the death of prayer and only impedes and spoils our work. It never advances it.” — John Mark Comer

Hurry is the death of a healthy spiritual life. Hurry forces us to skip important spiritual aspects of life. All the while hurry tricks us into believing that being hurried is good and having too much to do makes us more interesting and valuable. The problem is that when we are in a hurry we are too busy to live fruitful lives because we are focused on our own wants and needs and not God’s.

Wasn’t Jesus busy? Yes he was. Take a look at his life in the gospels and you will see that he has a lot going on. Jesus was busy, but he wasn’t too busy. He was never so busy that he had to hurry. He always had time to connect with his father through prayer. He had margin and he was able to take the extra time for people that needed it. This allowed him to be both personal and transformational.

Mark 5:25-34

And a woman was there who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years. She had suffered a great deal under the care of many doctors and had spent all she had, yet instead of getting better she grew worse. When she heard about Jesus, she came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, because she thought, “If I just touch his clothes, I will be healed.” Immediately her bleeding stopped and she felt in her body that she was freed from her suffering. At once Jesus realized that power had gone out from him. He turned around in the crowd and asked, “Who touched my clothes?”

“You see the people crowding against you,” his disciples answered, “and yet you can ask, ‘Who touched me?’”

But Jesus kept looking around to see who had done it. Then the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came and fell at his feet and, trembling with fear, told him the whole truth. He said to her, “Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering.”

40 DAYS DEVOTIONAL

Week of Solitude & Silence: Wednesday

Growth Challenge: Slow Down Today

- ✦ How did Jesus's ability to slow down allow him to be present with the person who needed it the most? How would this story be different if Jesus was in a hurry?
- ✦ Think of any time Jesus takes time to talk to someone- is he in a hurry to get on with his own life or does he have space to be with that person? (think Zachaeus, woman at the well, the woman accused of adultery)
- ✦ Look for some ways to slow down today. What would it take for you to build more margin into your life?
- ✦ If someone needs your time- give it to them.

40 DAYS DEVOTIONAL

Week of Solitude & Silence: Thursday

Taming the Tongue

Leadership books and blog posts are filled with researched strategies focusing on how to be a better leader to a wide variety of people. The idea of “talk less, think more” prevails in most popular advice. The common idea is basically this: People who have earned a lot of respect know how to listen well, the right things to say, and when to say those right things. While this is studied by secular culture as well, this idea has been in the Christian and Jewish Bible for thousands of years. It makes good practical sense. Would you rather be around someone that never stops talking or someone that listens well and knows when to contribute? One is detrimental to a relationship and one is an asset.

Learning to tame the tongue is the process of learning when to speak and how to say the right things when we do speak. Notice that before ever getting to saying the right things you have to know if you should be speaking in the first place. The Bible teaches us that mastering this not only benefits others, but it benefits us as well. When we learn to practice silence at the right times we become better leaders, better partners, and we look more like Jesus.

Prov. 10:19

*When words are many, transgression is not lacking, but whoever restrains his lips is prudent.
(Transgression refers to ways that people betray or violate someone’s trust.)*

Prov. 18:2

A fool takes no pleasure in understanding, but only in expressing his opinion.

James 1:19

My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry,

James 3:6

The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole body, sets the whole course of one’s life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell.

40 DAYS DEVOTIONAL

Week of Solitude & Silence: Thursday

Growth Challenge: Practice silence

These verses really speak for themselves. If you want to tame the tongue the first step is learning how to be quiet.

- ✦ When conversation comes your way- Practice thinking and listening well before you say anything.
- ✦ Allow long pauses in conversation.
- ✦ Ask God to give you the correct words to say and then contribute positively to conversation.
- ✦ Use the tongue rarely today and when you do use it- build others up.

40 DAYS DEVOTIONAL

Week of Solitude & Silence: Friday

Extended Solitude

Living in America is just plain exhausting. “Consumers around the world spend an average of 463 minutes or over 7.5 hours per day with media” (Statista.com). 7.5 hours of media and that’s not including in person conversations, work, and other things that take up our time. We must take steps at lowering our media input and regain our moments of solitude. This means that sometimes we need a detox to get back on track.

Extended solitude is a period of a full day or longer where we detox from all media, human relationships, and normal responsibilities. This is not a free pass to do nothing... In fact this break is often painful, but the goal is to allow ourselves a moment to reset and remember that we exist and have worth without all that stuff that clogs up our days. This break should take you away from your normal habits and force you to sit with your thoughts and feelings. Turn the phone to silent, bring a Bible and food, and just exist with God.

Look at how Jesus spends 3 days of ministry:

- ✦ Day one: Jesus Feeds the 5,000
- ✦ Day two: Jesus takes extended Solitude

Matthew 14:22

“Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowd. After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. Later that night, he was there alone.”

- ✦ Day three: Jesus Walks on water

40 DAYS DEVOTIONAL

Week of Solitude & Silence: Friday

Growth Challenge: Plan for Solitude

The context here is everything. In between 2 of Jesus most unique and powerful miracles Jesus makes time extended solitude.

- ✦ If Jesus requires extended solitude in his life why do we think we don't need it?
 - What do you imagine Jesus did during his solitude?
- ✦ Put a day on your calendar right now to take a day of solitude. It doesn't have to be anywhere far away- it could even be in your own home, but for one day drop your routines, silence your phone, and spend time without media and people.
 - For safety & accountability, inform someone close to you of your plans if you live alone.
 - Pray, read the Bible and just be with God during this day of solitude.

40 DAYS DEVOTIONAL

Week of Solitude & Silence: Saturday

Daily Solitudes

“In solitude we are freed from our bondage to people and our inner compulsions, and we are freed to love God and know compassion for others.” - Richard Foster

Earlier in our study of Solitude we talked about Solitude as a mindset. The logical next step of solitude as a mindset is daily solitudes. Daily Solitude is the ability to exercise the discipline of solitude in our everyday lives no matter our circumstances. We can't always get away for a retreat so we must learn to practice solitude throughout our day. This will look different for every one of us, but I promise you that it's possible to find daily solitude.

When I was in college I worked full time at Starbucks and the best time for solitude for me was on my way to work in the morning. I am unfortunately NOT a morning person, but being on the road at 5am means it's quiet and peaceful. It was the perfect time for me to just be in silence and listen. Sometimes that was hard and other times it helped me in ways I couldn't begin to know. On more than one occasion this solitude would prepare me mentally and spiritually for situations of verbal abuse. Today with a family and working full time my solitudes take place during my morning coffee time or after my son goes to sleep. We all have an opportunity for daily solitude, but it's up to us to make time for it.

Mark 1:35-39

Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed. Simon and his companions went to look for him, and when they found him, they exclaimed: “Everyone is looking for you!”

Jesus replied, “Let us go somewhere else—to the nearby villages—so I can preach there also. That is why I have come.” So he traveled throughout Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and driving out demons.

40 DAYS DEVOTIONAL

Week of Solitude & Silence: Saturday

Growth Challenge: Have solitude today

Reading this within context shows us that this morning solitude that Jesus took was right in the middle of healing people and exorcizing demons. Jesus had a lot to get done. There was no shortage of people that needed his help, but he still took time for daily solitude.

How do you think this daily solitude benefitted Jesus? If Jesus could benefit from a daily solitude do you think you can as well?

Make it a priority today to find time for a daily moment of solitude with God.

- + Pray and sit in a moment of silence.
- + Allow time for God to speak to you.
- + Listen to how he is moving you and allow him in. Be vulnerable to his direction.
- + Continue this every day.

40 DAYS DEVOTIONAL

Week of Fasting: Tuesday

Fasting For the Right Reasons

The common non-religious fasts we see in the world are for personal physical health and ultimately the goal for these is for us to exert control over our bodies. In contrast, the ultimate goal of fasting in a Christian context is to give control of our bodies over to God.

When we fast we are demonstrating that we don't live on bread alone (Matthew 4:4), but instead rely on God for sustaining us. Does that mean that we have to fast from food then? Absolutely not- you can fast from anything that separates you from relying on God. For many people this is food and if it would not harm you medically I would encourage this form of it at least once. However there are many other good options like fasting from social media, your phone, all news for a week, etc. One thing we have to be wary of in a religious context is fasting for the wrong reasons. By this I mean using fasting not to align with God, but to try to appear more godly or prove something to yourself- to get what we want.

This is what we see in the story of Isaiah.

Isaiah 58:

“Shout it aloud, do not hold back.

Raise your voice like a trumpet.

Declare to my people their rebellion

and to the descendants of Jacob their sins.

For day after day they seek me out;

they seem eager to know my ways,

as if they were a nation that does what is right

and has not forsaken the commands of its God.

They ask me for just decisions

and seem eager for God to come near them.

‘Why have we fasted,’ they say,

‘and you have not seen it?’

Why have we humbled ourselves,

40 DAYS DEVOTIONAL

Week of Fasting: Tuesday

and you have not noticed?
“Yet on the day of your fasting,
you do as you please
and exploit all your workers.
Your fasting ends in quarreling and strife,
and in striking each other with wicked fists.
You cannot fast as you do today
and expect your voice to be heard on high.
Is this the kind of fast I have chosen,
only a day for people to humble themselves?
Is it only for bowing one’s head like a reed
and for lying in sackcloth and ashes?
Is that what you call a fast,
a day acceptable to the Lord?
“Is not this the kind of
fasting I have chosen:
to loose the chains of injustice
and untie the cords of the yoke,
to set the oppressed free
and break every yoke?
Is it not to
share your food with the hungry
and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter—
when you see the naked, to clothe them
and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?”

40 DAYS DEVOTIONAL

Week of Fasting: Tuesday

Growth Challenge: Fast for the right reasons

According to Isaiah there are some things we must do while fasting. To fast properly and effectively we must be looking to God and doing his will. Isaiah shows us that fasting should actually drive us to live better while we are doing it.

- ✦ While fasting we must use our positions to bring justice to those without it.
- ✦ While fasting we must help those in need and the homeless.
- ✦ While fasting we must be like Jesus: Bringing restorative justice and fighting for the least of these.

Choose what you will fast from and try to fast from that either today or tomorrow. Take time during your fast to actively and prayerfully help others, enact justice, and serve your neighbor.

40 DAYS DEVOTIONAL

Week of Fasting: Wednesday

Fasting to Glorify

Fasting is a lot like praying in some ways. There are certainly many ways to pray and participate in prayer and fasting is similar. We can fast for many reasons and one of these that is described in the book of Daniel is fasting to glorify God. The reason for his fast was to show others the power of God and that his God, not his food, would provide strength to Daniel. Daniel had something to prove, but not about himself, about God. He wanted to demonstrate that his god was far more powerful than any God these people had seen or could imagine.

Daniel 1:11-20

Daniel then said to the guard whom the chief official had appointed over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, "Please test your servants for ten days: Give us nothing but vegetables to eat and water to drink. Then compare our appearance with that of the young men who eat the royal food, and treat your servants in accordance with what you see." So he agreed to this and tested them for ten days.

At the end of the ten days they looked healthier and better nourished than any of the young men who ate the royal food. So the guard took away their choice food and the wine they were to drink and gave them vegetables instead. To these four young men God gave knowledge and understanding of all kinds of literature and learning. And Daniel could understand visions and dreams of all kinds.

At the end of the time set by the king to bring them into his service, the chief official presented them to Nebuchadnezzar. The king talked with them, and he found none equal to Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah; so they entered the king's service. In every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king questioned them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters in his whole kingdom.

Daniel shows us another form of food fasting here called a partial fast. It's not a complete fast from food, but from all food that we would typically find "filling" and "strength giving". We would expect this fast to make these people healthy physically, but God did even more through this fast. He not only gave them physical strength and health, but also knowledge, wisdom, and understanding. God used Daniel's fast to separate Daniel from the others around him and show his glory in a humanly kingdom.

40 DAYS DEVOTIONAL

Week of Fasting: Wednesday

Growth Challenge: Glorify God in your life through fasting

- ✦ Consider how a fast or partial fast could glorify God. A great place to start is a fast from news and social media. This could make an impact in your community and glorify God.
- ✦ Pray today about how you can stand out from others and bring Glory to God.
- ✦ Put it into action. TODAY. Start right now. Pray about how long to do it for, but make a commitment to start.
- ✦ If you are already fasting from something- consider adding a dimension to it that will glorify God. The point here is to rely on God.
- ✦ If you are fasting from food, always consider your own health first.

40 DAYS DEVOTIONAL

Week of Fasting: Thursday

Fasting to Mourn

*“Yet even now,” declares the Lord,
“return to me with all your heart,
with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning;
and rend your hearts and not your garments.”
Return to the Lord your God,
for he is gracious and merciful,
slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love;
and he relents over disaster.
— Joel 2:12-13*

*Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.
— Matthew 5:4*

Mourning isn't given a lot of value in American culture. Most of us do whatever we can to “move on” from the pain of mourning and towards happy feelings. This is not the case in many other cultures around the world. Some cultures will have a mourning period that lasts more than a month with practices like wearing black the entire time, not bathing, not cleaning, and publicly crying in groups for days. The Bible shows us an idea of mourning that is much closer to these other cultures.

In the biblical perspective, mourning is a necessary and important human experience. When Jacob thought his son Joseph was dead, he mourned for many days (Genesis 37:34). When Moses died, the people of Israel wept and mourned for thirty days (Deuteronomy 34:8). Even Jesus himself publicly mourned at the death of his friend Lazarus. (John 11:35)

One way the Bible demonstrates that we can mourn is through fasting. Fasting demonstrates a reliance on God and forces us to drop reliance on other things like food. When we are mourning- truly mourning- nothing can comfort us like God. Fasting can give us the tools to truly feel the powerful and healing experience of mourning and come closer to God.

40 DAYS DEVOTIONAL

Week of Fasting: Thursday

Growth Challenge: Remember Mourning

Mourning isn't going to look the same for everyone. Some of us could really benefit from fasting during this time and others will not. Furthermore mourning isn't something we can exactly plan on a calendar, but we can all plan that it will happen at some point.

- ✦ Keep this form of fasting in your back pocket if you're not mourning. It could be one of the best responses to your time of need.
- ✦ Be healthy. It might not make sense for you to fast from food, but fasting from social media and news might help you focus and mourn well.
- ✦ Be in community. Let others in on your mourning. Jesus mourned with others around- we can too.
- ✦ Try this form of fasting if you are mourning and using fasting as a means to rely on God. Be sure to be healthy and be in community. Consult proper doctors if needed.

40 DAYS DEVOTIONAL

Week of Fasting: Friday

Fasting to Prepare

Luke 4:1-4

Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, left the Jordan river and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing during those days, and at the end of them he was hungry.

The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread."

Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone.'"

In the Gospel of Luke we see Jesus going out into the wilderness to fast after receiving the Holy Spirit. This is an interesting journey that Jesus is on, because he not only is fasting from food, but also fasting in solitude. 40 days of this is incredibly difficult and life threatening on its own, let alone with the devil tempting him. This all takes place right before his Ministry goes into full swing and really before the beginning of the end of his human life. At this point we can imagine Jesus is exhausted, solemn, and his survival will rely on supernatural means. This teaches us a couple really interesting things about fasting for us.

First, if Jesus thought it was important to fast then we should also fast. Secondly, we can fast for ministry and trials that lie ahead of us.

It would be irresponsible for me to leave out one of the reasons this story is so powerful. Another place we see the number 40 and the wilderness is when Israel wandered in the desert for 40 years after failing to follow God. Jesus is doing what Israel failed to do. Jesus fasted for 40 days in the wilderness and defeated temptation. Jesus conquered his human urges and emotions and did what was right to display his power and to point to the fact that he is the ultimate savior that humanity needed even back in the times of Moses.

40 DAYS DEVOTIONAL

Week of Fasting: Friday

Growth Challenge: Anticipate and meet trials head on with fasting

Fasting brings us close to God and causes us to rely on him for our needs. It also forces us out of our normal rhythms and causes us to think about God much more than we normally do. It's no secret that humanity as a whole talks to God more when we're in crisis or when we need things from God. When you are hungry or embracing a new daily rhythm, it's easy to distract yourself with other fake "fillers". Reject this urge and choose to turn to God.

- ✦ Today try to use fasting as a way to prepare for a trial or ministry ahead. Direct your thoughts towards God during times of hunger or longing. Direct prayers towards your trial or ministry ahead. Remember to consider your health in fasting.
- ✦ Your "trial" or "ministry" can be many things. It's anything you need God's help with or any opportunity you will have to share your faith. It can be a hard conversation at work or with family or even upcoming hard choices. Pray and draw near to God.

40 DAYS DEVOTIONAL

Week of Fasting: Saturday

Fasting to Petition

Fasting is an opportunity to dialogue with God and ask him for intervention. There are not a lot of ways to do this that are listed in the Bible. With prayer included, fasting is one of only two ways to petition God for change, and it's one we seldom use. The Bible shows us that it does indeed work. Fasting properly can be used to help us make important spiritual choices and it can also be used to ask God to have major intervention in our lives.

Acts 13:1-3

Now in the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul. While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off.

Esther 4:12-17

When Esther's words were reported to Mordecai, he sent back this answer: "Do not think that because you are in the king's house you alone of all the Jews will escape. For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?"

Then Esther sent this reply to Mordecai: "Go, gather together all the Jews who are in Susa, and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my attendants will fast as you do. When this is done, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish." So Mordecai went away and carried out all of Esther's instructions.

If fasting is one of only two ways to petition God for something, why in the world is fasting one of the least practiced spiritual disciplines? Because it's hard. Fasting is not meant to be easy. It's meant to be painful and we often choose to pray, because it's more convenient.

40 DAYS DEVOTIONAL

Week of Fasting: Saturday

Growth Challenge:

For this challenge I simply want you to commit to implementing fasting into your life. Fasting is a way to communicate with God and we don't use it because it's uncomfortable. Try fasting- whatever the reason for it- and commit to making it a regular practice. Some options you can use-

- ✦ Commit to fast once a week.
- ✦ Commit to fast for one week every 3 months.
- ✦ Commit to a fast for one month a year.

Fasting Reminders

- ✦ What you fast on should depend on your health. Consult doctors if unsure.
- ✦ The reason you are fasting can be to Glorify God, to Mourn, to Prepare, to Petition.
- ✦ You can have a partial or full fast. Partial fast is fasting from one type of thing. For instance you could fast from all processed food and sugar or from all forms of media.
- ✦ Matthew 6:16- Jesus assumes his followers fast. You should practice fasting.

40 DAYS DEVOTIONAL

Week of Celebration: Tuesday

Celebration Through Writing

Psalm 16:7,9,11

*I will bless the LORD who advises me;
even at night I am instructed
in the depths of my mind.*

*That's why my heart celebrates and my mood is joyous;
yes, my whole body will rest in safety*

*You teach me the way of life.
In your presence is total celebration.
Beautiful things are always in your right hand.*

God is always at work. He is a constant presence and source of love as we go about our day. As we work, complete tasks, and interact with others, God watches over us and protects us. Scripture tells us that God advises us even as we sleep. How amazing is our Lord! The trouble is that we often don't take the time to recognize and remember how God has blessed & impacted us. Many of the small touches of God's love in our lives go unnoticed because we let them pass by without reflection.

When we take the time to notice and reflect on God's blessings, it leads us to celebrate the amazing love of our Lord. How could we do otherwise? As the Psalms demonstrate, one of the simplest ways to celebrate God's goodness is to put our words of praise and celebration into writing.

Writing down the ways we see God at work, the things we hear from God in prayer, and the real life examples of God's mercy, is a way to honor God in the moment and record those moments for our own edification later.

40 DAYS DEVOTIONAL

Week of Celebration: Tuesday

Growth Challenge:

Take some time today, or even this entire week, to write down the ways God has been present with you or the ways God has blessed you. This can take the form of a “gratitude list,” or you can spend 10 minutes journaling about your day and God’s role in it.

There is no “right” way to journal or write down your praises. Feel free to try out whatever helps you celebrate God’s goodness in your life and then review what you’ve written at a later time.

40 DAYS DEVOTIONAL

Week of Celebration: Wednesday

Celebration of Creation

Romans 1:20

Ever since the creation of the world, God's invisible qualities—God's eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, because they are understood through the things God has made.

We only need to step outside to see God. From the anthill underfoot, to the stars in the nighttime sky, the handiwork of God is all around us. The same God who created galaxies millions of light years away also creates microscopic cells that multiply into a baby boy or girl.

The Psalmist declares, "How majestic is your name in all the earth!" God's artistic display is everywhere. We can celebrate his creation. We celebrate the beauty of it all. We can enjoy the majesty of nature and praise the Lord as we do so. We can celebrate the creator.

Growth Challenge:

Set time aside today (or in the next few days) to be outside and enjoy nature. Spend any length of time (10 minutes—1 hour+) that enables you to relax, intentionally sense God's presence, and celebrate God's goodness on display.

If you are unable to get outside or enjoy nature for any reason, do your best to admire creation from afar — sitting by a window, looking at old photos, etc. Then, spend some time in prayer thanking God for his creation and for specific places you have been to in the past.

40 DAYS DEVOTIONAL

Week of Celebration: Thursday

Celebration of Your Identity

You are special. You are worth celebrating. Sometimes, as Jesus followers, we forget that simple truth. We often focus on God's act of saving us, redeeming us, forgiving us, and we forget to celebrate that God created us. And the beautiful truth is that he created you uniquely. There is no one exactly like you. And you are wonderful. Your gifts, talents, and personality are wonderful. Your quirks and blemishes are wonderful. Your passions, desires, and successes are wonderful. The Psalmist says it this way:

Psalm 139:13-14

For you created my inmost being;

you knit me together in my mother's womb.

I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made;

your works are wonderful,

I know that full well.

We can praise God because he made us the way we are. We can praise God because we recognize the worth of our own identity and uniqueness, and those things come from our Lord. We can praise God because we trust that he created us, knows us, and love us — warts and all.

Growth Challenge:

Spend time doing something that you love to do and brings you joy. It should be something that makes you feel like you are "being yourself." As you do this activity, be intentional to thank God for making you the way you are. Thank God for your talents and for your experiences. Thank God for the joy you have in doing that activity.

This activity can be a wide range of things: cooking, creating art, doing a sporting activity, or sitting in a favorite reflection spot. You can go fishing, exercise, or read a book. The activity doesn't matter. What matters is that you celebrate your own uniqueness and express gratitude to the Lord while you do it.

40 DAYS DEVOTIONAL

Week of Celebration: Friday

Celebration Through Worship

The New Testament tells us that there were people other than Jesus that could do noteworthy things. There were others who preached, healed people, and cast out demons. The thing that set Jesus apart was his commitment to worship and honor his Father.

In the gospel of Matthew, Jesus tells a parable about a man who finds a treasure in a field. When he finds the treasure, he sells everything he owns so he can buy the field (Matthew 13:44). At its core, this is an act of worship. The man declares that nothing is more important than God and the kingdom of heaven. Everything else is worthless in that moment.

When we choose to celebrate God in worship, we're focusing our celebration on the Trinity and the character of God. We sing, dance, shout for joy, and bow in silence because we recognize the amazing worth of God in our lives. No matter the circumstances of the present moment, we worship God because his love, grace, and faithfulness endure forever. That is truly worth celebrating.

Psalm 100

Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth.

Worship the Lord with gladness;

come before him with joyful songs.

Know that the Lord is God.

It is he who made us, and we are his

we are his people, the sheep of his pasture.

Enter his gates with thanksgiving

and his courts with praise;

give thanks to him and praise his name.

For the Lord is good and his love endures forever;

his faithfulness continues through all generations.

40 DAYS DEVOTIONAL

Week of Celebration: Friday

Growth Challenge:

Find a time and place to worship God and celebrate him. You can do this in a variety of ways. Here are a few suggestions:

- ✦ Spend time in prayer focused only on praising God for who he is.
- ✦ Play, listen, or sing along with worship music in your home, your car, or on a walk.
- ✦ Go to a church or community worship event.
- ✦ Write a letter or journal entry to God expressing your love for him.

40 DAYS DEVOTIONAL

Week of Celebration: Saturday

Celebration in Community

Almost everything we do in following Jesus is meant to be done in community. When we place our faith in Jesus Christ, we are adopted as sons and daughters into the family of God. This family is large, diverse, and filled with amazing and gifted people. Scripture constantly reminds us that being part of the family of God is something to be celebrated.

1 Corinthians 12:12-13, 26

*Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body —
...if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.*

Colossians 3:15-16

Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts.

Revelation 7:9-10

*After this I looked, and there was a great crowd that no one could number. They were from every nation, tribe, people, and language. They were standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They wore white robes and held palm branches in their hands. They cried out with a loud voice:
“Victory belongs to our God
who sits on the throne,
and to the Lamb.”*

Let us celebrate being part of the family of God. Let us celebrate the community of disciples. Let us celebrate that God has given amazing talents and spiritual gifts to our brothers and sisters in Christ.

40 DAYS DEVOTIONAL

Week of Celebration: Saturday

Growth Challenge:

Make plans to celebrate God's goodness while being with others. You can try one of these ideas:

- ✦ Host a communal meal. While everyone is together, share what you appreciate and admire about each person.
- ✦ Gather people together for a group outing or activity. While together, invite everyone to share what they are thankful for.
- ✦ Schedule a FaceTime / Zoom / Video Call with your friends or Christian brethren, and share with each other how you appreciate those long-distance friendships.
- ✦ With your community or small group, spend time in musical worship and celebration of God's blessings.
- ✦ Include additional people in a family gathering. Invite someone outside your biological family to celebrate with you at a holiday or regular get-together.
- ✦ If you do not have community with other Christians, then take up the challenge to join a small-group or faith-based outreach group in your area.

40 DAYS DEVOTIONAL

Week of Service: Tuesday

Service as Our Purpose

John 13:34-35

A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.

Galatians 5:13

You were called to freedom, brothers and sisters; only don't let this freedom be an opportunity to indulge your selfish impulses, but serve each other through love.

In Genesis 12, God calls Abram from his homeland to go to a new land, and God promises to bless Abram. Yet, the promise of blessing doesn't end with Abram. God says that he will bless Abram to be a blessing, and "all peoples on earth will be blessed through you" (Genesis 12:3). God did amazing things in Abram's life, but he didn't do it just for Abram. God did it so that Abram could be a blessing to others. This is the way God works. He calls people, he saves people, and he redeems people not just for themselves. God rescues people so that they can pass on God's love to others.

This reality becomes even more clear in the ministry and sacrificial death of Jesus Christ. Jesus constantly calls people to receive God's love and grace, and he then challenges them to serve others. This is demonstrated when Jesus washes his disciples' feet, and then he tells them to do likewise (John 13:34-35). We are set free from sin and punishment in order to be the hands and feet of Jesus to a world in desperate need of rescue. We are set free to serve.

Despite what the outside world might think, service is not just cliché or religious rhetoric for those who follow Jesus. Service is not about trying to be a good person. Service is intrinsic to the gospel. We serve others because in Jesus' love & grace, we have been given more than we could ever give away.

40 DAYS DEVOTIONAL

Week of Service: Tuesday

Growth Challenge:

As you will spend the rest of this week thinking about service and putting it into action, today is a great opportunity to meditate and reflect on how Jesus serves us. Take a few minutes to meditate on Matthew 20:26-28 and then answer the questions below

Matthew 20:26-28

Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.

- ✦ What does it mean to you that Jesus, God's son, came not to serve, but to serve?
- ✦ What does this communicate about God's love for humanity?
- ✦ How do you typically think & feel about "service," and do these verses challenge your usual response?
- ✦ How might God be calling you to interact differently with the spiritual discipline of service?

40 DAYS DEVOTIONAL

Week of Service: Wednesday

Service Using our Gifts

“God has created me to do Him some definite service; He has committed some work to me which He has not committed to another.... I have a part in a great work; I am a link in a chain, a bond of connection between persons. He has not created me for naught. I shall love as Christ loved, I shall do his work.”

— John Henry Newman, *Meditations and Devotions*

Oftentimes, people who find fulfillment and satisfaction will say they are doing “what they were born to do.” That phrase communicates that doing anything else would be contrary to one’s identity or existence. A fish must swim. A bird must fly. The same is true for Christians. A child of God must use his/her gifts and talents bestowed by God. To do anything else would be contrary to one’s identity in Christ. Look at the words of Paul in Ephesians 2

Ephesians 2:8-10

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do

Paul draws a direct connection between our salvation and our response. We are saved by grace — it is not of ourselves. Yet, our response to that salvation is to be God’s handiwork. We are to respond to grace by serving the world. We are to use the talents, abilities, and spiritual gifts that God has given us to serve and love others. The discipline of service involves taking the time and effort to recognize how God created us uniquely and then using those strengths to serve others.

40 DAYS DEVOTIONAL

Week of Service: Wednesday

Growth Challenge:

Reflect on your own spiritual gifts, strengths, talents, and abilities. If you have never done this before, you can utilize various resources for guidance.** Gifts are normally positive skills or social attributes you have that are confirmed by those around you. As you think about your unique giftedness, answer these questions:

- How can I use my abilities and strengths to serve others in a practical manner?
- Which of my strengths am I using currently to serve others, and which ones am I neglecting to use?

Finish your time in prayer — ask God to help you use your gifts and talents to serve Him and others in love.

**Potential resources to utilize:

StrengthsFinder

High5 - A free alternative for finding strengths

A Spiritual gifts assessment

40 DAYS DEVOTIONAL

Week of Service: Thursday

Service Through Prayer

“A rich, vibrant, consoling, hard-won prayer life is the one good that makes it possible to receive all other kinds of goods rightly and beneficially. [Paul] does not see prayer as merely a way to get things from God but as a way to get more of God himself.” — Timothy Keller

Prayer is powerful. How incredible it is to hear the words “I’m praying for you” by someone who is steeped in a life of prayer. Prayer is the opportunity to connect with God and to pray for someone else is connecting with God on someone else’s behalf. When we pray in service to others we are demonstrating our love to them and our faith in God.

Oftentimes we too quickly make prayer about us. It’s so easy to fall into the trap of saying to yourself “Why should I pray if I’m only going to be disappointed if I don’t get what I want?” Setting our expectations is important here. Prayer is not about getting what we want and praying for others isn’t about solving their issues.

Praying for others is about serving someone by connecting to God on their behalf. This can take many forms. First you could pray with them in person. This experience is often powerful for everyone involved because you are connecting to God with someone else who has their own unique relationship with God. Secondly you can pray for someone on your own. This is a great way to serve others daily while also causing a benefit to yourself. Praying for others routinely changes our hearts and orients ourselves to be more others focused. Rick Warren writes that the key to Humility is “not thinking less of yourself, but thinking of yourself less”. Praying for others serves them, but also helps us develop a posture of humility by causing us to think of ourselves less.

Galatians 6:2 “Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.”

40 DAYS DEVOTIONAL

Week of Service: Thursday

Growth Challenge: Create a Prayer List

For this practice I assume some of you have had a prayer list going for years upon years, others haven't ever made one, and some are inbetween. Try this out at least once and use what works.

- ✦ Write out these simple categories and add to them people that come to mind.
 - Thanksgiving- Thanking and praising God.
 - Personal godliness- Places we need to improve.
 - My Family- Blood related or not whomever you consider family.
 - My Leaders- Church leaders, political leaders, all of them.
 - People I minister to- If you're struggling with this pray for people to minister to.
 - Friends and acquaintances- People you know well and those you don't
 - My ministry and other ministry- Where God is using you and others.
- ✦ Look for opportunities to add to your list. Ask others "How can I be praying for you?"
- ✦ Share your prayer needs with others. This is a crucial step- don't skip it!

40 DAYS DEVOTIONAL

Week of Service: Friday

Service Through Celebration

“Personalities united can contain more of God and sustain the force of his greater presence much better than scattered individuals. The fire of God kindles higher as the brands are heaped together and each is warmed by the other’s flame. The members of the body must be in contact if they are to sustain and be sustained by each other.”

— Dallas Willard

Serving others through celebration might be one of the most fun forms of a spiritual discipline that is available to us. The purpose of serving others this way is to demonstrate worth and value to others through the building up and celebration of who they are. It can be something as simple as taking a friend out to coffee and using that time to tell them how special they are. It can also be sharing in joys with friends and family at things like birthdays, weddings, and major accomplishments. If you can think of a way to share in the joy of genuine gratitude- that is an avenue to serve through celebration.

In order to serve someone through celebration we must confront the sin of envy. Envy is the sin of jealousy over the blessings and achievements of others, especially the spiritual enjoyment and advance of the kingdom of Christ freely and graciously bestowed upon the people of God. As redeemed saints and children of the living God, we’re to seek wholeness in Christ, not in what we attain or don’t have. In Christ we have all that we need. In Christ we find purpose. Because our worth is in Christ, we should do more than merely rejoicing with our brothers and sisters in the Lord.

Romans 12:9-12

Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. 13 Share with the Lord’s people who are in need. Practice hospitality.

Instead of just celebrating our fellow Christians, we should go out of our way to honor them and we should share their good news with others as though it’s our good news. When celebrating we should give in to fun and enjoy each other for who we are.

40 DAYS DEVOTIONAL

Week of Service: Friday

Growth Challenge: Celebrate someone

Take some time this week to celebrate someone openly. You can use an event coming up, accomplishment, or just celebrate your friendship with someone.

- ✦ Tell them why you want to spend time with them
 - "I want to celebrate x with you." "I'm really proud of you."
 - "I'm thankful for our friendship and I want to celebrate it"
 - "I appreciate you and just want to spend time with you."
- ✦ If you can't do this in person call them or even better video call them.
- ✦ Have fun and fully express the joy that comes from genuine gratitude.

40 DAYS DEVOTIONAL

Week of Service: Saturday

Serving Through Self Denial

Self denial sounds like a really odd call to service. How can we “deny” ourselves to help others without completely destroying ourselves and need our own help in return? If done improperly self denial becomes self destruction and ultimately leads us further from God. If self denial is done well we become more like Jesus and serve others to great extent in the process. What is important to understand is that self denial is a call to give up your own wants and desires for the sake of obedience to God and service to your family, the neighbor, and the stranger.

In this process of self denial we give up the power over our lives to God and put others first. For some of this self denial can look like fasting for a season and for others it can be giving up social media. During this time of self denial we are not advocating that someone would give up callings and gifts given by God. God may take our families through turbulent times, but he will not call a believer to stop caring for his or her family in the interest of work.

Most of the time in church self denial is understandably attributed to an inward practice that we often keep private. If this is the case how can we use self denial to serve those around us? In order to process this like disciples of Jesus let's look at some scripture.

Matthew 6:24-26

Then Jesus said to His disciples, “If anyone wants to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it. But whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. For what will a person be profited if he gains the whole world, but forfeits his life? Or what will a person give in exchange for his life?”

It might be hard to believe, but the first step of following Jesus is to deny ourselves. To follow Jesus well we must put aside our own desires. Jesus demonstrates a life of self denial and service. They go hand in hand and cannot be separated. When you deny yourself power over your life and give it to God you create margin to serve others and love people authentically. Self denial creates space for God to do work in your life and in the lives of others through you.

40 DAYS DEVOTIONAL

Week of Service: Saturday

Growth Challenge: Substitute Service

For this activity we will be giving up something to serve someone directly. The first step for this is prayer.

- ✦ Pray: Ask God what you should give up this week in order to serve someone. Your favorite meal routine? Some personal time? Something bigger? Search your heart for something that will stretch you.
- ✦ Convert the self denial into service: If you're giving up your starbucks or diner coffee for a week use that money and time to serve someone else. If you're giving up social media then use that time and attention on someone that needs it.
- ✦ Assess what God wants you to give up on a long term basis in order to follow Jesus.