

**THE
SECRET
PLACE**

**A DEVOTIONAL FOR
ENCOUNTERING GOD**

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THE SECRET PLACE

A DEVOTIONAL FOR
ENCOUNTERING GOD

VAN MOODY





He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High
Shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.
I will say of the Lord, "*He is my refuge and my fortress;
My God, in Him I will trust.*"
Surely He shall deliver you from the snare of the fowler
And from the perilous pestilence.
He shall cover you with His feathers,
And under His wings you shall take refuge;
His truth *shall be your shield and buckler.*
You shall not be afraid of the terror by night,
*Nor of the arrow that flies by day,
Nor of the pestilence that walks in darkness,
Nor of the destruction that lays waste at noonday.*
A thousand may fall at your side,
And ten thousand at your right hand;
But it shall not come near you.
Only with your eyes shall you look,
And see the reward of the wicked.
Because you have made the Lord, *who is my refuge,*
Even the Most High, your dwelling place,
No evil shall befall you,
Nor shall any plague come near your dwelling;
For He shall give His angels charge over you,
To keep you in all your ways.
In *their* hands they shall bear you up,
Lest you dash your foot against a stone.
You shall tread upon the lion and the cobra,
The young lion and the serpent you shall trample underfoot.
"Because he has set his love upon Me, therefore I will deliver him;
I will set him on high, because he has known My name.
He shall call upon Me, and I will answer him;
I *will be* with him in trouble;
I will deliver him and honor him.
With long life I will satisfy him,
And show him My salvation."

Psalm 91 (NKJV)



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INTRODUCTION

This book that you hold in your hand was born out of a life-long pursuit of God. From a very early age, I have been fascinated with God and with the great men and women throughout history who have had a relationship with Him. Growing up, the nagging question in the back of my mind and at the base of my heart was, *Can I know God the way these great men and women of the past did?*

The answer to my question didn't come the way I expected it. I'm sorry to tell you that I have never had a Mount Sinai or Mount Carmel experience the way Moses and Elijah did. I was never fortunate enough to see Jesus transfigured or to meet Him on the Damascus Road like Peter and Paul. Nevertheless, God did answer that nagging question and He showed me the way to experience Him and have a relationship with Him in a way that has defined my life and transformed it in ways far beyond anything that I could have imagined.

Many, many years ago, while studying in Oxford, England, I stumbled upon an obscure scripture. Through it, I was introduced to the spiritual discipline of journaling.

When he takes the throne of his kingdom, he is to write for himself on a scroll a copy of this law, taken from that of the Levitical priests. It is to be with him, and he is to read it all the days of his life so that he may learn to revere the Lord his God and follow carefully all the words of this law and these decrees and not consider himself better than his fellow Israelites and turn from the law to the right or to the left. Then he and his descendants will reign a long time over his kingdom in Israel. —Deuteronomy 17:18-20

Long before the Kingdom period ever began for the Israelites, God gives instructions about what the king should do daily. God commanded that the king should read the law and write down a



copy of what he read. In short, the king was commanded by God to journal. God also states the many benefits of the king following these instructions. The one that jumped out to me the most was the promise of long-term success: *Then he and his descendants will reign a long time over his kingdom in Israel.*

I don't know anyone who doesn't desire lasting success in every area of his or her life, but often, we don't know how to achieve it. Truthfully, no matter who we are, we don't have what it takes to do everything we desire in our hearts. We don't have what it takes to connect all of the dots and be a great mother, father, wife, husband, parent or leader. This is no surprise to God. In His providence, He knows that, no matter who the Israelites chose as their king, this king wouldn't have it all together. This is why He commanded the king to read the law and to journal.

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There are two ways to gain the understanding and insight we need to be successful in life: consequences or wisdom. The problem with consequences is that they cost more than we have to spend. You don't benefit from consequences until after you have made the mistake; often, by then, the price you've paid for that mistake is far too high. Wisdom is vastly different. Wisdom teaches you the lesson *before* you make the mistake and saves you the unnecessary heartache and pain often associated with mistakes.

King Solomon ignored this practice of reading the law and journaling. The consequences were catastrophic:

King Solomon, however, loved many foreign women besides Pharaoh's daughter—Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Sidonians and Hittites. They were from nations about which the Lord had told the Israelites, "You must not intermarry with them, because they will surely turn your hearts after their gods." Nevertheless, Solomon held fast to them in love. He had seven hundred wives of royal birth and three hundred concubines, and his wives led him astray. As Solomon grew old, his wives turned his heart after other gods, and his heart was not fully devoted



to the Lord his God, as the heart of David his father had been. He followed Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, and Molek the detestable god of the Ammonites. So Solomon did evil in the eyes of the Lord; he did not follow the Lord completely, as David his father had done. On a hill east of Jerusalem, Solomon built a high place for Chemosh the detestable god of Moab, and for Molek the detestable god of the Ammonites. He did the same for all his foreign wives, who burned incense and offered sacrifices to their gods. The Lord became angry with Solomon because his heart had turned away from the Lord, the God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice. Although he had forbidden Solomon to follow other gods, Solomon did not keep the Lord's command. So the Lord said to Solomon, "Since this is your attitude and you have not kept my covenant and my decrees, which I commanded you, I will most certainly tear the kingdom away from you and give it to one of your subordinates. —1 Kings 11:1-11

God's command to the king to read the law and write about it was given because wisdom is always the better path. This is why spending time with God and journaling is so vital. This spiritual practice has saved me from heartache and pain that I might not have been able to recover from. It has also given me wisdom well beyond my years. This spiritual practice has saved my life, my marriage, my family and my sanity. This practice has made all the difference in my life, and it will do the same for you if you commit to it, as well.

The Secret Place Devotional and Journal is made up of two volumes: The first, this volume, is full of devotional content to inspire you and to get you thinking as you spend time with the Lord. The second volume has practical application questions and space for you to reflect and apply what you're hearing and learning. My prayer is that you'll be encouraged, inspired and challenged in your walk with the Lord through this timeless resource.



THE SOAP DEVOTIONAL PROCESS

S.O.A.P. is the devotional method that I have practiced for years, and it's the devotional method I lay out in this journal. The acronym **S.O.A.P.** stands for Scripture, Observation, Application, and Prayer. It is a great way of getting more out of your time with God and in His Word. Just like physical soap, this devotional method will wash you spiritually, transform your heart and bring you closer to God than ever before. I did not invent this method; rather, it was taught to me by a mentor, and I am honored to share it with you through this journal.

In order to do this daily, you only need four things:

1. A Time

Set an appointment with God and keep it every day.

2. A Place

Find a great place. It can be your kitchen or a coffee shop. Any place that's comfortable and quiet for you works.

3. A Bible

Get a version that is easy to read and understand. My favorite versions of the Bible are the NIV, Message, NLT, NKJV, TLB and Amplified.

4. A Journal

What you hold in your hand is a great journal designed for you to write in. The Bible Reading Plan to do your S.O.A.P. Devotion is on the following pages.

In Your Journal, Focus on 4 Distinct Areas:

Scripture

Each day, as you do your daily Bible reading, there will be a verse or a few verses that will grab your heart. Write the verse or verses that spoke to you during your reading.

Observation

Write down what the context of the Scripture is. What is happening? Who is it happening to? Why is it happening? This is just your general observation of what is taking place in the verse or verses.

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Application

How does the Scripture apply to what is happening to you or in your environment currently? This is where you write down what the verse or verses mean to you, what you hear God saying to you through the Scriptures.

Prayer

Write a prayer to God based on what you just learned and ask Him to help you apply this truth in your life.

Following this devotional method daily will radically touch your heart and bring you closer to God than ever before.

SOAP SCRIPTURE READING PLAN

Following this devotional method daily will radically touch your heart and bring you closer to God than ever before.

- January 1..... Genesis 1–2; Luke 1
- January 2..... Genesis 3–5; Luke 2
- January 3..... Genesis 6–8; Luke 3
- January 4..... Genesis 9–11; Luke 4
- January 5..... Genesis 12–14; Luke 5
- January 6..... Genesis 15–17; Luke 6
- January 7..... Genesis 18–19; Psalm 3; Luke 7
- January 8..... Genesis 20–22; Luke 8
- January 9..... Genesis 23–24; Luke 9
- January 10..... Genesis 25–26; Psalm 6; Luke 10
- January 11..... Genesis 27–28; Psalm 4; Luke 11
- January 12..... Genesis 29–30; Luke 12
- January 13..... Genesis 31–33; Luke 13
- January 14..... Genesis 34–36; Luke 14
- January 15..... Genesis 37–38; Psalm 7; Luke 15
- January 16..... Genesis 39–41; Luke 16
- January 17..... Genesis 42–43; Psalm 5; Luke 17
- January 18..... Genesis 44–46; Luke 18
- January 19..... Genesis 47–48; Psalm 10; Luke 19
- January 20..... Genesis 49–50; Psalm 8; Luke 20
- January 21..... Exodus 1–2; Psalm 88; Luke 21
- January 22..... Exodus 3–5; Luke 22
- January 23..... Exodus 6–8; Luke 23
- January 24..... Exodus 9–11; Luke 24
- January 25..... Exodus 12–13; Psalm 21; Acts 1



DATE

SCRIPTURE READING

- ❑ January 26 Exodus 14–16; Acts 2
- ❑ January 27 Exodus 17–20; Acts 3
- ❑ January 28 Exodus 21–22; Psalm 12; Acts 4
- ❑ January 29 Exodus 23–24; Psalm 14; Acts 5
- ❑ January 30 Exodus 25–27; Acts 6
- ❑ January 31 Exodus 28–29; Acts 7
- ❑ February 1 Exodus 30–32; Acts 8
- ❑ February 2 Exodus 33–34; Psalm 16; Acts 9
- ❑ February 3 Exodus 35–36; Acts 10
- ❑ February 4 Exodus 37–38; Psalm 19; Acts 11
- ❑ February 5 Exodus 39–40; Psalm 15; Acts 12
- ❑ February 6 Leviticus 1–3; Acts 13
- ❑ February 7 Leviticus 4–6; Acts 14
- ❑ February 8 Leviticus 7–9; Acts 15
- ❑ February 9 Leviticus 10–12; Acts 16
- ❑ February 10 Leviticus 13–14; Acts 17
- ❑ February 11 Leviticus 15–17; Acts 18
- ❑ February 12 Leviticus 18–19; Psalm 13; Acts 19
- ❑ February 13 Leviticus 20–22; Acts 20
- ❑ February 14 Leviticus 23–24; Psalm 24; Acts 21
- ❑ February 15 Leviticus 25; Psalm 25–26; Acts 22
- ❑ February 16 Leviticus 26–27; Acts 23
- ❑ February 17 Numbers 1–2; Acts 24
- ❑ February 18 Numbers 3–4; Acts 25
- ❑ February 19 Numbers 5–6; Psalm 22; Acts 26
- ❑ February 20 Numbers 7; Psalm 23; Acts 27
- ❑ February 21 Numbers 8–9; Acts 28
- ❑ February 22 Numbers 10–11; Psalm 27; Mark 1
- ❑ February 23 Numbers 12–13; Psalm 90; Mark 2
- ❑ February 24 Numbers 14–16; Mark 3
- ❑ February 25 Numbers 17–18; Psalm 29; Mark 4
- ❑ February 26 Numbers 19–20; Psalm 28; Mark 5
- ❑ February 27 Numbers 21–23; Mark 6–7



DATE**SCRIPTURE READING**

- February 28 Numbers 24–27; 1 Corinthians 13
- March 1 Numbers 28–29; Mark 8
- March 2 Numbers 30–31; Mark 9
- March 3 Numbers 32–33; Mark 10
- March 4 Numbers 34–36; Mark 11
- March 5 Deuteronomy 1–2; Mark 12
- March 6 Deuteronomy 3–4; Psalm 36; Mark 13
- March 7 Deuteronomy 5–6; Psalm 43; Mark 14
- March 8 Deuteronomy 7–9; Mark 15
- March 9 Deuteronomy 10–12; Mark 16
- March 10 Deuteronomy 13–15; Galatians 1
- March 11 Deuteronomy 16–18; Psalm 38; Galatians 2
- March 12 Deuteronomy 19–21; Galatians 3
- March 13 Deuteronomy 22–24; Galatians 4
- March 14 Deuteronomy 25–27; Galatians 5
- March 15 Deuteronomy 28–29; Galatians 6
- March 16 Deuteronomy 30–31; Psalm 40;
1 Corinthians 1
- March 17 Deuteronomy 32–34; 1 Corinthians 2
- March 18 Joshua 1–2; Psalm 37; 1 Corinthians 3
- March 19 Joshua 3–6; 1 Corinthians 4
- March 20 Joshua 7–8; Psalm 69; 1 Corinthians 5
- March 21 Joshua 9–11; 1 Corinthians 6
- March 22 Joshua 12–14; 1 Corinthians 7
- March 23 Joshua 15–17; 1 Corinthians 8
- March 24 Joshua 18–20; 1 Corinthians 9
- March 25 Joshua 21–22; Psalm 47; 1 Corinthians 10
- March 26 Joshua 23–24; Psalm 44; 1 Corinthians 11
- March 27 Judges 1–3; 1 Corinthians 12
- March 28 Judges 4–5; Psalm 39, 41; 1 Corinthians 13
- March 29 Judges 6–7; Psalm 52; 1 Corinthians 14
- March 30 Judges 8; Psalm 42; 1 Corinthians 15
- March 31 Judges 9–10; Psalm 49; 1 Corinthians 16



DATE

SCRIPTURE READING

- ☐ April 1 Judges 11–12; Psalm 50; 2 Corinthians 1
- ☐ April 2 Judges 13–16; 2 Corinthians 2
- ☐ April 3 Judges 17–18; Psalm 89; 2 Corinthians 3
- ☐ April 4 Judges 19–21; 2 Corinthians 4
- ☐ April 5 Ruth 1–2; Psalm 53, 61; 2 Corinthians 5
- ☐ April 6 Ruth 3–4; Psalm 64–65; 2 Corinthians 6
- ☐ April 7 1 Samuel 1–2; Psalm 66; 2 Corinthians 7
- ☐ April 8 1 Samuel 3–5; Psalm 77; 2 Corinthians 8
- ☐ April 9 1 Samuel 6–7; Psalm 72; 2 Corinthians 9
- ☐ April 10 1 Samuel 8–10; 2 Corinthians 10
- ☐ April 11 1 Samuel 11–12; 1 Chronicles 1; 2 Corinthians 11
- ☐ April 12 1 Samuel 13; 1 Chronicles 2–3;
2 Corinthians 12
- ☐ April 13 1 Samuel 14; 1 Chronicles 4; 2 Corinthians 13
- ☐ April 14 1 Samuel 15–16; 1 Chronicles 5; Matthew 1
- ☐ April 15 1 Samuel 17; Psalm 9; Matthew 2
- ☐ April 16 1 Samuel 18; 1 Chronicles 6;
Psalm 11; Matthew 3
- ☐ April 17 1 Samuel 19; 1 Chronicles 7;
Psalm 59; Matthew 4
- ☐ April 18 1 Samuel 20–21; Psalm 34; Matthew 5
- ☐ April 19 1 Samuel 22; Psalm 17, 35; Matthew 6
- ☐ April 20 1 Samuel 23; Psalm 31, 54; Matthew 7
- ☐ April 21 1 Samuel 24; Psalm 57–58;
1 Chronicles 8; Matthew 8
- ☐ April 22 1 Samuel 25–26; Psalm 63; Matthew 9
- ☐ April 23 1 Samuel 27; Psalm 141,
1 Chronicles 9; Matthew 10
- ☐ April 24 1 Samuel 28–29; Psalm 109; Matthew 11
- ☐ April 25 1 Samuel 30–31; 1 Chronicles 10; Matthew 12
- ☐ April 26 2 Samuel 1; Psalm 140; Matthew 13
- ☐ April 27 2 Samuel 2; 1 Chronicles 11;
Psalm 142; Matthew 14



DATE**SCRIPTURE READING**

- April 28..... 2 Samuel 3; 1 Chronicles 12; Matthew 15
- April 29..... 2 Samuel 4–5; Psalm 139; Matthew 16
- April 30..... 2 Samuel 6; 1 Chronicles 13;
Psalm 68; Matthew 17
- May 1..... 1 Chronicles 14–15; Psalm 132; Matthew 18
- May 2..... 1 Chronicles 16; Psalm 106; Matthew 19
- May 3..... 2 Samuel 7; 1 Chronicles 17;
Psalm 2; Matthew 20
- May 4..... 2 Samuel 8–9; 1 Chronicles 18–19; Matthew 21
- May 5..... 2 Samuel 10; 1 Chronicles 20;
Psalm 20; Matthew 22
- May 6..... 2 Samuel 11–12; Psalm 51; Matthew 23
- May 7..... 2 Samuel 13–14; Matthew 24
- May 8..... 2 Samuel 15–16; Psalm 32; Matthew 25
- May 9..... 2 Samuel 17; Psalm 71; Matthew 26
- May 10..... 2 Samuel 18; Psalm 56; Matthew 27
- May 11..... 2 Samuel 19–20; Psalm 55; Matthew 28
- May 12..... 2 Samuel 21–23; 1 Thessalonians 1
- May 13..... 2 Samuel 24; 1 Chronicles 21;
Psalm 30; 1 Thessalonians 2
- May 14..... 1 Chronicles 22–24; 1 Thessalonians 3
- May 15..... 1 Chronicles 25–27; 1 Thessalonians 4
- May 16..... 1 Kings 1; 1 Chronicles 28;
Psalm 91; 1 Thessalonians 5
- May 17..... 1 Kings 2; 1 Chronicles 29;
Psalm 95; 2 Thessalonians 1
- May 18..... 1 Kings 3; 2 Chronicles 1;
Psalm 78; 2 Thessalonians 2
- May 19..... 1 Kings 4–5; 2 Chronicles 2;
Psalm 101; 2 Thessalonians 3
- May 20..... 1 Kings 6; 2 Chronicles 3; Psalm 97; Romans 1
- May 21..... 1 Kings 7; 2 Chronicles 4;
Psalm 98; Romans 2



DATE

SCRIPTURE READING

- ☐ May 22 1 Kings 8; 2 Chronicles 5;
Psalm 99; Romans 3
- ☐ May 23 2 Chronicles 6–7; Psalm 135; Romans 4
- ☐ May 24 1 Kings 9; 2 Chronicles 8;
Psalm 136; Romans 5
- ☐ May 25 1 Kings 10–11; 2 Chronicles 9; Romans 6
- ☐ May 26 Proverbs 1–3; Romans 7
- ☐ May 27 Proverbs 4–6; Romans 8
- ☐ May 28 Proverbs 7–9; Romans 9
- ☐ May 29 Proverbs 10–12; Romans 10
- ☐ May 30 Proverbs 13–15; Romans 11
- ☐ May 31 Proverbs 16–18; Romans 12
- ☐ June 1 Proverbs 19–21; Romans 13
- ☐ June 2 Proverbs 22–24; Romans 14
- ☐ June 3 Proverbs 25–27; Romans 15
- ☐ June 4 Proverbs 28–29; Psalm 60; Romans 16
- ☐ June 5 Proverbs 30–31; Psalm 33; Ephesians 1
- ☐ June 6 Ecclesiastes 1–3; Psalm 45; Ephesians 2
- ☐ June 7 Ecclesiastes 4–6; Psalm 18; Ephesians 3
- ☐ June 8 Ecclesiastes 7–9; Ephesians 4
- ☐ June 9 Ecclesiastes 10–12; Psalm 94; Ephesians 5
- ☐ June 10 Song of Songs 1–4; Ephesians 6
- ☐ June 11 Song of Songs 5–8; Philippians 1
- ☐ June 12 1 Kings 12; 2 Chronicles 10–11; Philippians 2
- ☐ June 13 1 Kings 13–14; 2 Chronicles 12; Philippians 3
- ☐ June 14 1 Kings 15; 2 Chronicles 13–14; Philippians 4
- ☐ June 15 1 Kings 16; 2 Chronicles 15–16; Colossians 1
- ☐ June 16 1 Kings 17–19; Colossians 2
- ☐ June 17 1 Kings 20–21; 2 Chronicles 17; Colossians 3
- ☐ June 18 1 Kings 22; 2 Chronicles 18–19; Colossians 4
- ☐ June 19 2 Kings 1–3; Psalm 82; 1 Timothy 1
- ☐ June 20 2 Kings 4–5; Psalm 83; 1 Timothy 2
- ☐ June 21 2 Kings 6–7; 2 Chronicles 20; 1 Timothy 3



DATE

SCRIPTURE READING

- June 22..... 2 Kings 8–9; 2 Chronicles 21; 1 Timothy 4
- June 23..... 2 Kings 10; 2 Chronicles 22–23; 1 Timothy 5
- June 24..... 2 Kings 11–12; 2 Chronicles 24; 1 Timothy 6
- June 25..... Joel 1–3; 2 Timothy 1
- June 26..... Jonah 1–4; 2 Timothy 2
- June 27..... 2 Kings 13–14; 2 Chronicles 25; 2 Timothy 3
- June 28..... Amos 1–3; Psalm 80; 2 Timothy 4
- June 29..... Amos 4–6; Psalm 86; Titus 1
- June 30..... Amos 7–9; Psalm 104; Titus 2
- July 1..... Isaiah 1–3; Titus 3
- July 2..... Isaiah 4–5; Psalm 115–116; Jude
- July 3..... Isaiah 6–7; 2 Chronicles 26–27; Philemon
- July 4..... 2 Kings 15–16; Hosea 1; Hebrews 1
- July 5..... Hosea 2–5; Hebrews 2
- July 6..... Hosea 6–9; Hebrews 3
- July 7..... Hosea 10–12; Psalm 73; Hebrews 4
- July 8..... Hosea 13–14; Psalm 100, 102; Hebrews 5
- July 9..... Micah 1–4; Hebrews 6
- July 10..... Micah 5–7; Hebrews 7
- July 11..... Isaiah 8–10; Hebrews 8
- July 12..... Isaiah 11–14; Hebrews 9
- July 13..... Isaiah 15–18; Hebrews 10
- July 14..... Isaiah 19–21; Hebrews 11
- July 15..... Isaiah 22–24; Hebrews 12
- July 16..... Isaiah 25–28; Hebrews 13
- July 17..... Isaiah 29–31; James 1
- July 18..... Isaiah 32–35; James 2
- July 19..... 2 Kings 17; 2 Chronicles 28;
Psalm 46; James 3
- July 20..... 2 Chronicles 29–31; James 4
- July 21..... 2 Kings 18–19; 2 Chronicles 32; James 5
- July 22..... Isaiah 36–37; Psalm 76; 1 Peter 1
- July 23..... 2 Kings 20; Isaiah 38–39; Psalm 75; 1 Peter 2



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SCRIPTURE READING

- July 24. Isaiah 40–42; 1 Peter 3
- July 25. Isaiah 43–45; 1 Peter 4
- July 26. Isaiah 46–49; 1 Peter 5
- July 27. Isaiah 50–52; Psalm 92; 2 Peter 1
- July 28. Isaiah 53–56; 2 Peter 2
- July 29. Isaiah 57–59; Psalm 103; 2 Peter 3
- July 30 Isaiah 60–62; John 1
- July 31. Isaiah 63–64; Psalm 107; John 2
- August 1. Isaiah 65–66; Psalm 62; John 3
- August 2 2 Kings 21; 2 Chronicles 33; John 4
- August 3 Nahum 1–3; John 5
- August 4 2 Kings 22; 2 Chronicles 34; John 6
- August 5 2 Kings 23; 2 Chronicles 35; John 7
- August 6 Habakkuk; 1–3; John 8
- August 7 Zephaniah 1–3; John 9
- August 8 Jeremiah 1–2; John 10
- August 9 Jeremiah 3–4; John 11
- August 10 Jeremiah 5–6; John 12
- August 11 Jeremiah 7–9; John 13
- August 12. Jeremiah 10–12; John 14
- August 13. Jeremiah 13–15; John 15
- August 14 Jeremiah 16–17; Psalm 96; John 16
- August 15. Jeremiah 18–20; Psalm 93; John 17
- August 16. Kings 24; Jeremiah 22; Psalm 112; John 18
- August 17. Jeremiah 23, 25; John 19
- August 18 Jeremiah 26, 35, 36; John 20
- August 19. Jeremiah 45–47; Psalm 105; John 21
- August 20 Jeremiah 48–49; Psalm 67; 1 John 1
- August 21. Jeremiah 21, 24, 27; Psalm 118; 1 John 2
- August 22 Jeremiah 28–30; 1 John 3
- August 23 Jeremiah 31–32; 1 John 4
- August 24 Jeremiah 33–34; Psalm 74; 1 John 5
- August 25 Jeremiah 37–39; Psalm 79; 2 John



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SCRIPTURE READING

- August 26 Jeremiah 50–51; 3 John
- August 27 Jeremiah 52; Revelation 1; Psalm 143–144
- August 28 Ezekiel 1–3; Revelation 2
- August 29 Ezekiel 4–7; Revelation 3
- August 30 Ezekiel 8–11; Revelation 4
- August 31 Ezekiel 12–14; Revelation 5
- September 1 Ezekiel 15–16; Psalm 70; Revelation 6
- September 2 Ezekiel 17–19; Revelation 7
- September 3 Ezekiel 20–21; Psalm 111; Revelation 8
- September 4 Ezekiel 22–24; Revelation 9
- September 5 Ezekiel 25–28; Revelation 10
- September 6 Ezekiel 29–32; Revelation 11
- September 7 2 Kings 25; 2 Chronicles 36;
Jeremiah 40–41; Revelation 12
- September 8 Jeremiah 42–44; Psalm 48; Revelation 13
- September 9 Lamentations 1–2; Obadiah; Revelation 14
- September 10 Lamentations 3–5; Revelation 15
- September 11 Daniel 1–2; Revelation 16
- September 12 Daniel 3–4; Psalm 81; Revelation 17
- September 13 Ezekiel 33–35; Revelation 18
- September 14 Ezekiel 36–37; Psalm 110; Revelation 19
- September 15 Ezekiel 38–39; Psalm 145; Revelation 20
- September 16 Ezekiel 40–41; Psalm 128; Revelation 21
- September 17 Ezekiel 42–44; Revelation 22
- September 18 Ezekiel 45–46; Luke 1
- September 19 Ezekiel 47–48; Luke 2
- September 20 Daniel 5–6; Psalm 130; Luke 3
- September 21 Daniel 7–8; Psalm 137; Luke 4
- September 22 Daniel 9–10; Psalm 123; Luke 5
- September 23 Daniel 11–12; Luke 6
- September 24 Ezra 1; Psalm 84–85; Luke 7
- September 25 Ezra 2–3; Luke 8
- September 26 Ezra 4; Psalm 113, 127; Luke 9



DATE

SCRIPTURE READING

- ☐ September 27 Haggai 1–2; Psalm 129; Luke 10
- ☐ September 28 Zechariah 1–3; Luke 11
- ☐ September 29 Zechariah 4–6; Luke 12
- ☐ September 30 Zechariah 7–9; Luke 13
- ☐ October 1 Zechariah 10–12; Psalm 126; Luke 14
- ☐ October 2 Zechariah 13–14; Psalm 147; Luke 15
- ☐ October 3 Ezra 5–6; Psalm 138; Luke 16
- ☐ October 4 Esther 1–2; Psalm 150; Luke 17
- ☐ October 5 Esther 3–8; Luke 18
- ☐ October 6 Esther 9–10; Luke 19
- ☐ October 7 Ezra 7–8; Luke 20
- ☐ October 8 Ezra 9–10; Psalm 131; Luke 21
- ☐ October 9 Nehemiah 1–2; Psalm 133; Luke 22
- ☐ October 10 Nehemiah 3–4; Luke 23
- ☐ October 11 Nehemiah 5–6; Psalm 146; Luke 24
- ☐ October 12 Nehemiah 7–8; Acts 1
- ☐ October 13 Nehemiah 9–10; Acts 2
- ☐ October 14 Nehemiah 11–12; Psalm 1; Acts 3
- ☐ October 15 Nehemiah 13; Malachi 1–2; Acts 4
- ☐ October 16 Malachi 3–4; Psalm 148; Acts 5
- ☐ October 17 Job 1–2; Acts 6–7
- ☐ October 18 Job 3; Acts 8–9
- ☐ October 19 Job 4–5; Psalm 108; Acts 10–11
- ☐ October 20 Job 6–7; Acts 12
- ☐ October 21 Job 8; Acts 13–14
- ☐ October 22 Job 9–10; Acts 15–16
- ☐ October 23 Job 11; Acts 17–18
- ☐ October 24 Job 12–14; Acts 19–20
- ☐ October 25 Job 15; Acts 21–23
- ☐ October 26 Job 16–17; Acts 24–26
- ☐ October 27 Job 18; Psalm 114; Acts 27–28
- ☐ October 28 Job 19; Mark 1–2
- ☐ October 29 Job 20; Mark 3–4



DATE

SCRIPTURE READING

- October 30 Job 21; Mark 5–6
- October 31 Job 22; Mark 7–8
- November 1 Psalm 121; Mark 9–10
- November 2 Job 23–24; Mark 11–12
- November 3 Job 25; Mark 13–14
- November 4 Job 26–27; Mark 15–16
- November 5 Job 28–29; Galatians 1–2
- November 6 Job 30; Psalm 120; Galatians 3–4
- November 7 Job 31–32; Galatians 5–6
- November 8 Job 33; 1 Corinthians 1–3
- November 9 Job 34; 1 Corinthians 4–6
- November 10 Job 35–36; 1 Corinthians 7–8
- November 11 Psalm 122; 1 Corinthians 9–11
- November 12 Job 37–38; 1 Corinthians 12
- November 13 Job 39–40; 1 Corinthians 13–14
- November 14 Psalm 149; 1 Corinthians 15–16
- November 15 Job 41–42; 2 Corinthians 1–2
- November 16 2 Corinthians 3–6
- November 17 2 Corinthians 7–10
- November 18 Psalm 124; 2 Corinthians 11–13
- November 19 Matthew 1–4
- November 20 Matthew 5–7
- November 21 Matthew 8–10
- November 22 Matthew 11–13
- November 23 Matthew 14–16
- November 24 Matthew 17–19
- November 25 Matthew 20–22
- November 26 Matthew 23–25
- November 27 Psalm 125; Matthew 26–27
- November 28 Matthew 28; 1 Thessalonians 1–3
- November 29 1 Thessalonians 4–5; 2 Thessalonians 1–3
- November 30 Romans 1–4
- December 1 Romans 5–8



DATE

SCRIPTURE READING

- December 2..... Romans 9–12
- December 3..... Romans 13–16
- December 4..... Ephesians 1–4
- December 5..... Ephesians 5–6; Psalm 119:1–80
- December 6..... Philippians 1–4
- December 7..... Colossians 1–4
- December 8..... 1 Timothy 1–4
- December 9..... 1 Timothy 5–6; Titus 1–3
- December 10..... 2 Timothy 1–4
- December 11..... Philemon; Hebrews 1–4
- December 12..... Hebrews 5–8
- December 13..... Hebrews 9–11
- December 14..... Hebrews 12–13; Jude
- December 15..... James 1–5
- December 16..... 1 Peter 1–5
- December 17..... 2 Peter 1–3; John 1
- December 18..... John 2–4
- December 19..... John 5–6
- December 20..... John 7–8
- December 21..... John 9–11
- December 22..... John 12–14
- December 23..... John 15–18
- December 24..... John 19–21
- December 25..... 1 John 1–5
- December 26..... Psalm 117, 119:81–176; 2 John; 3 John
- December 27..... Revelation 1–4
- December 28..... Revelation 5–9
- December 29..... Revelation 10–14
- December 30..... Revelation 15–18
- December 31..... Revelation 19–22



**THE
SECRET
PLACE**



JANUARY 1-7

WEEK 1

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THE SECRET PLACE: PSALM 91

THIS WEEK, let's be intentional about entering **the secret place** of God's presence.

When was the last time you truly made space for God in your daily life?

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So often, routine, stress, the demands of family life, work or even relaxation get in the way of communing with our Heavenly Father. We know we need His presence desperately, but the longer we go without it, the less we feel we can make time for it ... the more stretched and exhausted we feel.

As we begin this year-long journey into the Word of God, I want to encourage you to make space. It's not just a luxury for the believer—it's our oxygen. God's presence provides our fuel, our identity, our ultimate truth. Without Him, we cannot bear fruit (John 15); without Him, we can't truly make the most of our lives, let alone today.

Psalm 91 paints a touching picture of the protection and provision God offers to His children. The first two verses begin this way: "He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will abide in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say to the LORD, 'My refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust.'" Do we have this kind of faith in our God? Do we truly believe that He can sustain, provide for and protect us? If so, we'll honor Him with the firstfruits of our time. We'll make Him front and center!

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Our secret place isn't in a Netflix show; it's not in a spa day, a golf outing or any other form of escape we so often crave. It's not waiting out there in the future for when we work hard enough to earn it. It's right here, in the free, gracious, loving presence of God.

This year, let's make Him a priority. Let's find protection in His wings. Does this mean we won't face challenges, hardships, heartaches or the effects of our sinful world? Of course not. But it means we'll be shielded, empowered and delivered from the attacks of the enemy. It means we'll know who we are, even when our world is drenched in chaos and tragedy. It means we'll be secure even in the most turbulent of circumstances.

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Where are you going to make space for God this year? Each day, how will you enter into the secret place with Him? How will you put Him before those things that so often monopolize your time? He promises that it will be worth it. After all, He's the reason we exist.



JANUARY 8-14

WEEK 2

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FORGIVENESS

THIS WEEK, I want to encourage you to focus on and pray for an increased ability to show **forgiveness** to others.

Forgiveness is one of the hardest things we will ever have to do. That's why God didn't leave us without a perfect example of how to forgive. Jesus, the only perfect human being to ever walk the face of this planet, was wronged, falsely accused, beaten, tortured and murdered without cause. He was judged, called a blasphemer (and worse) and ostracized by the religious elite of His day. Still, when it came down to the final moments of His life, He prayed on behalf of the very men nailing his limbs to the cross: "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34).

This is forgiveness in its purest, strongest form. God wants us to clearly understand that forgiveness is at the heart of the gospel. The Good News of Jesus Christ is what he did for all of us on the cross 2,000 years ago—that He paid the debt that should have been ours to pay! He took our sins upon Himself, and because of what He did, you and I are forgiven.

However, this forgiveness comes with a clear obligation and expectation for those who have tasted and seen God's goodness: God expects forgiven people to forgive. Matthew 6:15 says, "But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions." If we have been forgiven an

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inestimable debt, it's the least we can do, out of gratitude, to forgive our brothers and sisters—our fellow sinners.

Jesus is our model. It is not just about celebrating Resurrection Day one Sunday out of the year, but it's about living the reality of that resurrected life every single day. And if we're going to live the reality of our resurrected King every single day, then it means that, just like He forgave us, we have to forgive others. How do we begin to do this? By understanding a bit of how Jesus did so.

Jesus separated the sin from the person. He was more concerned with the person than He was their actions. We, on the other hand, don't tend to separate the two; we consider someone's innate worth equivalent to his or her opinions, wrongdoings and shortcomings. When we don't separate who others are from what they do, we end up in a situation where we try to *rank offenses*. This isn't the way God dealt with us in Jesus Christ. He loved everyone. He ate with sinners. He came for the sick, not the well (Luke 5:31). He wiped our slates clean on the cross and continues to offer us unconditional love and grace every single day.

People are going to let you down. People are going to hurt you. But just as Jesus forgave us, He calls us to do the same for them. It's not a matter of feeling like it—think about how Jesus felt on the cross. Regardless of our feelings, we can choose to forgive because of His power in us! Today, pray for His guidance and strength—and then surrender your hurts and frustrations and unforgiveness to Him. He wants you to walk free of it!

JANUARY 15-21

WEEK 3

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ATTITUDE

THIS WEEK, let's focus on a radical change in **attitude!**

Often, we allow our circumstances to determine our outlook and attitude. Maybe we're going through a difficult season, so we allow complaining and bitterness to take root. Or, conversely, during times of celebration and ease, we can allow our happiness to be solely centered on our circumstances.

However, God is calling for a strength of attitude that transcends what's happening around us. The saints of the Bible maintained outlooks of faith, perseverance and strength because of the Holy Spirit—even as they were ridiculed, tortured and martyred.

One of the best examples of a good attitude in a difficult situation is the story of Joseph in Genesis 37. He is attacked, enslaved, falsely accused and imprisoned (all from the ages of 13 to 30). After all is said and done, Joseph spends an entire decade in what most people would call an unhealthy, difficult place. And yet, what do we find his attitude to be? He excels in whatever he does: He becomes Potiphar's most valued servant. He is placed in charge of his entire area of the Egyptian prison. He comes before Pharaoh and, with God's help, interprets his dream so impressively that he is placed in the second-in-command spot for all of Egypt.

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The very years in which God is preparing Joseph for his destiny are years of hardship, unfairness and isolation. Joseph maintains an attitude of learning, submission and trust in God. How? God enables him to keep a heavenly perspective in the midst of his struggle.

So often, we focus on where we are, and where we would rather be, instead of on God. The question is not, "God, why am I here?" The question is, "God, what are You doing, and how can I cooperate with it?"

Matthew 5:16 says this: "Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven." When does light shine the brightest? In life's darkest places. God places us in situations and environments and around people who may not be the healthiest or most pleasant, because these are the places and people who need Him the most!

God has a purpose in the difficult places He's leading you through. The way we can make the most of these places is by abiding in Him and asking Him to help us have a godly attitude. Where do you need a renewed attitude in your life today? Ask Him for help! He is ready to give it to you.

JANUARY 22-28

WEEK 4

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HEALING

THIS WEEK, we're reflecting on God's identity as our Healer and asking Him for **healing!**

There are countless areas of our lives that need God's healing touch, from our physical bodies to our emotions to our relationships. It's a good thing, then, that we serve a God who specializes in renewing and restoring!

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Mark 6:56 says of Jesus when He walked on earth, "Wherever He entered villages, or cities, or countryside, they were laying the sick in the market places, and imploring Him that they might just touch the fringe of His cloak; and as many as touched it were being cured." Our God has always been in the business of making dead things alive, injured things whole and fearful things secure.

Before we ask for specific healing in our lives, let's worship and praise God for being the ultimate Healer! Let's reflect on the times in our past when He's restored us, and thank Him for the most significant healing of all: Jesus' life, death and resurrection that brought us eternal salvation and relationship with God!

Once we know and trust God as our Healer, we'll turn to Him first and foremost when we need healing. God provides healing in myriad ways—through knowledge, professionals, miracles and many other methods. His timing isn't always

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our timing, but when we place our full confidence in Him, we'll be able to pray continually for healing, knowing that, at the end of all things, our prayers will be fully answered:

And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away." —Revelation 21:3-4

As you pray for healing in your life—and in the lives of others—today, remember this passage—remember God's promise. At the end of it all, there will be no more pain, sickness, hurt or injury. Until then, we can know and trust that we have a God who specializes in healing, and *Who wants* us to come to Him with our needs! Let's call out to Him in faith today.

WEEK 5

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EMPLOYMENT AND JOBS

THIS WEEK, let's focus on **employment and jobs**.

All of us have an employment of some kind—whether we're a business executive, ministry leader, blue-collar worker, stay-at-home parent, freelancer ... you name it. Life would be fairly directionless without some form of work. In fact, even in the Garden of Eden, God gave Adam and Eve work to do.

39

During this time, many have struggled to find, keep and find fulfillment in their employment. Jobs are scarce. Retention is shaky. Those who feel "stuck" in their current jobs don't have the luxury of job-hunting and moving around that they might usually have.

Employment has become one of the main sources of stress and worry in our lives. However, God doesn't want us to fret about what tomorrow will bring. Take a look at this familiar passage from Matthew 6:25-34, giving Jesus' words time to seep into your soul:

For this reason I say to you, do not be worried about your life, as to what you will eat or what you will drink; nor for your body, as to what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air, that they do not sow, nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not worth much more

than they? And who of you by being worried can add a single hour to his life? And why are you worried about clothing? Observe how the lilies of the field grow; they do not toil nor do they spin, yet I say to you that not even Solomon in all his glory clothed himself like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, will He not much more clothe you? You of little faith! Do not worry then, saying, "What will we eat?" or "What will we drink?" or "What will we wear for clothing?" For the Gentiles eagerly seek all these things; for your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. So do not worry about tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

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Choosing not to worry is more easily said than done; however, when we place our confidence in God's love and provision for us, we will have the strength to make the best of our current situation. Finding and retaining employment comes with a balance of God's provision and our personal responsibility. As we discussed earlier regarding attitude, it's up to us to make the most out of the place God has put us in. With His Holy Spirit's help, we can make the choice to take initiative, work with excellence and keep persevering in the midst of hardship.

WEEK 6

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LEADERSHIP DECISIONS

THIS WEEK, I want us to consider the difficult **leadership decisions** that we have to make in a variety of areas every day.

As we've said before, no matter where you are in life, you're a leader in some capacity. You influence someone else, and God has entrusted you with that influence! How do we go about making wise leadership decisions? Well, along with staying knowledgeable and educated in our spheres of influence, there are Biblical principles God gives us in this area.

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Most importantly of all, and what we'll focus on today, is the first step of going to God. It's so tempting to run to a number of other sources and authorities when we need to make a decision—the news, our friends or family, our coworkers, the experts ... the list goes on. We even consult our own experience first sometimes.

However, the Word of God gives us a more surefire strategy for decision-making in leadership:

James 1:5 says, "But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him."

This requires two key things: knowing that we lack wisdom and *asking God for it*. It takes a certain humility to do this. As a leader, understand that you will always need support and

help. In fact, a foolish leader doesn't listen to anyone but him or herself. Once we learn that our own understanding can't ultimately get us anywhere, we'll be in a position of heart to ask for God's heavenly wisdom.

Proverbs 3:5-6 echoes this imperative: "Trust in the LORD with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight."

God wants to help us make decisions! God wants to straighten our paths and make our burdens lighter. The key is that we have to surrender to His wisdom.

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Where in your life today do you need God's decision-making wisdom? How do you need Him to expand and accelerate your leadership potential? Ask Him!

WEEK 7

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PEACE

THIS WEEK, let's seek God for more **peace.**

Peace comes in many forms. Most important is the peace we have with God in Jesus Christ. There is also the inner peace we enjoy and peace in our relationships with others. The Bible tells us that, without God, we can't enjoy any of these kinds of peace at all!

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Philippians 4:4-7 says, "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."

Only when we fully trust God will we experience His amazing peace! It's not always easy to surrender our worries and cares to Him, but it's always worth it.

In John 14:27, Jesus said to His disciples, "Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful." Sometimes, this seems impossible! That's why we need God's help—we can't achieve or experience true peace on our own.

Peace with God and in God is the most fundamental kind of peace there is. When we experience this, we'll begin to see peace take over our hearts, our homes and our relationships with others. Conversely, if we see a lack of peace in any of these areas, it may be a sign that our understanding of the peace we have in Christ has been disrupted.

Where do you need to surrender to God and take hold of the peace you have in Christ? Who around you desperately needs this same inner peace? Ask Him today to give you a greater understanding of His peace so that you can experience it and share it with those around you!

WEEK 8

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FEAR AND ANXIETY

THIS WEEK, I want to encourage you to recognize God’s help in addressing your **fear and anxiety**.

Anxiety and fear are on the rise in our culture. Many factors contribute to this, but when it comes down to it, the number one thing we need to calm our hearts is the presence and the love of God. Of course, other strategies, help and methods are also useful, but so many people are trying to heal their fears without the influence of God!

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When we truly understand the power and love of God, it does more than anything else to alleviate and eradicate our fear. The Psalmist writes in Psalm 118:6-7, “The LORD is for me; I will not fear; what can man do to me? The LORD is for me among those who help me; therefore I will look with satisfaction on those who hate me.” What gives him the confidence to live in such a way? Knowing his God!

Likewise, we will never conquer anxiety and fear through trying to better ourselves. There are things we can do to partner with God; however, it all starts with knowing Him more—understanding His power and character—drawing closer to Him.

Others also play a pivotal role in this area. If we’re not willing to reach out to trusted family and friends, we’ll find ourselves on a scary, lonely road. Even Jesus, on the eve of His crucifixion,

confided in His disciples when he felt anxiety. Mark 14:33-34 says, “He took Peter, James and John along with him, and he began to be deeply distressed and troubled. ‘My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death,’ he said to them. ‘Stay here and keep watch.’” If the perfect Son of God experienced unpleasant emotions, and had the confidence to share them with His friends, why shouldn’t we do the same?

What areas of fear and anxiety do you need to be honest with God, yourself and others about today? Where haven’t you invited the Holy Spirit in to calm your heart and mind? Where have you been trying to “white-knuckle” it and eradicate your own anxiety?

46

Today, reach out and surrender. Admit that you can’t do it on your own. Ask God—and others—to help you. You’ll be amazed at how your fears and anxieties are quieted in the light of His presence.

WEEK 9

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THANKFULNESS

THIS WEEK, I want to remind you of how powerful it is to have a heart of **thankfulness!**

Gratitude is one of the most important qualities we can have as followers of Jesus! The Bible says that God has given us everything we need for life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3). Why shouldn't we be grateful?

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So often, however, circumstances, struggles and other factors get in the way of our thankfulness. Today, we're focusing on thanking God for everything He's done—past, present, and future. There is so much that He's done in *your* life alone—let's worship and praise Him for it!

Psalm 9:1 says, "I will give thanks to the LORD with all my heart; I will tell of all Your wonders." The more we reflect on the goodness of God—the more we praise Him with our lips and our lives—the less room that dissatisfaction, bitterness, complaining, jealousy and discontentment have in our hearts. The choice is ours—what will we make room for today?

We've already talked about peace during this study, but a big part of the peace we experience has to do with knowing who God is and what He's done for us. Paul tells the Colossian church in Colossians 3:15-17, "Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful. Let the word of Christ richly dwell within



you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father.” The more of God we experience, the more we’ll naturally give Him praise and thanks!

So here’s the question for us today: In what areas have we neglected to thank God for His amazing works? When have we forgotten the most praiseworthy things of all: the gospel and Jesus’ salvific work? Where have we allowed the worries and disappointments of life to eclipse His unconditional, eternal love?

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Wherever your perspective needs correction today, ask God to help you see things as they truly are. Ask Him to bring to your remembrance all the wonderful things He’s done in your life—and, more importantly, who He is! You won’t be able to help but give Him thanks!





MARCH 5-11

WEEK 10

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GUIDANCE AND WISDOM

THIS WEEK, let's seek God for more **guidance and wisdom**.

Just like our discussion of leadership decision-making, wisdom and guidance are essential in our lives. Wisdom extends beyond decision-making, however—it's a way of living that the believer grows in every single day.

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Guidance and wisdom are essential to life. Proverbs 11:14 says, "Where there is no guidance the people fall, but in abundance of counselors there is victory." One of the most important ways that God brings wisdom into our lives is through other people. Trusted, faithful sources of guidance are invaluable in your life, as you journey through uncharted territory and develop individually. Who do you have who makes you better? Whose wisdom has helped you move forward?

Just as in decision-making, the Bible is clear where our ultimate wisdom comes from. James 1:5-6 tells us, "But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him. But he must ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind."

Why do we so often doubt God's ability, or willingness, to solve our problems? Why do we neglect to go to Him when we need wise counsel? It's not His will that we be driven

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MARCH 5-11

about by hardships and circumstances. He wants us to have a wisdom that surpasses these things: His wisdom! He wants to impart it to us and bring people into our lives who reinforce it.

How can you seek out wise sources of guidance in your life? Who do you know who's gone before you and has the experience and insight to expand your view of God's wisdom? And even more importantly, what's keeping you from asking God for wisdom? What distracts, or gets in the way of, you beseeching Him for guidance? Make a commitment today to seek His wisdom first!

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MARCH 12-18

WEEK 11

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FINISHING WELL

THIS WEEK, let's ask God to give us the endurance to **finish well!**

The life of the believer isn't an easy one. In fact, Jesus promises us that we'll have struggles and trials in this life (John 16:33). If we're going to press on toward the prize—eternity with Jesus—effectively, we're going to need endurance.

Paul wrote about the struggle of finishing well in Hebrews 12:1-2. This passage comes directly after Hebrews 11, which is a spiritual "Hall of Fame" of sorts, detailing the faithful journeys of all the saints who had come before. Only by God's grace and power did they persevere—and only He can help us do the same. Paul writes, "Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."

Our example for finishing well is Jesus Himself! Though He faced many difficulties in His life and ministry—attacks, threats, ridicule, rejection, physical exhaustion and more—He knew the work His Father had given Him to do. He knew His mission, and He didn't stop until He said, "It is finished."

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Up until the end of His life, He was living the grace, forgiveness and righteousness of God.

There are so many people watching to see how we will finish—from unbelievers and acquaintances to the saints Paul mentions, watching from above. This race is not easy; we'll have to ask God for His help in laying aside sin that holds us back and tries to persuade us to throw in the towel. We'll need the support of other runners—other believers—who push us on toward the goal. We'll need to be that support for somebody else, as well!

But the pressure to finish doesn't ultimately rest on us—it rests on Jesus, who perfectly and faithfully finished our race. Now, we get the privilege of worshiping Him with our lives as we rely on His strength to keep running. Have you been trying to finish well on your own? Be comforted—it's not all up to you! He is the author and finisher of your faith!

How do you need to lean into Him more today as you run? Who needs your help in finishing well? How does the knowledge that *It Is Finished* already help you finish well today?

MARCH 19-25

WEEK 12

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REVIVAL

THIS WEEK, let's look to God for **revival!**

What does this word mean? In essence, revival is bringing something back to life—breathing vitality into something that's dead. Salvation in Jesus is the ultimate form of revival—we are “born again” into God's family, made spiritually alive with Him.

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There are other revivals that happen in our lives, as well. It could be a personal rededication or re-focusing on the Lord, or a community-wide movement of surrender to and trust in God. Revivals happen all around us, in large and small ways. In Psalm 85:4-7, the Psalmist pleads with God to bring about a revival in the hearts of the people of Israel. Pay attention to the restorative, revitalizing language in this passage:

Restore us again, God our Savior, and put away your displeasure toward us. Will you be angry with us forever? Will you prolong your anger through all generations? Will you not revive us again, that your people may rejoice in you? Show us your unfailing love, LORD, and grant us your salvation.

Despite the circumstances, the psalmist trusted in God's love and ability to revive what had been lost. Do we trust Him like this? When we consider the dead parts of our lives—the

THE SECRET PLACE

things that have shriveled up and become dormant—are we fully convinced that He can do something about them?

God wants to breathe life back into your soul—your emotions—your finances—your marriage—your family—your community—your mind—your job—every area of your life! The question is this: Will we submit to the revival He wants to bring about? Are we willing to lay aside our own agendas and wishes to embrace His?

Where in your life do you need revival today? What about your family? What about your community? Revival starts with God drawing people to Himself—and it involves our yielding to His Spirit! Where do you need to submit to the Lordship of Christ today? Don't wait! Revival—big or small—is often just a prayer away.

WEEK 13

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SERVANT LEADERSHIP

THIS WEEK, let's examine the power of **servant leadership**.

Christ, the ultimate leader, came not to be served, but to serve—to give His life as a ransom for many (Philippians 2:6-8). He asks His followers to do the same. However, our leadership is often more selfish than we even realize. We make choices and form relationships for personal gain; we try to leverage people and situations based on our own agendas. We misuse resources that have been entrusted to us.

There is a better way to lead. Jesus said that the greatest in His kingdom are those who are last (Matthew 20:16). As the early church formed, Paul confirmed this same ethic in his letter to the Galatians:

You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love. For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." If you bite and devour each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other. So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want.



MARCH 26-APRIL 1

But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. —Galatians 5:13-18

Our biggest witness to a watching world—and to those we lead—is our selfless love. If we're not willing to lay down our own wishes, agendas, preferences, egos and titles at the foot of the cross, why are we in leadership? We will never influence others to be more like Christ if we ourselves are not dying to ourselves and asking Him to make us new—every single day.

Servant leadership isn't trying harder to be more selfless—it's understanding that even Jesus, our leadership model, laid down His own life. There's a freedom in realizing that we can't—and won't—be good leaders on our own. Once we've accepted that, we can start to serve others in a way that will confound the world and make an eternal impact in our communities!

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THE SECRET PLACE

APRIL 2-8

WEEK 14

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HUMILITY

THIS WEEK, I want you to think deeply about **humility!**

Here's an intriguing story from Jesus' life found in Luke 14:7-11. When Jesus goes to someone's house for dinner, He makes an observation about not only the guests, but human nature:

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When he noticed how the guests picked the places of honor at the table, he told them this parable: "When someone invites you to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honor, for a person more distinguished than you may have been invited. If so, the host who invited both of you will come and say to you, 'Give this person your seat.' Then, humiliated, you will have to take the least important place. But when you are invited, take the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he will say to you, 'Friend, move up to a better place.' Then you will be honored in the presence of all the other guests. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted."

Jesus was teaching an important lesson, but one that's so difficult to practice. Why? Because our nature is to jockey for that most-important spot. Our nature is to compare ourselves with those seated "ahead" of us and to wonder why we're not in their spots. Our nature is to equate our self-worth with our position at the table—even though there is room for everyone!

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Humility is the kingdom difference. Just as Jesus was a servant leader, He embraced humility in every aspect of His life. He didn't need money, status, possessions or key connections in order to feel good about Himself. He hung out with fishermen, prostitutes, tax collectors, adulterers and lepers. The Bible says He had no place to lay His head (Matthew 8:20). He gave up everything—including His own life—for others. And yet, He never forgot His worth, or His Father's love!

Humility isn't the same as self-effacement. It doesn't mean compromising your values or becoming a doormat for others. Humility is a quality that only the Holy Spirit can grow in us, and it so beautifully reflects the heart and character of God that others can't help but take notice.

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Think of the most humble people in your life. What stands out to you about their demeanor, the way they treat others, the way they handle themselves? Let's ask God today for a dose of the humility that He desires to see in us—the humility that only He perfectly exemplifies!



APRIL 9-15

WEEK 15

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HOLY SPIRIT

THIS WEEK, let's pray for a fresh revelation of the **Holy Spirit** in our lives!

The Holy Spirit is an often overlooked member of the Trinity, but He plays a pivotal role in our relationship with God. The Holy Spirit seals us, teaches us, intercedes for us and journeys with us. As we get to know Him, and surrender to His work, the Spirit manifests the power of God more and more in our lives!

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1 Corinthians 2:9-12 gives more insight into the work of the Holy Spirit in us:

What no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, and what no human mind has conceived—the things God has prepared for those who love him—these are the things God has revealed to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. For who knows a person's thoughts except their own spirit within them? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. What we have received is not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may understand what God has freely given us.

Isn't that amazing? Without the Holy Spirit, we wouldn't be able to understand God at all! The Spirit is the one who

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APRIL 9-15

moves and works in us to draw us to Christ—to seal us as eternally belonging to the Father! It's the Holy Spirit who dwells in us daily, who prompts us, corrects us and guides us into all truth.

Where have you missed an opportunity to learn about and get to know the Holy Spirit? Have you perhaps thought about Him more as a *force* than a Person of the Trinity? Have you settled for having only a vague idea of who He is and what He does? Today, let's delve into the Word to get to know the Spirit more intimately!

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APRIL 16-22

WEEK 16

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PRAYING FOR OTHERS

THIS WEEK, let's focus our hearts on **praying for others!**

For most of us, it's tempting to make our time with God all about us—our needs, our questions, our requests, our hurts, our victories, our relationships with Jesus. However, God makes it clear that the Body of Christ is meant to support one another. We can't do this walk alone. We need the intercession and encouragement that other believers provide for us.

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James 5:14-16 lays out a remedy for suffering in the church: "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." Notice that God doesn't instruct the sick or suffering believer to simply pray for him- or herself. It's not a matter of building personal faith. In this instance, God instructs the church to lift up the other person. We are called to support, to sustain, to encourage, to intercede for—to come to God on behalf of—one another.

We see this also in the Old Testament. When the people of Israel sin, Moses makes intercession for them after God

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APRIL 16-22

sends a poisonous punishment into the camp. Take a look at Numbers 21:6-9:

Then the LORD sent venomous snakes among them; they bit the people and many Israelites died. The people came to Moses and said, "We sinned when we spoke against the LORD and against you. Pray that the LORD will take the snakes away from us." So Moses prayed for the people. The LORD said to Moses, "Make a snake and put it up on a pole; anyone who is bitten can look at it and live." So Moses made a bronze snake and put it up on a pole. Then when anyone was bitten by a snake and looked at the bronze snake, they lived.

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This intercession was actually a foreshadowing of the greatest intercession of all—Jesus standing in our place, taking the punishment for our sins and giving us His righteousness in return. The Bible says that Jesus is our Great High Priest (Hebrews 4:14-16), the One who enables us to come before God with confidence!

Today, let's follow His example by spending our time lifting up our brothers and sisters. Let's intercede and pray for those around us, knowing that these prayers are powerful! Who do you need to lift up today? Who do you need to practically show support to in your life?

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APRIL 23-29

WEEK 17

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UNITY

THIS WEEK, let's consider the topic of **unity** in our homes, communities and world.

It's no secret during these times that we desperately need a sense of unity. Our world is being torn apart by spirits of judgment, discrimination, hatred, jealousy and other dark forces. The church ought to be the example for the world of what love and unity look like ... yet so often, we are the exact opposite. The church falls short in this area far too often.

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Paul writes to the Corinthian church in 1 Corinthians 1:10, "I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another in what you say and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly united in mind and thought." The divisions in Corinth ranged from sects that held specific preachers and teachers in higher esteem than others to the racial divide between Jews and Gentiles. There were tensions of all kinds—differences of belief—intersections of culture and questions of faith—and yet, Paul still exhorts this church to find unity.

How is this possible today? It's possible because of what Christ has done. Galatians 3:27-28 say, "For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."

THE SECRET PLACE



Paul didn't mean this literally. He's teaching that these distinctions and differences take a back seat—forever—to the identity we all share in Christ.

If the church is going to be an example of unity for the world, we need to put our identity as Christ followers above every other identity. This doesn't mean we don't appreciate and learn about each other's differences and experiences. This doesn't mean we don't ask the hard questions. It simply means we don't allow our disagreements to overshadow our connection as brothers and sisters in Christ. It means we submit to God's standard of love, justice, grace and mercy—no matter what we personally might think is best.

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Where in your life have you allowed your differences with others to usurp your shared destiny with them in Christ? Where have you allowed the spirits of division, bitterness and judgment to close your eyes and ears to the experiences of others? Only God can help us overcome these barriers and realize a fuller version of the unity He desires for us. Today, let's get on our knees and ask for His forgiveness—and His help.

WEEK 18

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GOD-CENTERED STRATEGY

THIS WEEK, I want us to consider **God-centered strategy!**

Unlike decision-making, strategizing involves long-term plans and weighty choices. While a decision can be as simple as what to eat for lunch, strategizing involves looking at where you want to be years from now. We've already discussed leadership decision-making, but today, we're seeking God's help on realizing His big-picture plans for our lives, churches, families and businesses!

65

Proverbs 16:9 says, "In their hearts humans plan their course, but the LORD establishes their steps." Humans tend to do a lot of planning—it's true. We spend hours around tables in meetings about vision, direction, goal-setting and strategy. We spend more time over lunches and dinners—in talks with spouses and friends—imagining where we could be, should be, would be ...

But how often do we commit our ways to the Lord? How often do we acknowledge Who is truly in control of where we go from here? And why is it so difficult to remember Him in the midst of an exciting new idea or visionary challenge?

James writes about this tendency in James 4:13-15, as well: "Now listen, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money.' Why, you do not even know what will happen

tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. Instead, you ought to say, “If it is the Lord’s will, we will live and do this or that.” James doesn’t pull any punches. He tells these people, “Let’s be honest—you don’t even know what’s going to happen when you wake up tomorrow ... *if* you wake up tomorrow!”

We operate, many times, as if we have everything in our lives under control, locked down—which is both a great way to get a big head and a great way to stress ourselves out immensely. To realize God-centered strategy requires—big surprise here—surrendering our strategies to God. Rather than hastily asking Him to sign off on our bright ideas right before we act, we should be seeking His face before we even go into the vision meeting.

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Today, in what areas of your life do you need God-centered strategy? It all begins with centering our lives on God.

MAY 7-13

WEEK 19

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FAMILY

THIS WEEK, let's consider the importance of our **families!**

Whether you live with others or not, all of us have families of a kind—trusted people we spend time with, confide in and do life with on a daily basis. As believers, we're also part of God's family—the church. Today, we're focusing on praying for those in our families, as well as the unity of our families in general.

67

It's true around the world—families can be huge sources of happiness, joy, security and love—or they can cause strife, pain and hurt that affects us for years. Finding a godly family model requires understanding the love that God has offered us, so we can in turn show that same love towards others.

1 John 4:16-21 says, "God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them. This is how love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment: In this world we are like Jesus. There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love. We love because he first loved us. Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen. And he has given us this command: Anyone who loves God must also love their brother and sister."

THE SECRET PLACE



MAY 7-13

Without experiencing this love, we won't be able to have loving, secure, joyful families. We won't create safe places for those around us—because we won't truly understand what it means to be safe in God. If we're operating out of fear, it will slowly begin to tear our families apart. Conversely, when we're walking in love, our families will come closer together.

Whether you're a child, a parent, living on your own or living with a house full of other people, God has surrounded us with those in need of a family. Today, let's ask for God's help in empowering us to be loving examples of His family to those around us. Who needs a better understanding of His love? Where can you influence and invest in your family, and in the church, to help bring people together?

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MAY 14-20

WEEK 20

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AWAKENING

THIS WEEK, let's open our hearts for a spiritual **awakening!**

Similar to revival, awakening is something that happens in our spiritual lives—it's a change where God opens our eyes to a truth about Himself, which affects the way we live. Awakenings can happen frequently in the life of a believer or a community. The Bible speaks about “waking up” in a spiritual sense—coming to know Christ as Lord and Savior—and about the eventual rising of the saints, when those who have “fallen asleep” will join God forever in the new heaven and new earth.

Clearly, being “awake” spiritually is extremely important. Paul writes this passage to the church in Rome, in Romans 13:11-14: “And do this, understanding the present time: The hour has already come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh.”

This makes it clear that, even for believers, there can be areas of our lives in which we temporarily “fall asleep” to the work

THE SECRET PLACE

God is doing—to His purposes and plans for our lives. Paul admonishes these church members to “look alive,” because Jesus is coming back sooner than they expect. We only have a short time on this planet—and the more the enemy can lull us into a slumber, or an apathetic way of living—the more our eternal impact will be hindered.

Today, we’re praying for awakening, because only God can change our hearts and wake us up. Only He can give us the passion we need to pursue Him and His plans for our lives. Take time today to ask Him where you have fallen asleep, and where you’ve settled for something other than His best for you. Remember, this isn’t a matter of us waking ourselves up, or simply trying harder to run the race—this is us beseeching God to pull us out of a slumber we can’t even sense, and to open our eyes to who He is in a new way!

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As we lift up our own lives to Him, let us also lift up those around us, knowing that none of us have reached the end of our journeys, and that we all have a lot to learn and “wake up” to in our spiritual lives!



MAY 21-27

WEEK 21

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COMPASSION

THIS WEEK, let's talk about **compassion**.

In times of hardship and division, it's difficult to find a compassionate spirit towards others. This is especially challenging when we feel as if we've been slighted, attacked or hurt by someone else. Our flesh tells us to retaliate in the same fashion, not to offer mercy and understanding.

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However, just as with any other spiritual quality, our model for compassion is Jesus. He showed compassion to those who didn't deserve it—which was everyone. Even those who thought they were righteous in their own eyes—who didn't realize their need for a Savior—became broken by His display of compassionate love.

The Old Testament tells us about God's inherently compassionate character: Lamentations 3:22-23 says, "Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness." If God's compassion were based on anything other than Himself, it would be conditional. Instead, God's infinite, true nature means that His compassion will *never* fail. That's good news for us!

It also means that, through His power, we have the opportunity to share this same incredible compassion with others. 2 Corinthians 1:3-4 tells us that we are called to do just this:

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“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God.”

Just as God has shown us unmerited compassion and comfort, we are called to reach out to those—deserving or not—in our world and share His heart. It’s not easy, but it’s something we do out of gratitude for the compassion that we’ve received! When we fully understand the lengths God went to in order to comfort us, we’ll readily ask Him to use us to accomplish the same work—to make us even more into His image and send us into a world that desperately needs His compassion.

72

Who do you need to show compassion to today? How haven’t you accepted God’s compassion in your own life? Ask Him to grow your understanding and experience of what true compassion is—and then become a conduit of it to your community!

MAY 28–JUNE 3

WEEK 22

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DEALING WITH FEAR

THIS WEEK, we're asking for God's help in **dealing with fear!**

Oftentimes, in Christian circles especially, we are told to “just stop being afraid.” However, it's not that simple. The enemy is crafty—he's been doing this a long time, and he knows how to infiltrate our thoughts and hearts with lies and with doubt.

73

If we're going to live free from fear, it requires an antidote—a solution—to the worry and the apprehension we face. The Bible offers two main antidotes to fear that are actually tightly intertwined: prayer and the Word.

First, Philippians 4:6-7 instructs believers not to “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.” Instead of willing fear away in our own strength, God asks us to surrender our fears to Him—to adopt a faith-filled perspective as we shift our focus from our problems to our great God!

Equally important, we need to dive into God's Word regularly. This will ensure that His truths are always bigger in our mind and our heart than the enemy's lies. The author of Proverbs explains it this way: “My son, if you receive my words and treasure up my commandments with you ... then you will understand the fear of the LORD and find the knowledge of

THE SECRET PLACE

God ... then you will understand righteousness and justice and equity, every good path; for wisdom will come into your heart, and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul; discretion will watch over you, understanding will guard you" (Proverbs 2:1, 5, 10-11).

Fear of the Lord and obedience to His Word are the antidotes to fear. It comes down to this: Will we choose to place our faith in God rather than in our own abilities, circumstances and loved ones? When we approach Him in faith-filled prayer, and when we dive into His Word to better understand who He is, our hearts will begin to be transformed. We will still face struggle, hardship and spiritual battles, but we will be able to do so free from fear, because we know the One who's in control.

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What do you need to do more of this week? Do you need to make time for prayer and bring your concerns before God in surrender? Do you need to delve more deeply into the wisdom of the Scriptures? You can never do too much of either! It's amazing how the Holy Spirit shifts our hearts away from fear and towards confidence in God as we draw nearer to Him. Allow Him to deal with your fear today!

JUNE 4-10

WEEK 23

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GOD'S WILL FIRST

THIS WEEK, we're putting **God's will first!**

The book of Romans has much to say about submission to God's will; what's even more interesting is that Paul lays out practical ways to discern if we are truly submitted and putting God's will above all else!

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Romans 12 begins this way in verse 1: "I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship." In this context, Paul is addressing the physical body; however, in the following chapters, he goes on to cite spiritual, mental and emotional proofs that we are fully surrendered to God's transformative work. Putting God's will first starts with surrender. Then, we see the evidence of that surrender.

Romans 13 goes on to expound on one of these signs: How we respond to human authority reflects how we've responded in our hearts to Godly authority. "Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment."

While it may be difficult to grasp this truth today, imagine hearing this as a Jew living in Rome during the time of

THE SECRET PLACE

Roman occupation! Imagine watching your brothers and sisters in Christ be martyred and violently persecuted and then reading these words from Paul. This was no lighthearted command; the only way we can respect the governing authorities—even when they're in the wrong—is if we've already submitted to our ultimate authority: Jesus Christ.

Romans chapter 14 continues this theme, providing another piece of evidence that we're putting God's will first: how we treat our brothers and sisters in Christ. Paul explains that each of us have a level of faith; for those stronger in the faith, who felt free to do certain things like eating or drinking specific substances, Paul writes, "If your brother is grieved by what you eat, you are no longer walking in love. By what you eat, do not destroy the one for whom Christ died ... so then, let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding." Submitting to God's will results in a higher level of esteem, consideration and love for our heavenly brothers and sisters.

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To summarize, Paul cites our biggest example in Romans 15: Jesus Himself. Verses 3-7 read, "For Christ did not please himself, but as it is written, 'The reproaches of those who reproached you fell on me.' For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God."

It's hard to wrap it up more succinctly than that: If we're truly and fully submitted to God's will—if we're putting what He says first—we'll see it evidenced in our relationships. Are we loving others like Christ? Are we submitting as He did? Are we laying down our own rights for the rights of others?

JUNE 11-17

WEEK 24

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RIGHTEOUSNESS

THIS WEEK, let's find our **righteousness** in Christ alone!

Our culture makes it easy to adopt a checklist or a series of sacraments as the metric for our righteousness. *If I can just get all my tasks completed for this week*, we think. *If my children would just behave, if my marriage were a bit healthier, if I lost those ten pounds ... then God would be happy with me (and I would be happy with myself).* The problem with this mindset is one we all know too well—Monday morning comes around, and we realize we've backslidden, stalled, fallen short. Again and again, we try to do better, only to realize the same truth that God's Word has been telling us all along: *We can never be good enough.*

The only way we'll be transformed, and see transformation in our lives, is by operating *out of Christ's righteousness*—not trying to earn it. This seems fundamental to our faith—and it is—but too often, we ignore this reality in favor of believing that we can make it happen. Even if our efforts are fueled by gratitude, if they're founded on guilt, we're operating out of fear, not faith!

Our righteousness comes through Christ alone. Ephesians 2:4-10 explains it beautifully:

But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were

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dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

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Notice how generously the Father lavishes His love on us! Phrases stand out from this passage like, “rich in mercy,” “great love,” “immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness,” and “gift of God.” If we trust that the Father loves us enough to give up Jesus Christ on our behalf, how much more can we trust that Jesus’ finished work on the cross is adequate—that He alone is all we need to be righteous?

It’s clear that righteousness and salvation are things we can’t earn on our own—no matter how well-intentioned or hardworking we are. It’s time to get off the treadmill of religion and rest in the finished work of Jesus Christ! He is your righteousness! Your obedience comes out of a place of identity—not so that you can acquire that identity. Once we fully believe and soak in this truth, it will literally change everything about how we operate on a daily basis!

WEEK 25

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SPIRITUAL AMBITION

THIS WEEK, let's re-evaluate the meaning of **spiritual ambition!**

Ambition is a lauded character quality in every area of life—from the workplace to the home, those with ambition are described as self-driven, responsible, action-oriented and resilient. That's what we all want to be, right? Spiritual ambition is similar, but unique in that our *motivation* matters just as much, if not more, than our ambitions themselves.

We see countless examples of God's people displaying spiritual ambition in the Bible: from Moses and Joshua's leadership of the Israelites through the wilderness and into the Promised Land (a spiritually daunting task, not to mention the physical and mental toll), to various Old Testament kings and prophets following God's Word amidst a land full of false gods and depravity, to Jesus Christ's own ultimate example of enduring to the end of His earthly mission—even though it cost Him everything. Spiritual ambition is a praiseworthy attribute ... *but only if our hearts' motivation is right!*

What does this mean? Let's take a look at Philippians 3 and 4. Paul is exhorting the believers in Philippi to keep straining towards the goal of their purpose in Christ. Philippians 3:12 says, "Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, *because Christ Jesus has made me his own*" (emphasis added). 3:20 and the

following verses elaborate on the motivation behind Paul's endurance: "But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we *await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ*, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself. Therefore, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved" (emphasis added).

Did you catch that? Paul's ultimate motivation for spiritual endurance stems from the fact that he already has a Savior in Christ Jesus! He's not ambitious for ambition's sake—to make a name for himself, make a living or to get recognition in the local paper. Paul's foundation for his ambition is the truth and identity of Jesus! As we discussed last week, God's strength and truth is the only driving force that will sustain us, rather than drain us.

80

Spiritual ambition is a wonderful character trait to have ... if it's founded upon Jesus Christ and His work! So, let's evaluate today: What's causing us to strain towards the goal? Is it an earthly pressure? A feeling of obligation? Guilt or shame? Or is it the surpassingly sweet truth of the gospel—that we are running the race *for* Christ and *in* Christ?

JUNE 25–JULY 1

WEEK 26

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WALKING BY FAITH

THIS WEEK, let's seek the Lord's help in **walking by faith!**

"Walk by faith" is one of those phrases we hear often in Christian sermons, devotionals, books and conversations. It's so common, in fact, that we can completely miss its deep meaning as we skim over it. "Walk by faith" can become synonymous with "don't let anything bother you," which is far from the intended meaning.

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In fact, let's look at a section of this week's SOAP reading plan as an example. The book of Jonah is short—only four chapters—but it paints a picture of a man seriously struggling with his faith and obedience. Jonah knows his identity as a prophet—a spokesman of God—but when the time comes to obey, he runs. When God finally gets to his heart—in the belly of the great fish—and Jonah repents, we think his character arc is complete. Now, he'll do what he's supposed to, right?

Wrong. Jonah fails another test when God forgives the Ninevites and he pouts like a toddler from above the city. "It is better for me to die than to live," Jonah whines. In his mind, God's mercy towards the Ninevites doesn't make one iota of sense. They deserved to be obliterated—wiped off the face of the planet! In fact, this had been Jonah's hope all along. Instead, God shows mercy towards them. It goes against everything Jonah stands for and believes.

THE SECRET PLACE

Here's the litmus test of our faith: Are we able to walk in faith *even when God's Word seems diametrically opposed to what's "right" in our own eyes?*

Are we willing to walk in faith when God chooses another answer to our prayers than the one we've been requesting?

Are we willing to walk in faith when God allows pain and suffering into our lives?

Are we willing to walk in faith when we can't trace or track God's hand in our situation?

This is a far cry from "don't let anything bother you," or a platitude plastered on a decorative sign. This is a deeply-rooted assurance that God's ways are truly better and higher than our own (Isaiah 55:9)! Jonah's story is authentic; and, at some point in time, it has been ours, too. We have spurned God and His truth when it seemed inappropriate or incomprehensible to us. Today, let's ask for His help in living by true, heart-level faith—no matter what.

WEEK 27

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GOD'S OUTSTRETCHED ARM

THIS WEEK, let's thank God for the power of **His outstretched arm!**

The Bible makes multiple references to God's "outstretched arm." This phrase simply means the power and authority with which God acts—His ultimate influence and sovereignty in creation. Often, this outstretched arm of God is referenced in relation to God's acts of deliverance on behalf of His people, the Israelites. Take a look:

- God promises to deliver Israel from Egyptian slavery (Exodus 6:6).
- God asks Israel if there is any other god able to do the things He has done (Deuteronomy 4:34).
- *After* Israel is freed from Egyptian slavery, God calls His work to their remembrance (Deuteronomy 5:15).
- The psalmist praises God for his power and might (Psalm 136:12).
- God's power is displayed in His creation of the universe and everything in it (Jeremiah 27:5, 32:17).

These are just a few of the examples of the phrase "outstretched arm" that occur in Scripture. The message is clear:

There is no one like God. No one can resist or overpower His outstretched arm! God Himself summarizes it this way in Isaiah 43:13: “No one can deliver out of my hand. When I act, who can reverse it?”

Why is it essential for us to grasp this truth? Because it affects how we go about our lives on a daily basis! If we realize and recognize that we’re serving an all-powerful God, it will change our interactions with others, our view of ourselves and the passion with which we pursue God’s purposes for us on this earth!

Today, meditate on the truth that God is the most powerful Being in the universe. His outstretched arm is omnipotent—*no one* can stop what He’s purposed to do, or force Him to change His mind. The God who sent Jesus to bring us salvation is the same God who will keep us in His hand, protect us with His outstretched arm and bring us home to be with Him in glory. Let this reality encourage and spur you on today!



JULY 9-15

WEEK 28

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STRUCK DOWN BUT NOT DESTROYED

THIS WEEK, we're thanking God for the truth that we may be **struck down**, but in Christ, we are **not destroyed!**

The 2 Corinthians passage that houses this statement provides insight on what it means to be both struck down and not destroyed. Let's begin by reading the passage in 2 Corinthians 4:7-12:

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But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may also be revealed in our mortal body. So then, death is at work in us, but life is at work in you.

Here, Paul is referring to himself and Timothy when he says "we" and the Corinthian church when he says, "you." The Greek verbiage Paul uses in the phrase "struck down" is thought, by several commentaries, to be tied to the word picture of a gladiator or wrestler being thrown down in a match. Paul and Timothy have been beaten and thrown around for the sake of the gospel—and for the sake of their spiritual

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children. However, their hope and their legacy endures, regardless of their circumstances, thanks to the eternal life of Christ within them. As the saying goes, "To resurrect something, it has to die first." This is the truth Paul is operating out of in this passage.

If you and I are to share in Christ's resurrection, we also will share in His death. Romans 6:3-8 explains this apparent paradox:

Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his. For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin— because anyone who has died has been set free from sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.

This is how we can be struck down, stripped of ourselves and beaten by the circumstances and adversaries of this life, *without being destroyed*. Paul and Timothy recognized this distinction, and if we are to share in Christ's death and resurrection, so must we. We may be hard-pressed on every side, but God will never abandon us. He will never forsake us. We will never be defeated, because Jesus Christ has already won the ultimate victory over sin and death!

JULY 16-22

WEEK 29

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RENEW OUR MINDS

THIS WEEK, let's ask God to help us **renew our minds!**

Have you ever caught yourself thinking something that surprised you—and not in a good way? The reality is that, all day long, our souls and minds are taking in messages from the world around us. These messages can be anything from “You want a cheeseburger for lunch” to “Your worth is wrapped up in what you can produce.” It can be easy, especially in Christian circles, to assume that the solution to renewing our minds is retreating from the world.

Instead, Jesus prays the following over His disciples in John 17:15-18: “I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth.”

How are we to remain sanctified and renewed mentally while still being in the world? God's Word is the truth we need. Romans 12:2 is perhaps the most well-known passage about this topic. It reads, “Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.” As we delve more deeply into God's Word each day, throughout the day,

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He supernaturally transforms our minds to be more like His! We're able to discern His voice, His will and His ways more accurately the more that we take in His Word!

James 1:22-25 echoes this truth, adding another important note. Renewal of the mind requires obedience:

Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues in it—not forgetting what they have heard, but doing it—they will be blessed in what they do.

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Not only will our minds be renewed by our faithful obedience—we'll exemplify the mind of Christ to the world around us. Again, does this mean we'll never be influenced or swayed by the messages of the world? Chances are, no. But we'll be continually washing our hearts and minds in God's truth. As we walk in the world, we'll be able to contextualize our sharing of the gospel message to the audiences we encounter each day, maintaining a mental purity that keeps us from compromising His truth.

How is Jesus "sending you into the world" today? Who has He called you to reach, love, influence and share His truth with right where you are? And what scriptural truth are you taking in? Let's thank Him for renewing our minds through the power of His Holy Spirit!

WEEK 30

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REVIVE OUR HEARTS

THIS WEEK, we're asking the Lord to **revive our hearts!**

Countless influences in life can discourage, de-motivate and depress us. We need a healing, rejuvenating touch from God each and every day. In fact, it's in God's nature to do this very thing! In Scripture, we find example after example of God bringing rest, joy and encouragement to His people. Primarily, this is through the amazing person and message of His Son, Jesus Christ!

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Let's take a look at a few passages from Isaiah 40-42, in which God is comforting His people. After their disobedience and turning away from God, the Israelites suffered the consequences of their rebellion. In these passages, God is promising His people renewed life—the scripture in chapter 42 points forward to the coming Messiah, who would restore the intimate relationship between God and all men—Israelites and Gentiles—forever. Isaiah 40:1-2:

“Comfort, comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her that her hard service has been completed, that her sin has been paid for, that she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins.”

Isaiah 41:8-10:

“But you, Israel, my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, you descendants of Abraham my friend, I took you from the ends of the earth, from its farthest corners I called you. I said, ‘You are my servant’; I have chosen you and have not rejected you. So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.”

Isaiah 42:1-4:

“Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him, and he will bring justice to the nations. He will not shout or cry out, or raise his voice in the streets. A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out. In faithfulness he will bring forth justice; he will not falter or be discouraged till he establishes justice on earth. In his teaching the islands will put their hope.”

Just as God promised restoration and joy to His people in the Old Testament, through Christ, He promises us the same thing, as well! Not only do we receive salvation in Jesus, but we receive a continual renewal of our hearts! What an amazing reality to dwell on this week!

WEEK 31

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VICTORY IN JESUS

THIS WEEK, we're claiming and resting in the **victory** that we have **in Jesus!**

It can be difficult to remember our eternal victory when disheartening circumstances demand our attention and threaten to steal our joy. In the day-to-day grind, as we tackle challenges and confront the enemy, how can we walk in victory? By remembering Jesus' finished work on the cross!

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1 Corinthians 15:55-58 says, "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?' The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain."

Let nothing move you. More easily said than done, isn't it? The only way we can live this way is through the power of the Holy Spirit in us! As He reminds us of Jesus' finished work, and as we meditate on the Word, we'll be able to maintain a perspective higher than that of the daily minutiae that demand our attention.

Jesus Himself promised a peace that surpasses circumstance, shortly before He left His disciples: John 16:32-33 says, "Behold, the hour is coming, indeed it has come, when you

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will be scattered, each to his own home, and will leave me alone. Yet I am not alone, for the Father is with me. I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.”

This peace is a promise we can claim and cling to, regardless of what’s happening around us. As you tackle the responsibilities and obligations on your plate this week—as you navigate the conflicts, tragedies and challenges in your path—remember the endgame: Remember that Jesus already won the ultimate victory. In Him, we have peace!

AUGUST 6-12

WEEK 32

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FRESH WIND

THIS WEEK, let's pursue a **fresh wind** from the Holy Spirit!

What does it mean to experience a “fresh wind” from God? The Holy Spirit wants to bring new revelation about God into our lives—a deeper understanding and experience of Himself!

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Perhaps the greatest example of the Holy Spirit bringing a fresh wind is the story of Pentecost in Acts 2. Jesus' disciples are gathered together in the Upper Room when the power of the Holy Spirit descends to dwell in them for the first time. Acts 2:1-4 says, “When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.”

Jesus had instructed them to wait in Jerusalem for this indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Christ calls the Spirit a Helper, an Advocate, the One who will make all things clear to the disciples. Today, we're praying for the Spirit to move in such a way that we gain a deeper understanding of who God is, and what He wants to do in and through us!

This is a privilege reserved for those who have called Jesus Lord and accepted His gift of salvation. As Jesus Himself

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explained to Nicodemus in John 3:7-8, "You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit."

The Holy Spirit and His ways don't make sense to the unbelieving world; as we've studied already, God's ways are higher than ours! That's why we need the Spirit to reveal God's truth to us! In fact, John 6:44 tells us that we can't even come to Christ on our own! "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day."

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God has things to reveal to us that we don't know—things we're not even aware that we don't know! This week, let's approach Him and His Word with humble expectation, asking the Holy Spirit to give us fresh wind at the heart level so that we would know and love and serve Him better.

AUGUST 13-19

WEEK 33

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SPIRITUAL LEADERSHIP

THIS WEEK, let's seek God for a renewed sense of **spiritual leadership.**

The Bible makes it clear that the church is called to reveal the truth of God to the world. Each of us has our own role to play in that Great Commission—and each of us, no matter our title or position in life, is a spiritual leader.

Especially during these times, the Church needs to be the force that brings people together under the love and grace of Jesus Christ. Instead of being a voice of condemnation and division, we need to be a unifying force! After all, God doesn't discriminate or divide people. John the Revelator gives this preview of the new heaven and new earth in Revelation 7:9-10: "After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could count, from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and palm branches were in their hands; and they cry out with a loud voice, saying, 'Salvation to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.'"

Now is the time for us to stand up for truth and show people the unifying, saving love of Jesus Christ. Let our spiritual leadership not be biased, selfish or based upon any certain political agenda. Rather, let's cause true change in our communities! Spiritual leaders will face hardships along this

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journey, but it's all going to be more than worth it in the end. Romans 8:18-21 says so:

I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God.

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Now is the time for you, as a kingdom leader, to rise up and be a change agent—to take your place in God's kingdom and lead others spiritually so that creation can stop waiting. He wants to equip you to take possession of your spheres of influence, in every corner of the world—whether that's the arts, entertainment, politics, finance, education or any other area of influence.

Whether you lead in the ministry, in the marketplace, in the home or anywhere else, God is looking for hungry hearts that long to cause lasting change for His kingdom. Today, commit to being one such heart. Seek God on how He wants you to more fully step into the spiritual leadership role that is *already yours!*

AUGUST 20-26

WEEK 34

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THE GREAT I AM

THIS WEEK, we're dwelling on the truth that God is **the great I Am!**

This title has been used by God to refer to Himself since the early pages of the Old Testament. In Exodus 3:13-14, God tells Moses that this is the title he should use when he goes to Egypt to free the Israelites: "Moses said to God, 'Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, "The God of your fathers has sent me to you," and they ask me, "What is his name?" Then what shall I tell them?' God said to Moses, 'I Am who I Am.' This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I Am has sent me to you.'"

There are many reasons God uses this name—all of which we may not fully understand or appreciate—but one of them is that the world at that time had *many* gods—idols, cultural deities and shrines that were places and objects of worship. God was differentiating Himself from these false gods—He wasn't created or changed by human hands. He wasn't an urban legend. He was the self-sustaining, here-since-before-time-began, one and only God!

"I Am" became one of the main names by which God's people knew Him in the Bible. In fact, when Jesus used this title to refer to Himself, the religious leaders of the day immediately made the connection: Jesus was calling Himself God. John 8:56-59 shares the account: "Your father Abraham rejoiced at

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the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad.' 'You are not yet fifty years old,' they said to him, 'and you have seen Abraham!' 'Very truly I tell you,' Jesus answered, 'before Abraham was born, I Am!' At this, they picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus hid himself, slipping away from the temple grounds."

When we realize who Jesus is—and the powerful truth behind the name "I Am"—we'll revere and worship God in an entirely new way. The reality of His eternal existence and total self-sufficiency is mind-bending. His very existence is proof that He can be trusted—that He created all things—that He has the first and the last word. This week, let's ask God for a fuller understanding of this name—of who He is! We truly serve the one and only, all-powerful God—the great I Am!

WEEK 35

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WHO ARE WE?

THIS WEEK, we're affirming **who we are** in Christ!

Last week, we talked about God's identity; this week, we're talking about how who God is and what He's done through Christ informs *our* identity! Scripture is full of passages about who we are in Jesus. Let's focus on a specific passage in the book of 1 John that succinctly explains the impact of the cross and the resurrection on our own selves. First John 3:1-3 reads:

See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. All who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure.

At our core, when all is said and done, we are children of God. No matter how well we perform, whom we know, what we do, what our status is or any other temporary factor of life, we are sealed in Christ as His sons and daughters. As if this weren't enough, the author of 1 John looks forward to eternity, where we'll attain an even fuller understanding of who Christ is and who we are created to be! Isn't that an amazing hope to hold onto?

This week, no matter what voices or messages attempt to define you, remember who God says you are! Our status as children of God supersedes any other distinction or category with which we identify. Galatians 3:25-29 explains: "But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian, for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise."

Let's thank God for the amazing promise that, no matter who we are or what we've done, if we've accepted Jesus as Lord and Savior, we are children of God above anything else!

WEEK 36

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OVERFLOW

THIS WEEK, let's believe God for the **overflow!**

God's riches and grace toward us are so abundant that Scripture describes them repeatedly as "overflowing." When we're out of strength, out of patience, out of ability, out of wisdom or lacking in any other area, God has more than enough! His storehouses never run dry, and His power is unfathomable!

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Even when we walk through difficult circumstances or spiritual attacks, God has more than enough. The psalmist exclaims in Psalm 23:5-6, "You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever." How good our God is, that He lavishes us with every good thing even when we don't deserve it!

Paul echoes this grateful tone in 1 Timothy 1:12-14, where he recounts God's immense grace and mercy to him: "I thank him who has given me strength, Christ Jesus our Lord, because he judged me faithful, appointing me to his service, though formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor and insolent opponent. But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief, and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus." God's grace towards all of us *overflows!* It's so great that we can't contain it or even fully appreciate it!

So many times, we're focused on the things we're asking God for—whether it be restoration of health, reconciliation of relationships, strength to overcome in the midst of challenges or any other number of things. However, how often do we stop to dwell on just how immense God's goodness to us has *already been*? How often do we thank Him for causing our cups to overflow with goodness? How often do we thank Him for who He is and for being in relationship with us through Christ's finished work, instead of focusing on the temporal things which so often dominate our thoughts?

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This week, ask God to reveal to you the ways in which He's already allowed you to live in the overflow! Be thankful! Worship and praise Him for His overwhelming goodness! Make a list of the ways He's shown Himself faithful, true, trustworthy, good, loving, gracious, tender and kind. Find little ways to appreciate His goodness each day—and share it with others! We're operating in the overflow *right now*, because of who He is and what He's done!

WEEK 37

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GOD IN THE WHISPER

THIS WEEK, I want to encourage you to listen for the **whisper of God!**

1 Kings 19:11-14 tells an interesting story in the life of Elijah. The prophet of God, who'd been persecuted and threatened by the reigning authorities, had fled the presence of Queen Jezebel in fear. God meets Elijah in the wilderness, and the following takes place:

And he said, "Go out and stand on the mount before the LORD." And behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind tore the mountains and broke in pieces the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind. And after the wind an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. And after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire the sound of a low whisper. And when Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his cloak and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. And behold, there came a voice to him and said, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

God's power was on full display in this experience, and yet, none of the first three frightful displays contained the voice of God. Only when the whisper came did Elijah recognize the sound of His Lord's voice.

Directly before this moment, Elijah tells God that it's all too much—that he wants to lie down and die. Instead of berating the prophet, God sends an angel to feed Elijah and gives him time to sleep and rest his mind. Then, when He finally speaks, it's in this gentle whisper.

How incredible is it that God knows what each of us needs in any given moment? He knows when we need a coach, and He knows when we need a comforter. He knows when we need to be spurred onwards to action, and when we need to lie down and take a nap. Regardless of what we think our needs are, God knows them better than we do! The tenderness He has for Elijah in this passage is remarkable. Instead of yelling, storming, thundering or shaking the ground—all of which are completely within His power—God whispers.

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God wants an intimate encounter with you. He wants to reveal His character to you more fully than you've ever understood it before. He wants to be the comforting presence when you can't take another step. He wants to be the first one you come to in your weakness so that He can be glorified in and through you! Will you take time to listen for His whisper this week? Will you quiet your heart and invite Him in to speak gently to you?

WEEK 38

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THE POWER OF INTERCESSION

THIS WEEK, we're discovering **the power of intercession!**

God sets us an example in how to intercede for others in His Son, Jesus Christ, who came to earth to live, die and rise so that He could intercede on our behalf. Hebrews 4:14-16 explains that, just as the Old Testament high priest would enter the Holy of Holies to make atonement for the sins of the people, Jesus was our perfect atonement:

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Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

The power of Jesus' intercession made a way for us to approach God with confidence! How incredible is that? Hebrews 7:25 also speaks of Christ's finished—and continuing—work of intercession: "Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them."

Did you know that Jesus isn't the only member of the Trinity that makes intercession for us? Romans 8:26 tells us that

even the Holy Spirit does this: “Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.”

Jesus is our intercessor in the area of sin, and the Holy Spirit is our intercessor in the area of prayer! How loving of God, to do what we couldn't do in our own power!

When we intercede for others in prayer, we're reflecting the character and nature of our God. Just as we couldn't save ourselves, there are times when those in our lives need extra help. They can't make it without support. Sometimes, they can't find the words to pray. This is when we, as their brothers and sisters in Christ, can intercede powerfully. We can approach the throne of grace on their behalf; we can wage war spiritually. We can offer an encouraging word or act of service, providing fuel for those on spiritual “empty.”

Who has God placed in your life who needs your intercessory prayer today? How can you reach out and stand in the gap for them, as Jesus Christ has done for you? Our intercession is powerful!

WEEK 39

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THE POWER OF LOVE

THIS WEEK, let's lean into **the power of God's love!**

The entirety of Scripture is filled with evidences of God's love for us, and exhortations to love one another. This week, however, let's look at one specific event that encapsulates and displays the love of God in a never-before-seen way.

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When the Son of God stepped into creation and became an infant, God was with us—Immanuel—in a way He had never been before. The eve of Christ's birth, and the days shortly thereafter, show the power of love—those who encountered the baby Jesus were amazed, blessed, and received a fresh revelation of God's identity through Him.

Luke 2:8-14 tells the story of the shepherds who received the joyous announcement:

And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger."

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And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!”

What an amazing announcement! The shepherds went on to visit Jesus in the manger and to share what they’d seen with others.

A few days after this, a certain man in the temple encountered the baby Jesus and had similar responses. Let’s take a look at Luke 8:25-32:

Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord’s Christ. And he came in the Spirit into the temple, and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the Law, he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said, “Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel.”

The very presence and person of Jesus—even in His earliest earthly days—brought this worshipful declaration from Simeon’s lips! That’s the power of the love that compelled God to come down into our world and save us from ourselves. This week, dwell on Christ, and allow His identity to reveal to you how powerful love truly is!

OCTOBER 1-7

WEEK 40

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SPEAK IT

THIS WEEK, let's learn God's truth and commit to **speak it!**

It's not enough to know, or mentally acknowledge, the truth of God's Word—we have to believe it and speak it! That's why Romans 10:9, a well-known verse about salvation, says, "If you *confess with your mouth* that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved" (emphasis added). The words we speak reveal the contents of our hearts!

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What do your words currently reveal about the state of your heart? Are they words of faith, confidence and trust in God? Are they words of truth and honesty? Do they dwell on the goodness of God and the blessings He's given you? Where have your words drifted away from the truths of Scripture?

Each of us has a daily battle to fight in our minds and our hearts. The enemy would love nothing more than to derail your words—to have you speak death, doubt, fear and anxiety over both yourself and others. But we have the greatest hope and truth there is! We have so much to thank God for.

This week, ask God how He wants to shift your words more into alignment with His Word. This begins with changing the way we think! Philippians 4:8-9 says, "Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there

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is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me—practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.” If we’re dwelling on true, noble, righteous things, that’s what will come out of our mouths!

If God has given you a calling, speak it! When you find promises in His Word that are yours in Christ, speak them! Speak His identity over yourself and over those around you! Your words have power, so don’t waste them or use them thoughtlessly. Speak His truth!



OCTOBER 8-14

WEEK 41

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ATTITUDE OF GRATITUDE

THIS WEEK, we're asking God for strength to have an **attitude of gratitude!**

Have you ever caught yourself complaining needlessly or repeatedly about something relatively insignificant? Have you ever realized that it's been a while since you sincerely thanked God for the blessings He's given you? When was the last time you allowed yourself to be content—even grateful—for where He's placed you right now?

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Our culture is inundated with messages, advertisements and influencers whose goal is to make you feel dissatisfied so that you'll purchase—or at least strongly desire—what these sources have to offer. This kind of atmosphere breeds discontentment that can easily seep into every area of our lives. However, this isn't God's will for us.

Luke 17 tells a poignant story of ten men who were miraculously touched by Jesus. You'd think that being present for a miracle performed by the Son of God would leave these men with nothing more to complain about—that they would leap at the opportunity to thank God for His goodness. However, that's not what we find out. Let's take a look at Luke 17:11-19 for the full story:

On the way to Jerusalem he was passing along between Samaria and Galilee. And as he entered a

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village, he was met by ten lepers, who stood at a distance and lifted up their voices, saying, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us." When he saw them he said to them, "Go and show yourselves to the priests." And as they went they were cleansed. Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice; and he fell on his face at Jesus' feet, giving him thanks. Now he was a Samaritan. Then Jesus answered, "Were not ten cleansed? Where are the nine? Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?" And he said to him, "Rise and go your way; your faith has made you well."

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Why did only one of the healed men return? This shows us a lot about the states of their hearts. The other nine men were obviously excited, but that doesn't mean they were grateful. They had other things to do—more aspirations to chase—interests and goals to achieve separately from God. That's why they didn't take the time to turn around and express their thanks—if they had any thankfulness at all! However, the one who did return was grateful. His heart had been moved. He recognized what God had done for Him, and that nothing else he could go after would compare to knowing Christ.

Where are you this week? What state is your heart in? How grateful are you for what God has already done? Let's not simply move forward toward the next thing—let's take time to stop, reflect, be grateful and worship our Healer!

OCTOBER 15-21

WEEK 42

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BE STILL AND KNOW

THIS WEEK, we're discovering how to **be still and know that He is God!**

It's so difficult to rest and be still in our world today. Constant stimuli compete for our attention: social media, news outlets, books, friends, responsibilities, to-do lists, fun outings, music, movies and more. There's a constant stream of noise. In this unrelenting barrage of messages, it's tempting to want to keep going—to “keep up” with everything. The danger in this is that we're never at rest—never satisfied—never still.

One of the quickest ways to drift from God relationally is by never making time for Him. When we haven't connected with Him, it's easy to begin to doubt His goodness and His ability to be Lord over our lives. We begin to think (along with the enemy's prompting) that we've got this. We can make it work on our own. We can be good enough.

The Bible prescribes a completely different antidote to fear, anxiety and doubt in Psalm 46:10: “Be still, and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!”

Our perspective is only set right when we are still enough to acknowledge God for who He is. As we've already explored, our minds are renewed when we dwell on His truth and His Word. If you're feeling anxious, shaky in your faith or inundated

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OCTOBER 15-21

with unrelenting and conflicting messages, there's a simple way to drown out the noise: Be still. Dwell on God. Recognize Him. Worship Him. Renew your mind and refresh your heart with the reality of who He is.

Will you take time this week to be still? How can you work this into your daily routine? How can you prioritize Him above all of the other messages, notifications, obligations and exciting things going on? Quiet your heart, kneel before Him and thank Him for being who He is.

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OCTOBER 22-28

WEEK 43

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HOLY SPIRIT POWER

THIS WEEK, we're relying on the **Holy Spirit's power** in our hearts and lives!

One of the most powerful books of the Bible as it relates to studying the Holy Spirit's power is the book of Acts. The early church, newly-indwelted with the Spirit of God, went forth sharing the good news of the gospel with all kinds of people groups in all kinds of places. This wasn't easy work, and they needed God's strength, wisdom and protection. The greatest displays of the Holy Spirit's power in Acts, one could argue, are found not in the moments where He spares His followers from pain and hardship, but rather when He sustains and keeps them in the midst of it.

In Acts 7, we find the amazing story of Stephen, one of the earliest church leaders. Stephen wasn't ashamed to share the message of Jesus Christ—even though it meant persecution. In fact, Stephen is the first recorded New Testament martyr in the Bible! Let's take a look at the final few moments of his life in Acts 7:56-60, which give a powerful testimony of how the Holy Spirit's power was made manifest in Stephen's obedient surrender:

Now when they heard these things they were enraged, and they ground their teeth at him. But he, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God.

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And he said, "Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God." But they cried out with a loud voice and stopped their ears and rushed together at him. Then they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their garments at the feet of a young man named Saul. And as they were stoning Stephen, he called out, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." And falling to his knees he cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

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The powerful evidence of the Holy Spirit's power isn't seen in the number of converts here; rather, the Spirit empowers Stephen to stand firm, to see the glory of God and to forgive his murderers with his dying breath. Many times, we assume that the Holy Spirit's power in our lives will dramatically change our circumstances—and many times, that's true. However, Stephen didn't rely on this. Instead, he relied on the Spirit's power to faithfully obey what God had called him to do.

How might the Holy Spirit want to empower you this week? What is God calling you to do? Let's acknowledge our inability to be faithful on our own and joyfully ask God to fill us with the Spirit's power in order that we might walk in all that He has for us, trusting that His plans are the best plans!

WEEK 44

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HEARING GOD CLEARLY

THIS WEEK, we're focusing on **hearing God clearly** and obeying Him!

How can we obey God faithfully if we're not hearing His voice? Hearing God clearly is the first step to walking with Him and living out the purposes He has for our lives. On an even more fundamental level, we can't come to know Jesus as Lord and Savior until we hear the truth of God's Word and the prompting voice of the Holy Spirit!

Romans 10:14-17 explains it this way: "How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, 'How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!' But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, 'Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?' So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ."

Faith—whether initial, saving faith or continual, daily faith—comes from hearing. Hearing comes from the Word of God! As we've studied this year, it's essential to dive into God's truth every single day. If we don't, we may misinterpret God's voice, will or instructions to us. However, the more we steep our hearts and minds in His truth, the more clearly we'll be able to discern His voice.

Last week, we talked about the power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus promised His disciples that they would face trials and tribulations, but then, He instructed them to listen for the words the Spirit would give to them for these situations. Mark 13:9-11 says:

But be on your guard. For they will deliver you over to councils, and you will be beaten in synagogues, and you will stand before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them. And the gospel must first be proclaimed to all nations. And when they bring you to trial and deliver you over, do not be anxious beforehand what you are to say, but say whatever is given you in that hour, for it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit.

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When we listen for the voice of the Holy Spirit, and when we read God's truth regularly, we find that He gives us the words to speak! This week, how will you listen for His voice? How will you hide His truth in your heart? The more we do these things, the more clearly we'll be able to recognize and follow His voice on a daily basis. There's truly no greater privilege than that!

NOVEMBER 5-11

WEEK 45

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BROKEN BUT BLESSED

THIS WEEK, we're remembering that, though this life may leave us **broken**, we are always **blessed** because of God's presence and salvation!

It's easy to assume that brokenness and blessing are mutually exclusive states of being. In fact, there's a false message in Christian circles which implies that followers of Jesus won't suffer, be broken or go through hardships. This couldn't be farther from the truth! The life of Jesus—and every believer who has walked in His footsteps—teaches us that we'll walk through trials, spiritual warfare and tribulations (see John 16:33 for evidence of this). However, this doesn't mean that, in our brokenness and struggle, we're not also abundantly blessed!

The eternal blessing of God's presence and salvation never goes away. As Paul explains in Romans 8:35-39, it supersedes and overcomes every other obstacle we'll ever face:

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written,

"For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered."

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither

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death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Even in the midst of intense persecution and hardship, Paul and the other members of the early church kept their eyes on the bigger picture. They knew they were blessed—and this assurance gave them the strength to endure challenges with a holy joy. They were looking forward to the blessing beyond the brokenness! In fact, Paul was even able to boast in his own weaknesses in 2 Corinthians 12:9, knowing that they brought God glory: “But he said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.”

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Are we able to boast in our weakness, in our brokenness, and keep our gaze on the blessing of God’s presence in the midst of hardship? This week, let’s ask for His help in attaining and maintaining this perspective! This life may leave us broken, but we are abundantly and eternally and surpassingly blessed!



NOVEMBER 12-18

WEEK 46

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FREEDOM

THIS WEEK, we're walking in **Christ's freedom!**

If we've accepted Christ as Lord, we have freedom from sin, death and the grave. This is incredible news! However, our freedom doesn't begin when we breathe our last here on earth—Jesus died so that we could have an abundant, full life right now (John 10:10)!

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In order to walk in the freedom He purchased for us, we need to understand exactly how Jesus' life, death and resurrection affects us. Galatians 5:1-13 explains it well. In this letter, Paul is exhorting the Galatian Christians to remember where their freedom truly lies—it's not in following old traditions or laws. Instead, it comes only by faith in Jesus Christ! Let's take a look at Paul's instructions:

For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.

Look: I, Paul, say to you that if you accept circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to you. I testify again to every man who accepts circumcision that he is obligated to keep the whole law. You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace. For through the Spirit, by faith, we ourselves eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness. For in Christ Jesus neither

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circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love.

You were running well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth? This persuasion is not from him who calls you. A little leaven leavens the whole lump. I have confidence in the Lord that you will take no other view, and the one who is troubling you will bear the penalty, whoever he is. But if I, brothers, still preach circumcision, why am I still being persecuted? In that case the offense of the cross has been removed. I wish those who unsettle you would emasculate themselves!

For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.

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In this day, the Jewish believers were trying to pressure Gentile converts to undergo certain traditional rites of salvation from the Old Testament, including circumcision or kosher diets. Paul's point is simple: If you want to be saved by the law, you'll end up being condemned by it, too. However, if you rely on the finished work of Christ, you'll find freedom! This is a freedom that doesn't give us license to act any way that we want—rather, it's a freedom that calls us to serve and love those around us!

This week, let's reflect on how we're walking in our Christian freedom. Are we using it as a license to act however we like? Are we using it to lay burdens, rules or religious requirements on newer believers? Or, are we walking in freedom and encouraging others to do the same? "For freedom Christ has set us free." Let's truly walk in that freedom!



NOVEMBER 19-25

WEEK 47

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PRAY FIRST

THIS WEEK, we're choosing to **pray first!**

Many of us are good in a crisis—we jump to action, organize people, come up with a plan and execute it. Others of us freeze when conflict or catastrophe strikes—we don't know what to do, or we feel overwhelmed, so we hesitate until we see a clear path forward. Regardless of your personality or how you respond in a crisis, the exhortation for this week is the same for all of us: Change the first thing you do.

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Praying first isn't about making a show of seeking God; it's not to reassure others around you or to make yourself feel better. Instead, it's a sign of authentic trust in God to handle the situation better than we can. If we don't have faith in His ability, we'll try to fix it on our own. However, if we know He's in control and that He already has a plan, the first thing we'll do is run to Him for guidance.

Jesus instructs His disciples on how to pray in the familiar passage Matthew 6:5-13:

And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in

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secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you. And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. Pray then like this:

“Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name
Your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day 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 evil.”

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When trouble strikes, God doesn't want fancy words; He wants your heart. He wants your absolute trust. He wants your worship, no matter the circumstances. Strategy, coordination and teamwork are essential, but let's not let them get ahead of the first step we need to take.

This week, make it your priority to pray first!

WEEK 48

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WATCH YOUR MOUTH

THIS WEEK, we're **watching what comes out of our mouths!**

A huge indicator of the state of our hearts is what we're saying on a daily basis. Jesus makes this point clear in Matthew 12:33-37:

Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or make the tree bad and its fruit bad, for the tree is known by its fruit. You brood of vipers! How can you speak good, when you are evil? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. The good person out of his good treasure brings forth good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure brings forth evil. I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak, for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.

What careless, destructive, fearful or doubtful words are coming out of your mouth? Have you been judgmental towards others (or yourself)? Have you complained and whined? Have you gossiped or slandered? Have you spoken false things about God, yourself or someone else?

This week, pay attention to the words that come out of your mouth. First, just be aware of them; don't beat yourself up or heap condemnation on yourself. Allow the Holy Spirit to

bring to your attention any areas of speech that aren't glorifying to Him or beneficial to yourself and others.

Then, ask Him to help you change the way you speak to reflect Him! It's not easy to adjust our language, but it's essential if we're going to show the world who God is and what He's like! Oftentimes, we do the most damage to our witness through our example, so take time this week to truly let God examine your heart, your mind and your words. It's worth the time and effort. Surrender to Him, and let Him transform the way you speak!

DECEMBER 3-9

WEEK 49

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SOW GOOD SEEDS

THIS WEEK, let's focus on **sowing good seeds!**

Jesus shares one of the most memorable parables of His ministry in Matthew 13:1-8. There's much for us to learn from this story, as we go out into the world to share the gospel and to be His hands and feet. Let's take a look at the Parable of the Sower:

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That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea. And great crowds gathered about him, so that he got into a boat and sat down. And the whole crowd stood on the beach. And he told them many things in parables, saying: "A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seeds fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured them. Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and immediately they sprang up, since they had no depth of soil, but when the sun rose they were scorched. And since they had no root, they withered away. Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. Other seeds fell on good soil and produced grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. He who has ears, let him hear."

Jesus' listeners don't fully understand the parable—in fact, even His own disciples ask why He doesn't simply explain the

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principle instead of using a story. In response, Jesus shares the meaning in verses 18-23:

Hear then the parable of the sower: When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is what was sown along the path. As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy, yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while, and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away. As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful. As for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it. He indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty.

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Our goal as sowers isn't to judge the viability of the soil (the hearts of the people) around us; instead, it's to sow good seed! The more we spread the truth of God's Word—the more people we love, serve and influence in Jesus' name—the more that good roots will take hold. God is the One who causes the seed of truth to grow in people's hearts; we are the workers and the harvesters responsible for stewarding those hearts.

This week, don't agonize over the results of your ministry; don't hold yourself accountable for making people come to God. Instead, focus on sowing good seed! Focus on spreading the everlasting truths of God's Word, and leave the results up to Him!



DECEMBER 10-16

WEEK 50

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THE VALUE OF SERVING OTHERS

THIS WEEK, let's ask God to reveal to us **the value of serving others!**

It's easy to get so wrapped up in our own concerns, desires, work, relationships and lives in general that we forget about the needs of those around us. God calls us to a higher way of living! In fact, Jesus' time on earth was full of healing, connecting with and serving those around Him. Our lives should look the same. Philippians 2:5-11 paints a beautiful picture of the humility with which Christ served others:

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Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

If Jesus knew that His primary purpose was to serve God and others, how much more should we make our lives about

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humble service! This isn't something we can do in our own strength; instead, it's the result of the Holy Spirit's power transforming and working through us to touch lives!

Peter gives a similar exhortation to believers in 1 Peter 4:7-11. Knowing that Jesus is coming back one day, how should we act?

The end of all things is at hand; therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers. Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins. Show hospitality to one another without grumbling. As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

Our lives are meant to be poured out as offerings! The value of serving others isn't in feeling better about ourselves, or gaining a charitable reputation. Instead, it's in bringing glory to God, reflecting His Son to a hurting world, and being transformed more and more into the image of Jesus Christ!

So, who is God calling you to serve this week?



DECEMBER 17-23

WEEK 51

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BATTLING OFFENSES

THIS WEEK, we're **battling the offenses** that arise in our spirits toward others!

All of us have been hurt, betrayed, scorned or sinned against by someone else. If you haven't, you've probably just been born. The principle for this week isn't about *avoiding* offense. After all, each of us has also *offended* someone else. Instead, it's about learning how to process through, surrender and let go of offense once we've been the recipient of it.

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Many times, our unforgiveness causes more damage internally than the initial offense! When we're unforgiving—when we harbor grudges and judgmental attitudes towards others—we damage both our witness and our hearts! This isn't the life God wants for us. In fact, Paul writes in Colossians 2:13-14 about the example Christ set for us—the ultimate act of releasing offense:

And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross.

If God chose to forgive us through Jesus Christ, what excuse do we have to harbor unforgiveness towards others?

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Colossians 3:12-13, which comes just a few verses after the above passage, says, “Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.” We see that it isn’t a matter of emotion, being in the right or getting our way. If it were, Jesus wouldn’t have come to die a brutal death for the sins of those who had wronged Him.

What attitude do we see from our perfect Savior in those last moments? Luke 23:33-34 tells us: “And when they came to the place that is called The Skull, there they crucified him, and the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. And Jesus said, ‘Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.’”

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The only way we’ll find the strength to release offenses—truly healing from them, not just ignoring the pain—is through Christ’s power. This week, ask Him to reveal any places in your life in which you’re harboring offense towards someone else—places you haven’t been able to let go and forgive. Ask Him for His power to surrender those things, trusting that His healing and love will be enough to move you forward. It’s not easy work, but it’s essential. Jesus Christ forgave us; we must also forgive others.



DECEMBER 24-31

WEEK 52

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EXPAND OUR THINKING

THIS WEEK, we're petitioning the Lord to **expand our thinking!**

So often, we place limits on what we think God can do. This week, we're challenging you to recognize and remove these limits. The reality is that God can do anything! His thoughts and ways are higher than ours (Isaiah 55:8)! This is a lesson Job learns in a difficult way: After enduring some of the most tragic circumstances in all of Scripture, Job begins to question God's plans. God responds with three chapters of staggering, humbling words. Let's take a look at just the first 20 verses of Job 38:

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Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind and said:
 "Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge? Dress for action like a man;
 I will question you, and you make it known to me. Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?
 Tell me, if you have understanding. Who determined its measurements—surely you know!
 Or who stretched the line upon it? On what were its bases sunk,

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or who laid its cornerstone, when the
 morning stars sang together
 and all the sons of God shouted for joy?
 Or who shut in the sea with doors
 when it burst out from the womb, when I
 made clouds its garment
 and thick darkness its swaddling band,
 and prescribed limits for it
 and set bars and doors, and said, 'Thus far
 shall you come, and no farther,
 and here shall your proud waves be
 stayed'? Have you commanded the
 morning since your days began,
 and caused the dawn to know its place,
 that it might take hold of the skirts of the
 earth,
 and the wicked be shaken out of it? It is
 changed like clay under the seal,
 and its features stand out like a garment.
 From the wicked their light is withheld,
 and their uplifted arm is broken. Have you
 entered into the springs of the sea,
 or walked in the recesses of the deep?
 Have the gates of death been revealed to
 you,
 or have you seen the gates of deep
 darkness? Have you comprehended the
 expanse of the earth?
 Declare, if you know all this. Where is the
 way to the dwelling of light,
 and where is the place of darkness, that
 you may take it to its territory
 and that you may discern the paths to its
 home? You know, for you were born then,
 and the number of your days is great!"

Wow! Job's thoughts were surely expanded after this experience! God gets a little smart with Job, reminding him that

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there's no way we can understand or fully appreciate God's ways! This week, let's remember this truth and humbly ask God to expand our thinking.

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