



Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you ...” - James 4:8a

Do you ever wonder if you're spending enough time with God? Do you question how to spend more time with God, even if you want to, when you have the responsibilities and demands of everyday life pressing in?

There is no getting around the importance of **Making Room for God!** For anyone endeavoring to live the Christian life, refreshing our souls by abiding in the presence of God is a must. Without it, our emotional, physical and spiritual tanks run dry. And when that happens, we likely feel depleted, disconnected, powerless and stuck in the daily grind of our everyday lives.

A full life cannot run on an empty soul.

The question then is, how can we make time for God when life is already so busy? For starters, we may need to say “no” to say “yes”. With that in mind, we invite you to make room for God in a very purposeful way over the next 21 days by engaging in the ancient biblical practices of fasting and feasting.

We don't enter this season flippantly or mechanically. We definitely do not intend to merely go through religious motions. Our heart is to encounter God in a fresh, life-changing way which enables us to be with Him and become like Him, all while moving toward our remembrance of the death and resurrection of Jesus, the supreme act of self-denial, and the source of real change and real life.

Fasting isn't magic. We aren't somehow leveraging God with our performance. We are denying our flesh to make room for God to be God and do God-like stuff in us as we feast upon his presence: to guide, comfort, encourage, forgive, empower and change us.

Fasting is temporary, but purposeful setting aside earthly provisions to feast upon heavenly realities. Biblical examples have to do with abstaining completely or partially from food for the

purpose of focused attention on God. Said another way, *“Fasting is the voluntary denial of an otherwise normal function (eating) for the sake of intense spiritual activity (communing with God).”* – Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*.

Historically, many have included non-food items (social media, entertainment, hobbies) as alternatives to food for the purpose of fasting. There is certainly a useful place for abstaining from any number of things as an expression of self-discipline, but doing so falls under the broader category of abstinence rather than biblical fasting.

The important distinction of fasting has to do with the physical sensation of going without food we are accustomed to having whenever we want, in whatever amounts we desire. Fasting is a psychosomatic exercise which experientially trains our will in the essential act of self-denial. And self-denial makes room in our lives to live the life God intends for us: full, free and forever!

Matthew 16:24–25 *“Then Jesus told his disciples, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.”*

So, you’re probably wondering, “What’s the plan?”

It’s pretty simple: Spend less time preparing to eat and eating, and more time with God. We want you to draw near to God and encounter the Lord in life-giving and life-changing ways.

Begin by determining how you would like to engage the fasting component of this twenty-one-day experience. You may be led to set aside a specific type of food. Examples include things like sweets, meats, or beverages other than water (please drink plenty of water!). Some may want to eliminate a meal each day. Others may even feel led to skip two meals per day. Those who are eliminating meals should consult their doctor before doing so.

Whatever you decide, we encourage you to consciously replace what you have denied yourself with feasting upon God’s presence. When you feel a craving for what you don’t have, let it prompt you to engage what you do have in prayer, Scripture reading and/or meditation. Feed on the *Bread of Life!* (John 6:33-58)

The devotional guide you have in your hands is just that, a guide. It’s divided into three sections: your past, your present, and your future. Every Sunday will be an introduction to each section. Then, for each of the next six days, we will provide a biblical focus, a devotional thought, a few questions for reflection, and finally, some prayer prompts for you to use.

Big picture, we will all be on a journey to make room for God and pursue the biblical value we have emphasized this ministry year: Life Change is a Way of Life.

If you need some help coming up with your plan, please reach out to your Community Group leader, a staff member or an elder. In addition, a few recommended resources are listed below.

- <https://www.cru.org/us/en/train-and-grow/spiritual-growth/fasting/personal-guide-to-fasting.html>
- Fasting for Spiritual Breakthrough by Elmer L. Towns
- A Hunger for God by John Piper
- Celebration of Discipline, by Richard Foster
- Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life, by Donald S. Whitney and J. I. Packer

A Word to Parents: We hope your entire family will participate. We know that will look different given the age and maturity of your kids, but we encourage you to talk with your children about biblical fasting, about denying themselves food (of any kind and amount) so that they can feast upon God by spending time in His Word and in prayer. If you need help, please ask!

Days 1-7: YOUR STORY - A LOOK BACK

If you haven't already, you will want to land on a plan for fasting today. Ask God to make it clear to you and to give you the strength to follow through. Then cry out and ask Him to give you a hunger and a thirst that only He can satisfy.

Over the next 6 days we invite you to divide your life into chapters and reflect on the ways you have seen God at work throughout the peaks and valleys. Ask God to open your eyes and spark your memory as you look backward at your story.

Reflect:

- When you think about your past, how does it make you feel?
- If you had to title your life story, what would you name it?
- Here are some of the verses that we will be looking at this week. In preparation for the week, read them slowly several times aloud.
 - Psalm 86:1
 - Luke 15:11-24
 - 2 Corinthians 12:9-10
 - Lamentations 3:19 – 33
 - Ecclesiastes 3:11
 - 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

Pray:

- Spend time just being in God's presence. Be still!
- Ask God to open your eyes, to help you see yourself and Him clearly as you look back and reflect upon your story.

Day 2: My Whole Story

Read: Psalm 86:1

Thinking back to my upbringing in N.C., it is quite clear that the environment of my home lacked what a young boy needed. The alcohol and abuse caused me to unconsciously decide, 'I must take care of myself' because no one else will. We were a tough lot. No one messed with us. This climate made words like depend and need seem like a foreign language.

My childhood helped shape me for better and worse. I'm sure that's true for you as well. For me, that includes how I approach God in prayer. My awareness of my spiritual and emotional need escaped me for long stretches...that is, until I recently ran head long into the pain and hardness of life. I knew in the depths of my soul that I MUST learn to pray. I quickly bought Tim Keller's book, "Prayer: Experiencing Awe and Intimacy with God" and teared up as I read the introduction when Keller himself confessed that he did not learn to really pray until he was nearly 50 years old. 9/11 had just happened in N.Y. City and he needed help in the chaos. It reminded me of a universal truth, everyone has to LEARN to pray. So, for nearly 80 days, I have started my morning off with Psalm 86:1. It is this posture that has allowed me to experience God in a powerful and fresh way.

Reflect:

- How has your past shaped you?
- How has it impacted your relationship with God, including how you approach Him in prayer?

Pray:

- Ask God to help you become more aware of your past and to surrender any barriers it has created between you and Him.
- Thank God that he never sleeps or slumbers and He so delights when His children cry for help.

Day 3: Celebrate the Good

Text: Luke 15:11-24

I don't have a point in time conversion story. Coming home to Jesus was a process. Before my junior year in high school, I knew about God, but I didn't KNOW God. By that, I mean I didn't know Him personally and intimately as my Heavenly Father.

Before placing my faith in Christ, I was desperately trying to fill the empty spaces in my life with "stuff". But good grades, pretty girls and all my accomplishments on the court, were no more than fleeting celebrations and temporary fixes.

Hear me, I'm not minimizing the good things, good times and good people that I have enjoyed over the course of my life. I thank God for them all! But even good things can become bad things when they keep you from the best thing! And for me, the best thing is far and above the best thing. Chasing after anything or anyone else is meaningless by comparison.

I was dead. I was lost. But now I'm found! All thanks and praise to Him. He found this poor sinner and He saved me! There is no greater joy than knowing and being known by my Father! If that describes you and your story, give thanks and celebrate His presence in your life. Prepare the feast, cue the music, drop the confetti and throw a party! This is the party to end all parties! Even the angels celebrated that day!

Reflect:

- Do you remember the day or the time in your life when you came to Christ? What was it like?
- What has changed in your life because He came into your life?

Pray:

- Give thanks to God and celebrate His goodness to you!

Day 4: Grieve the Hard Parts

Read: 2 Corinthians 12:9

Late in 2020, the New York Times ran a story that said Americans are ashamed of being weak, vulnerable and dependent. One leader commented that Americans value being strong and wrong more than weak and right. In our wrong thinking, we tend to cover our weaknesses by hiding, avoiding and isolating.

We all have hard parts of our stories that have weighed us down and knocked the wind out of our sails. We have felt drained by the incredible weight of what we've experienced, by our own choices and those of others.

Fear and pride mark my story. With that, I can forget God and the fullness of all He offers and instead, look to myself. When I forget God, I am leaning into my own understanding, but when I remember God, who He is and what He has done, that radically changes my perspective. God's grace strengthens us to grieve, to be vulnerable and release back to Him the hard parts of our stories.

In our weakness, God makes His power known. Paul speaks to the church at Corinth reminding them that God's grace and power are available. There is no room for shame, fear, or pride in our lives when they are full of God and His grace. He is enough!

Reflect:

- How has God used the hard parts of your story to shape you and strengthen you?
- Do you turn to and trust in God's power even when you feel weak or helpless?

Pray:

- Ask for help in recognizing limits and limitations, confess weakness and cry out for His strength and sustaining grace.

Day 5: Entrust God with the Broken Parts

Read: Lamentations 3:19 – 33 & Ecclesiastes 3:11a

There are parts of our stories that are so broken we prefer not to think about them: Betrayal. Abuse. Addiction. Abandonment. Loss. Or maybe just broken relationships and disappointment. Revisiting these things can feel like opening an old wound. It can even cause us to question God's goodness.

But God.

Ecclesiastes 3:11 says, *"He makes everything beautiful in its time."* This includes the messiest, ugliest parts of our stories. God does not allow painful things to happen to us just so we can sweep them under the rug. He loves us, and He works for our good. He is our hope and our comfort, and He wants to use our brokenness to draw us to Himself, to refine us, to sanctify us.

When Jesus was buried in the tomb, His followers believed all hope was lost. But God used that devastating event as part of the greatest story of all time. And because of that story, we can have hope that God is with us in our heartache too. We can trust that He is working all things for good even when the remembering does not feel good.

Reflect:

- What are the most broken parts of my story?
- Do I see God at work in them, or do I avoid looking backward?
- Am I able yet to thank God for allowing my brokenness? Are there parts of my story that I still need to trust God to redeem?

Pray:

- Thank God for your whole story, even the difficult parts, and ask Him to show you how He is at work and to gently lead you as you trust Him with the messiest parts of your story.

Day 6: Confess the Messy Parts

Read: 2 Corinthians 12:9-10

This passage reveals a profound truth: God's power shines brightest in our weakness. Confessing our "messy parts" isn't an admission of defeat; it's an invitation for God's grace to fill the voids we try to conceal.

Our society glorifies strength and self-sufficiency, but God flips that script. He doesn't ask us to pretend we have it all together. Instead, He invites us to acknowledge our limitations, our struggles, and the areas where we desperately need Him. This confession, especially during a fast where we are physically weak, creates space for Christ's power to reveal itself. The act of fasting itself is a physical acknowledgment of our dependence on God.

In moments of weakness, confess your "messy parts"—your mistakes, fears, doubts, and shortcomings—and witness the transformative power of God's grace. He doesn't require perfection, He desires authenticity. When we are weak, He is strong! By His grace and in His strength, He redeems the pain and the mess to grow us and to glorify Himself!

Reflect:

- Looking backward at your story, where do you feel vulnerable or even some degree of shame?
- What would it look like for you to "boast" in your weaknesses, to see weakness as an opportunity for God's power to shine?

Pray:

- Confess the messy parts of your story.
- Cry out and trust God to replace the mess with more of His grace and the weakness with all of His strength.

Day 7: Thank God for All the Parts

Read: 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

"Be thankful in all circumstances." When we hear those words, our minds race to find an exception. Surely, not all circumstances. It's easy to give thanks for good things, but what about when life feels like a hammer hitting us over and over? Gratitude in those moments can seem not only difficult—but absurd.

During these days of fasting and prayer, we've already revisited painful chapters of our stories. Some memories or circumstances feel like far too great a mountain of pain to climb with gratitude. The wounds are too deep to find words of thanks. And still, we wrestle... because this is "God's will."

As we arrive at a place of thanksgiving, it is helpful to remember what "being thankful in all circumstances" does not mean: It does not mean calling evil good, silencing cries for justice, giving up on petitions for healing, surrendering to brokenness or stifling prayers for change.

But the light breaks in when we notice how the command comes with the greatest context and comfort of all—"we belong to Christ Jesus." We orient our prayer of thanksgiving not around what has happened, but rather around Who has us in the midst of it. That belonging reshapes our gratitude. God has been faithful. God is with us. And Christ will come again—to make all things new.

Reflect:

- How might focusing on Who holds you—rather than what is happening—change the way you approach life?

Pray:

- In the beauty and goodness that you encounter and see in your story, give thanks. In the difficult places and the roads marked with suffering, give thanks that you belong to Jesus.

Days 8-14: YOUR PRESENT - A LOOK INSIDE

Psalm 139:23-24 says, "*Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there is any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!*" This week we encourage you to open yourself up to God.

Take an honest look at your life (Romans 12:3). Don't think too much, or too little of yourself. Invite God to search you, then listen to what He has to say about who you really are, about your true identity.

Reflect:

- On a scale of 1 to 10 how well do you think you know yourself? How well do others know you?
- How does being known make you feel?
- How about being fully known by God? Can you think of a specific time that felt scary and a time that it made you feel loved?
- Here are the key verses that we will be looking at this week. In preparation for the week, read them slowly several times aloud.
 - 1 John 3:1
 - Matthew 6:9
 - Ephesians 4:20-24
 - Romans 8:28
 - Philippians 1:6
 - Hebrews 10:24-25

Prayer:

- Use Psalm 139 as a prayer.

Day 9: A Child of God

Read: 1 John 3:1

Timothy Keller once remarked, *"The only person who dares wake up a king at 3:00 AM for a glass of water is a child. We have that kind of access."* The Creator and Sustainer of the universe loves us with a love that draws us into the most intimate relationship of care we can picture. Children. That is who we are.

Being a child of God grants us great depths of love and care. It also gives us a profound sense of purpose. This concept echoes even in our earthly names. The Smiths were once blacksmiths. The Bakers once baked bread. In the same way, when the Father calls us His children, He entrusts us with His work. He invites us to participate in His purposes and carry His name.

God does not need us to do this. Yet, out of the self-giving overflow of who He is, He wants to involve us. In *The Screwtape Letters*, C.S. Lewis captures this: *"We want cattle who can finally become food; He wants servants who can finally become sons. We want to suck in; He wants to give out. We are empty and would be filled; He is full and flows over."*

It's an incredible change in status for those who would otherwise be spiritual orphans. We are not merely apprentices, soldiers, or students—we are His children.

Reflect:

- Think about all the ways children need parents. How does this shape how you grasp the Father's care and support for you?
- What does it mean to you personally that God desires to involve you in His purposes?

Pray:

- Thank God for being your heavenly Father, that is who you are! Let Him care for and support you today!

Day 10: Close to My Father

Read: Luke 15:11-24

I have a father wound that is as big as Texas. Recently, I realized that in 40+ years of being a Christian, I cannot remember calling God 'Father'. It's embarrassing to type, but it's true. Yes, my earthy relationship with my father has affected my ability to pray to my heavenly Father.

Over the last three months, I began to ask God to give me a clear vision of Him as my Father. Gentle, caring, patient, loving, kind. I thought deeply about how God has been all of this and more to me over the years. I closed my eyes and meditated on the picture in Luke 15 where the father is waiting and watching for his wayward son to come home. The father sees the son and instead of shame and scorn, he runs to his son, embraces him and throws a party.

I thought long and hard about how Jesus could say 'Thy will be done' in the most crushing circumstance of all time the night before his crucifixion. It would have been impossible to do unless he was profoundly certain that His father loved Him and had His good in mind. Jesus, submitted to His father's will rather than following His own desires and this one act of surrender-SAVED US! I still have a way to go, but daily I am now coming to God with the prayer of, 'MY father who is in heaven'. I needed to re-frame my vision of God as my Father so I could see the greatness of our Father God.

Reflect:

- Do you feel connected to your heavenly Father? If not, why not?
- Do you believe you can trust God with all that life brings?

Pray:

- Ask God to remove any barriers or obstacles that keep you from felling connected to your heavenly, loving Father.

- **Day 11: Confession**

Read: 1 John 1:9

The word confession might prompt strong thoughts and emotions. First off, aren't we resistant to bringing things into the light? Then there's those "things." It's the stuff usually accompanied by guilt, shame and regret. Who wants to swim in that stuff!? Suffice it to say, confession isn't usually a feel-good experience...until it's over.

To confess means to acknowledge something. It is to concede something – otherwise concealed or denied – is, in fact, true. In context, John contrasts confession with a deceptive claim of sinlessness. On the one hand, a sinner stands before God in denial of their need for grace and mercy. On the other, the sinner stands before God acknowledging what he and God both know to be true. In King David's words, "I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me" (Ps 51:3).

For the believer, this is an affirmation of completed conversion. Without confession, the Christian lives in the misery of denial. Fellowship with God is frustrated by fraudulent self-righteousness. Again, David declares, when I kept silent (about my sin), my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long" (Ps 32:3).

What if today you started fresh with the One who is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness (Ps 86:15)? Clean the slate with the Lord and enjoy the intimacy that is yours in Christ.

Reflect:

- What comes to mind when you think about something you've been hesitant to confess to the Lord?
- What fear might be keeping you from being honest with the Lord and vulnerable before him?

Pray through Psalm 51.

Day 12: Listening to the Holy Spirit

Read: Ephesians 4:20-24

A former colleague was a hard-charging, ultra productive, get it done at all costs kind of guy. The problem was that he would run over people to get things done. He had a reputation for being controlling, impatient, mean, rude, and so on. He believed his accomplishments made him beloved within the organization. That is until the day a friend told him the truth. At first, he was shocked, then angry, then in denial, and eventually he came to accept the hard but truthful words. To his credit, he turned to the Lord. He started doing the hard work of apologizing and inviting others to collaborate. His heart change led to his behavioral change, which transformed him into the person he had mistakenly thought he was. Once aware of his behavior and attitude towards others, he was compelled to make the necessary changes. While the initial cost of making the changes felt overwhelming, he is reaping the long-term benefits to this day.

Just as this former colleague had a faithful friend who cared immensely about his potential and was willing to address critical changes he could make, so we have the Spirit, who cares enough to prompt us to make meaningful changes in our lives.

Reflect:

- Take an inventory of your life, in what areas are you most likely to walk by the flesh instead of by the Spirit (Gal. 5:16-26)?
- Are there heart-level changes the Spirit has been prompting you to make? What are you doing with His counsel?

Pray:

- Pray Psalm 139:23-24. Ask God to lovingly reveal to you the depths of your own heart.
- Ask for the wisdom to know the right next step to take toward meaningful change in your life.

Day 13: How Do I Feel About Change?

Read: Romans 8:28; Ephesians 4:20 – 24; Philippians 1:6

The longer we live, the more we realize that the only constant in this world is change. Some changes are welcome, some are not, but even the best changes often bring loss and discomfort. I think it's safe to say that we don't prefer discomfort. We long for the familiar and the predictable, the comfortable and the "safe."

But sometimes our safe and comfortable breeds stagnation. Our predictable keeps us from God's best. So, we need a gentle nudge – or a push – to step into what God has for us. He loves us where we are, but He loves us too much to leave us there.

Whether our circumstances change by God's doing or simply His allowing, we can rest in knowing that He wants what is best for us, and what is *always* best is a greater dependence on Him. His loving plans for us don't change even when our circumstances do.

When we feel God's nudge toward life change, instead of feeling fear or resistance, we can hold firmly to our anchor and trust The Unchanging One to bring us to a new place of growth and dependence. John 10:10b says, "*I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.*" An abundant life is not based on circumstances; it is based on relationship with the One who controls all circumstances.

Reflect:

- What do I feel about the possibility and process of change?
- Are there changes I sense God is calling me to? Am I pursuing those changes, or am I resisting or avoiding them? Why?

Pray:

- Admit to God how you feel about change. Ask for His help and mercy to show you where you need to change and the courage to embrace new beginnings.

Day 14: I Need Help!

Read: Hebrews 10:24–25

Have you ever been in a room full of people and felt lonely? I think we can all resonate with the feeling of loneliness. Research shows that social media has only added to the struggle for people to feel real connection with each other.

God Himself lives in community in the form of the Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit living in perfect harmony, love and unity. God lives in community, and He wants the same for us. We were created to live in community, created to do life together!

But because we live in a fallen world, we feel this loneliness at different times in our life. Some days more than others. The writer of Hebrews encourages us when we feel loneliness to not drift to isolation (apathy). Instead, notice the response is to "stir up one another to love and good deeds." To stir up means to take an intentional action step. The intentional action step is to ask for help by reaching out to the community around you. Change is hard, but near impossible if we go it alone. It takes a village – a team - a community of faith! Make the call! Send the text! Start the conversation! You will be glad you did.

Reflect:

- Do you feel lonely? Who can you reach out to encourage you and hold you accountable in your pursuit of life change?
- How does living in community help you to change and grow?

Pray:

- Thank God for the people in your life who have been there for you. Ask God to help you be that person for someone else.

Days 15-21: YOUR FUTURE – A LOOK AHEAD

Today is Palm Sunday, the day Jesus rode into Jerusalem to the cheers of the crowds. Six days later those same crowds cried out, “Crucify him!” They celebrated the hope of an earthly king who would set them free from Rome. Instead, He offered His life as a sacrifice to set people free from the power and penalty of sin. So much can change in such a short amount of time!

This week is all about looking forward; forward with the power of the cross and the hope of the resurrection in mind. That’s the power and the purpose to change. It’s all about being with Christ and becoming like Christ.

Reflect:

- What do you think your future holds? Does it fill you with fear, hope, joy, uncertainty...?
- How has this time of fasting and feasting gone so far? Have you been able to make more room in your life for God? If yes, how has that impacted how you see yourself and your future?
- Here are the key verses that we will be looking at this week. In preparation for the week, read them slowly several times aloud.
 - 2 Cor. 4:16-18
 - Psalm 20:7
 - Luke 9:23-24
 - Romans 12:1-2
 - Jeremiah 29:11

Pray:

- Give thanks to God for His coming and for the journey He made through the gates of Jerusalem to a hill called Calvary.
- Ask Him to help you release your grip and to place your future into His hands.

Day 16: Am I Hopeful About My Future?

Read: 2 Cor. 4:16-18

The Bible does not shy away from the reality of suffering in this life. Sin has had a profound impact on this world and unfortunately, it touches everyone no matter their station. Even though He was completely aware of suffering’s origin and the end of it in eternity, Jesus was never flippant about suffering. He listened and responded to people with compassion, just as Paul is doing in the passage above.

Paul reminds his audience that we have a future hope of the removal of all suffering in eternity. This hope is not blindly wishing, but a rock-solid confidence in the promise of God. What we encounter in this life on a regular basis is not for nothing. God is using our experiences, the good, the bad, and the tragic as He prepares us for the future. A future so glorious, that by comparison, our sufferings could be called “light and momentary affliction.” This is not a minimization of what we go through but a re-casting of the totality of life in the proper light. Trials and tribulations that last for months, years, or even decades are difficult, but they pale in comparison to infinite eons of glory. It is this truth that provides the hope needed to endure... as Paul says to “not lose heart.”

Reflect:

- What is currently dominating your thoughts and focus? In what ways do you think God could be using these to conform you to the image of His Son and prepare you for eternity with Him?
- When are you most likely to pursue Jesus? In times of abundance or during suffering? Why do you think suffering is such a motivator for turning to Jesus?

Pray:

- Ask God to help you persevere in suffering and to hope in affliction. Ask Him to remind you of the hope you have in Jesus’ return. Pray for those who suffer without such hope.

Day 17: Who Do I Trust

Read: Psalm 20:7

The saying goes, “history has a way of repeating itself.” This suggests a tendency of making the same mistake twice rather than learning from the past. The very definition of insanity is doing the same thing repeatedly and expecting a different result. One of the areas where we can relate to making the same choice repeatedly is when we trust in ourselves!

In ancient times the strength of a kingdom was measured by its possession of chariots and horses. It was common in David’s day for nations to place their confidence (trust) in their military strength for protection and security. History really does have a way of repeating itself! It shows up in my life when I think that if only I was smart enough, strong enough, rich enough or good enough, everything would be okay -- I could manage life with all of its challenges and changes.

David reminds us that there is not only a different way but a better way. And it all begins with placing our trust in someone who is completely trustworthy, the Lord our God. There is something special about that name! We trust in His character as a Good Father who can handle the heaviness of life when we are ready to say, “We can’t do it by ourselves anymore!”

Reflect:

- What modern day chariots and horses do you find yourself turning to for security and protection?
- Do you have anything that is causing you to feel overwhelmed, anxious, or fearful?

Pray:

- Turn over anything you listed above to the Lord. Trust Him with it! Ask Him to reveal His faithfulness to you.

Day 18: Giving Up Control

Read: Luke 9:23-24

This passage calls us to a radical surrender of control. In a world that champions self-assertion, Jesus promotes self-denial. This isn’t about self-hatred, but about placing Christ at the center of our lives, relinquishing our grip on our own desires and plans.

Denying ourselves means recognizing that our lives are not our own. It’s about surrendering our will to God’s, trusting that His plans are far greater than our own. It’s about laying down the anxieties and fears that arise from trying to control everything, and instead, trusting in God’s sovereign care.

Taking up our cross is daily surrendering of self. It’s a daily choice to prioritize Christ’s will over our own, even when it’s difficult or uncomfortable. This is crucial as we look to our future and the goal of becoming more like Christ. As we move closer to Christ, our desires become aligned to His.

In losing our lives for Christ’s sake, we discover true life. When we release our grip on control, we open ourselves to the abundant life that God offers. We find freedom and joy in surrendering to His perfect plan. This is the path to becoming like Christ, a journey of continual surrender and transformation.

Reflect:

- Where in your life are you struggling to surrender control?
- What does "taking up your cross daily" look like in your life?

Pray:

- Confess your struggles and ask God to help you release your grip and to surrender control over your future. Ask God to teach you what it means to deny yourself so you can become more like Him.

Day 19: Patient and Persistent

Read: Romans 12:1-2 (MSG)

Christ follower. Wife. Mother. Daughter. Friend. Mentor. Runner. Caregiver. The roles that make me, me are a unique blend of my personality, experiences, values and relationships.

I'm a work in progress. He is forming me, molding me, making me more and more into Christ's image. He is growing my patience and persistence in the lifelong process of being changed. It is always a step at a time, and often, one step forward and two backward. Fixing my attention on God makes me more aware of both my desperate need and His gracious provision.

In addition to sitting my phone away each night, so I don't reach for it first thing in the morning, I simply invite God to take me, change me, and use my life to draw others to Him. I recently found Priscilla Shirer's prayer from Romans 12:1 which similarly offers every part of herself for God's service. You'll find this beautiful prayer here: <https://youtu.be/loygpXqhrzg?si=-xmMk5MdXzitmnST>

Transformation as Christ followers isn't a one and done deal, it's steady and gradual. I can be hard and impatient with myself. I need help to wait well, and to be steadfast in my faith, as he changes me more into His image. Transformation is from the inside out. It's Christ in us, working for us. Be patient -- It's a long obedience in the same direction!

Reflect:

- Do you need to be more patient and/or persistent in your pursuit of Christ?
- How might you offer your body as a living sacrifice (think about your roles and what makes you, you)?

Pray:

- Practice the living sacrifice prayer this week.

Day 20: Developing a Plan

Read: Jeremiah 29:11

I'm a planner, so I easily connect with these words of Benjamin Franklin: "If you fail to plan, you are planning to fail!" But here's a shocker, I've made plans and failed. That is never truer than when my plans didn't line up with God's plans! That's why, I have an even deeper connection to the words in Jeremiah.

While this verse has been popularized, it remains one of my favorites and anchors me whenever I begin to doubt God's goodness or presence. The verse reminds us, no matter what, God is *for* us and has good plans for our lives. What is that plan? In large part, for the Christ follower, it is to change us and make us more and more and more like Christ. Being with and becoming like Christ is a fail-proof plan for living a life full of prosperity and hope!

Does that mean that life will be easy? That we will never face hardship or evil? Or that in the face of suffering, God will immediately swoop in and rescue us? NO. But it does mean that God is for us and that God is with us, and that the heavy lifting of transforming our lives for the good, is on Him.

That doesn't mean we just sit there, passively waiting for the change to magically happen. There is an "our" part. We are invited to participate in His plans - to submit and surrender, to draw near.

Reflect:

- Seek God's guidance in developing a plan – a pathway for moving closer to Him and becoming more like His Son.
- Sometime in the next week, share it with a friend and ask for their feedback and help!

Pray:

- Ask God to reveal a life-change plan with you and to give you the strength to go for it!

Day 21: Anticipate and Celebrate!

Read: I Peter 1:3-5

You've reached the finish line of our fasting and feasting! Our hope is that this season of restraint and renewal has been a sweet and memorable time of fresh intimacy with God.

Speaking of hope, tomorrow represents the pinnacle of our confident expectation of ultimate, eternal and abundant salvation in the presence of our Savior. The loving sacrifice of Jesus serves as the anchor of our soul, made certain by the well-attested bodily resurrection of Christ on the third day, in accordance with the Scriptures (1 Corinthians 15). The resurrection of Jesus is, as we say, the linchpin of our faith, the reason we make our way through each day with a living hope.

As a child of God, your life in Christ is a daily declaration of victory over sin, death, and all that is opposed to the goodness and glory of God. Like everyone, you fall short each and every day. But also, you are not merely broken. By God's grace, you are broken yet hopeful. You have every reason to celebrate the infinite ways God has lavished his love on you and anticipate the day when he will make all things new once and for all.

Reflect:

- How has the power of God been most evident to you recently?
- How might the reality of the resurrection further transform the way you live in the days ahead?

Pray:

- Thank God for the gift of eternal and abundant life, made available through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus.