

**Why  
Wonder?**

Exodus 15:11

**40  
Days  
OF FAITH**

 **FIRST MELISSA**



## wonder

/'wʌndər/

### Noun

1. **A feeling of amazement or admiration:** Often caused by something beautiful, remarkable, or unfamiliar.  
*Example:* The resurrection of Jesus is a profound wonder.
2. **Something remarkable or extraordinary:** An object or event that inspires awe.  
*Example:* God's grace is a wonder that transforms lives.

### Verb

1. **To feel curiosity or doubt:** To desire to know something or feel uncertain about it.  
*Example:* I wonder if God really cares for me.
2. **To be amazed or in awe:** To feel admiration or amazement at something remarkable.  
*Example:* He wondered at the beauty of God's creation.

# Why Wonder?

Over the next 40 days, you are invited to embark on a journey to rediscover the foundations of the Christian walk. Whether you are just beginning to know Jesus or have walked with Him for many years, it is essential to study and remember the principles that shape our faith. This year's theme, *Why Wonder?*, challenges us to pause and reflect on the awe-inspiring nature of our relationship with God and the truths that guide our lives.

Each week, we will explore a core aspect of the Christian life:

- **Week 1: Wait for the Lord**
- **Week 2: Orient Your Path**
- **Week 3: Navigate the Culture**
- **Week 4: Deny Yourself**
- **Week 5: Encourage Others**
- **Week 6: Run the Race**

This workbook is designed to complement the Sunday morning messages and small group discussions, providing daily devotions to engage your heart and mind in God's Word. Each day is an opportunity for God to speak, lead, and transform you, cultivating a deeper connection to His presence and His purpose for your life.

Pray now for an open heart as you embark on this journey. God promises that if we seek Him, we will find Him (Jeremiah 29:13). Commit to completing each day of this workbook, trusting that God will use this time to grow your faith and help you walk more passionately in His ways.

Let's approach these 40 days with a sense of wonder and expectancy, ready to encounter the One who is worthy of all our worship, devotion, and love.

## Day 1 – Notes from Pastor Trey's teaching

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# Small Group Lesson – Week 1

## W – Wait for the Lord

God's delays are not denials. Waiting for the Lord is an act of trust that allows His glory to be revealed and His purposes to unfold.

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- How do you typically feel about waiting – waiting in line? behind traffic?
  - How do you feel about waiting in prayer?
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### READ John 11:1–44 (The Raising of Lazarus)

Focus Verses: John 11:5–6

*"Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. So, when He heard that Lazarus was ill, He stayed **two days longer** in the place where He was."*

### DISCUSSION

- How many days had Lazarus been in the tomb when Jesus arrived?
- Jesus waited intentionally: Discuss why Jesus, who loved Lazarus, chose to delay. What does verse 4 reveal about His priorities?

In Jewish thought, the journey of the soul after death is detailed in various texts, including the Talmud. In Jewish tradition, it is believed that the soul (**נֶפֶשׁ** (*nephesh*)) remains near the body for a period after death. According to the Midrash, the soul lingers near the body, hoping for reunification for three days, but then departs permanently. <https://reformjudaism.org/glimpses-afterlife>

- How might this Jewish tradition give deeper significance to Jesus waiting until the fourth day to raise Lazarus?

By waiting until the fourth day, Jesus confronted the Jewish belief that the soul lingered near the body for three days before departing to Sheol, making it impossible for someone to return to life afterward. His arrival on the fourth day, **when all hope seemed lost**, highlighted His divine power to accomplish what was humanly impossible.

**So, things got worse before they got better:** Lazarus died, Mary and Martha grieved deeply, and people questioned Jesus' decision to delay. Mary and Martha were not just biblical figures; they were real people experiencing real anguish. They had sent word to Jesus, hoping He would come in time to heal Lazarus. It's possible they clung to the Jewish belief that the soul lingered for three days, holding onto hope that even if Lazarus died, Jesus might still perform a miracle during that window. But as the fourth day dawned, they would have known that, by their understanding, all hope was gone.

When Jesus finally arrived, their emotions were palpable. The Bible tells us that Martha, upon hearing of His approach, went to meet Him, while Mary remained at home, possibly overwhelmed by grief or disappointment. Martha's words in John 11:21-22 reveal a heart wrestling with sorrow yet steadfast in faith: "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you." Martha acknowledged her pain but also expressed her trust in Jesus' power, even in the face of what seemed like an impossible situation.

Mary, however, stayed behind—perhaps indicating a grief so profound it rendered her immobile. **Mary and Martha's humanity** invites us to consider our own emotions when God's timing doesn't align with our expectations.

- As we reflect on their waiting, let's imagine the range of emotions they might have felt—hope, despair, confusion, perhaps even anger or frustration. If you were in their position, with a loved one on the brink of death and **the one person who could save them delayed**, what would you feel? Would you question?
- What does His appearance on the 4<sup>th</sup> day also say about His perfect timing?

While Jesus intentionally delayed revealing God's glory, **He did not delay longer than necessary**. He came at precisely the right moment to comfort Mary and Martha in their grief and to demonstrate that He is the resurrection and the life. This moment serves as a profound reminder that God's timing, though often mysterious, is always perfect and purposeful. He showed them that He was in charge of death even.

- Why do you think Jesus chose to arrive on the fourth day—not the fifth or sixth?
- Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead on the first day it could be done "for the glory of God, so that the Son of God was glorified through it." How does it encourage you in seasons of waiting to know that Jesus does not linger beyond what is necessary to accomplish His purpose?

His perfect timing gives us comfort and strength as we trust Him to act at just the right moment!

*"God is too good to be unkind, and He is too wise to be mistaken.  
And when we cannot trace His hand, we must trust His heart."*

**Charles Spurgeon**

## **APPLICATION**

Mary and Martha were integral to revealing who Jesus was through one of His greatest miracles - their story became part of a divine plan far beyond what they could comprehend in the moment. But in the midst of their waiting, their grief and confusion were real.

- Do you think they ever felt regret for their emotions during those agonizing days? Imagine their emotions after the realization of God's plan?

We have the benefit of Mary and Martha's story to guide us in our own seasons of waiting. When God's plan is unclear, when the waiting feels unbearable, and when we struggle with doubt, we can hold on to the truth that He is working for His glory and our ultimate good. Their story reminds us that even in the waiting, we may be part of something greater than we could ever imagine.

- The miracle only God could do: Jesus' delay magnified the miracle. How does the story of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus challenge or strengthen your faith to wait for God's perfect timing? What practical steps can we take to strengthen our faith and trust in God during these times?

*"What if God had reasons for delaying your requests because He had glory in mind?"*

**Jackie Hill Perry**

## CLOSING

Psalm 27:14

*"Wait for the Lord; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the Lord!"*

Waiting is not passive—it's active trust in God's perfect timing!

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## DEFINITIONS

Talmud:

The Talmud is one of the central texts of Rabbinic Judaism and a foundational work for Jewish law and theology. It is a compilation of discussions, debates, and interpretations of the Torah (the first five books of the Hebrew Bible) by Jewish sages over centuries. The Talmud consists of two main parts: the Mishnah, a written collection of oral laws, and the Gemara, an explanation and commentary on the Mishnah. Together, they address various aspects of Jewish life, including ethics, customs, and legal principles.

Midrash:

The Midrash refers to a body of ancient Jewish writings that offer commentary, interpretation, and stories explaining the deeper meanings of biblical texts. The term comes from the Hebrew root *darash*, meaning "to inquire" or "to seek out." Midrashic literature often explores theological themes, moral lessons, and allegorical interpretations of scripture, aiming to uncover hidden layers of meaning and apply biblical teachings to everyday life.

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## Day 2: Hannah's Story

**READ** 1 Samuel 1:1-20

Focus Verses: 1 Samuel 1:10-11

*"In her deep anguish Hannah prayed to the LORD, weeping bitterly. And she made a vow, saying, 'LORD Almighty, if you will only look on your servant's misery and remember me, and not forget your servant but give her a son, then I will give him to the LORD for all the days of his life, and no razor will ever be used on his head.'"*

## DEVOTION

Hannah's story is a poignant reminder of faith in the midst of waiting. For years, she longed for a child, enduring ridicule and sorrow. Yet, she brought her pain to the Lord with honesty and persistence. Her perseverance in prayer wasn't just about asking for what she wanted—it was an act of trust, believing that God was listening even when her circumstances seemed unchangeable. When the time was right, God answered her prayers, blessing her with Samuel, a pivotal figure in Israel's history. Her journey shows us that waiting on the Lord doesn't mean passivity; it means actively trusting Him and bringing our hearts to Him in prayer.

## PRAYER

Lord, like Hannah, I bring my hopes, my hurts, and my desires before You. Teach me to trust You in the waiting, even when I don't see the outcome. Help me to persevere in prayer, believing that Your timing is perfect. In Jesus' name, Amen.

## REFLECTION

What burden or longing do you need to bring to God in prayer today, trusting Him to answer in His perfect timing?

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## Day 3: David's Patience

**READ** Psalm 40

Focus Verses: Psalm 40:1-2

*"I waited patiently for the LORD; He inclined to me and heard my cry. He drew me up from the pit of destruction, out of the miry bog, and set my feet upon a rock, making my steps secure."*

### DEVOTION

Psalm 40 combines two parts: first, David gives thanks for the many past mercies he has received from God, and then he presents a fresh instance of need for God's help.

David's life is a testament to waiting on God's timing. In this Psalm, he reflects on a time of deep distress, acknowledging that God heard his cry and delivered him. Waiting patiently is not easy—it requires faith that God is working even when we don't see immediate results. David's experience reminds us that God doesn't just hear us; He acts in His perfect time. The deliverance David experienced brought him a renewed sense of security and a testimony of God's faithfulness, encouraging us to wait with patience and trust. Psalm 40:3 highlights that our personal experiences of God's deliverance after a time of waiting not only strengthen our faith but also inspire others to place their trust in the Lord.

### PRAYER

Father, waiting is hard, but I know You hear my cries. Teach me patience and strengthen my faith as I trust in Your perfect timing. Help me to remember that Your plans are always for my good and Your glory. In Jesus' name, Amen.

### REFLECTION

Reflect upon a past experience in your life of God's deliverance or mercy. How can that experience serve as a reminder of His faithfulness and encourage you in your current time of waiting?

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## Day 4: Joseph's Journey

**READ** Genesis 39, 40, 41:1-40

Focus Verses: Genesis 39:21-23

*"The LORD was with him; he showed him kindness and granted him favor in the eyes of the prison warden." And the keeper of the prison put Joseph in charge of all the prisoners who were in the prison. Whatever was done there, he was the one who did it. The keeper of the prison paid no attention to anything that was in Joseph's charge, because the LORD was with him. And whatever he did, the LORD made it succeed."*

### DEVOTION

Joseph's story is one of perseverance through prolonged waiting. Sold into slavery and falsely accused, he spent years in prison before stepping into the leadership role God had prepared for him. During this time, God was not absent—He was shaping Joseph's character and preparing him for a



significant purpose. It was about two years after the chief cupbearer was released from prison before he made mention of Joseph to the Pharaoh, and by then Joseph would have been 30 years old (see v. 46) and had been in Egypt for 13 years.

Sometimes, God allows waiting periods to refine us, to teach us reliance on Him, and to prepare us for what lies ahead. Joseph's journey reminds us that waiting is not wasted; it is part of God's plan to bring about His greater purposes.

### **PRAYER**

Lord, help me to trust that You are working even in seasons of waiting. Use this time to prepare me for what You have planned. Strengthen my faith and teach me to rely on You in all circumstances. In Jesus' name, Amen.

### **REFLECTION**

What lessons might God be teaching you during your current season of waiting? How can you embrace the process?

*"I am sure that God keeps no one waiting unless He sees that it is good for him to wait."  
C.S. Lewis*

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## **Day 5: Listening to God in the Wait**

**READ** Matthew 6:5-15

Focus Verse: Matthew 6:6

*"But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you."*

### **DEVOTION**

Waiting on the Lord often means listening for His voice amid the noise of life. Our schedules, responsibilities, and even our thoughts can make it difficult to hear Him clearly. Dr. Charles Stanley, in his sermon, "Listening to God," teaches effective prayer requires intentional seclusion. Jesus Himself modeled this by retreating to solitary places to commune with the Father. He emphasized this in Matthew 6:6 by instructing His followers to pray in private, away from distractions, where they can connect deeply with God.

God's voice is not distant; it is clear and consistent with His Word. He desires to speak into your life—through Scripture, prayer, circumstances, and even others. But how often do we give Him room to do so? Quieting our hearts and removing distractions allows us to discern His guidance. This process requires intentionality and trust, knowing that God's timing and message are always perfect. When we listen for His voice, we align ourselves with His will and gain peace even in the wait.

### **PRAYER**

Heavenly Father, help me to still my heart and quiet my mind so I can hear Your voice. Teach me to seek You above all distractions and trust Your perfect timing. Open my ears to Your Word and my heart to Your guidance as I wait upon You. In Jesus' name, Amen.

### **REFLECTION**

When you pray, how can you move from simply speaking to earnestly listening for God's voice? What steps can you take today to create space in your life to hear from God clearly?

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## Day 6: When Jesus Speaks, He Wants Us to Listen

**READ** Mark 4:1-3, Mark 4:23-24, Mark 7:14, John 3:3

Focus Verse: John 3:3

*“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.”*

### DEVOTION

Throughout His ministry, Jesus consistently called for people’s attention, urging them to truly listen. In Mark 4:1-3, He addressed a large crowd, beginning His teaching with, “Listen to this!” This wasn’t just about hearing words but about understanding and applying His message. Jesus often emphasized the importance of discernment in listening, saying in Mark 4:24, “Take care what you listen to,” and urging His followers to comprehend His words fully (Mark 7:14).

The phrase **“Truly, truly, I say to you”** (Greek: *Amen, amen, lego humin*) is unique to Jesus’ teaching and is primarily found in the Gospel of John. It appears **25 times in John**, emphasizing Jesus’ authority and the importance of the truths He is communicating. While similar phrases like “Truly I say to you” or “Amen, I say to you” are used by Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke), the double “truly” is distinct to John’s Gospel, making it a hallmark of Christ’s authoritative declarations in that book.

For instance, in His conversation with Nicodemus (John 3:3), Jesus used this phrase to emphasize the eternal importance of being born again. The repetition of “truly” underscores His urgency for listeners to grasp His message.

Jesus’ call to listen is timeless. He invites us to engage not just our ears but our hearts and minds, understanding that His words hold eternal truths that can guide and transform our lives. Listening to Him today is no less critical than it was for those who walked beside Him.

### PRAYER

Jesus, thank You for speaking truths that bring life and guidance. Open my ears and heart to truly listen to You today. Help me to recognize the urgency and importance of Your Word and to follow You faithfully. It is in Your name I pray, Amen.

### REFLECTION

If you could audibly hear Jesus say to you, “Truly, truly, I say to you,” how might that get your attention? Recognize that through His Word, He is speaking directly to you. Is He urging you to listen today?

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## Day 7: Recognizing God’s Voice

**READ** Psalm 32:8

*“I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with My loving eye on you.”*

### DEVOTION

Hearing God’s voice is one of the most profound aspects of our faith journey. In Psalm 32:8, God promises to instruct, teach, and counsel us, demonstrating His desire for a personal relationship. But how do we recognize His voice in the midst of all the competing noises in our lives?

God primarily speaks to us through His Word. The Bible is our ultimate source of truth and guidance. Prayer is another avenue where God communicates with us, not just as we speak but as we listen. He also uses circumstances—especially trials—to capture our attention and draw us closer to Him. Sometimes, God will even speak through others, bringing encouragement, affirmation, or correction.

The key to recognizing God’s voice is alignment with Scripture. His messages will never contradict His Word. God’s voice is also quiet but clear, resonating deeply within our hearts through His Holy Spirit. Developing the discipline to tune out distractions and focus on Him is essential for discerning His guidance.

As we grow in our ability to listen, we’ll find that God’s voice brings peace, direction, and confidence—even in seasons of waiting. As we practice intentional listening and consistently align our hearts with His Word, we will find that His voice becomes increasingly clear and recognizable over time.

### **PRAYER**

Jesus, thank You that You speak to me. Help me to recognize Your voice above the noise of life. Teach me to listen attentively, align my heart with Your Word, and trust the guidance of Your Spirit. Thank You for speaking to me and leading me in Your perfect ways. In Your name I ask, Amen.

### **REFLECTION**

Why is it important to read God’s Word to have a vibrant relationship with Him? What steps can you take to incorporate the reading of the Word in your daily life?

What instruction, teaching, and counseling do you hear God giving you as you wait on Him?

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## **Day 8 – Notes from Pastor Trey’s teaching**

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## Small Group Lesson – Week 2

### ○ – Orient your path

The Christian walk is not without challenges. Life's storms test the strength of our foundation. Orienting your path means intentionally aligning our lives with God's Word, ensuring our foundation is firmly built on Christ.

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- What does it mean to you to “orient your path”?
  - Have you ever tried to accomplish something important without a clear plan? How did it turn out?
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### **READ Matthew 7:24–27 (Build Your House on the Rock)**

Focus Verses: Matthew 7:24–25

*“Everyone then who hears these words of Mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock.”*

### **DISCUSSION**

- Jesus doesn't say “if” storms come, but “when.” What does this tell us about trials in life?
- How does the foundation we choose determine the outcome?

### **Two Builders, Two Foundations:**

Jesus presents a clear contrast between two builders—one who builds on rock and another on sand. The foundation represents our response to His teachings.

### **READ 1 Kings 18:20-40 and 1 Kings 19:1-18**

Focus Verse: 1 Kings 19:3

*“Then he was afraid, and he arose and ran for his life and came to Beersheba, which belongs to Judah, and left his servant there.”*

Elijah had just experienced one of the most extraordinary victories of his ministry on Mount Carmel, where God demonstrated His unmatched power by sending fire from heaven to consume Elijah's sacrifice (1 Kings 18:36-39). This event was a triumphant moment, showcasing the Lord's supremacy over Baal and bringing the people to proclaim, “The Lord, He is God.” However, this spiritual high was followed immediately by one of Elijah's lowest moments.

When Jezebel, the wicked queen, heard of Elijah's actions and the slaughter of Baal's prophets, she sent a messenger with the death threat. Instead of standing firm in the face of this threat, Elijah was overcome by fear.

- Does Elijah's reaction surprise you, given the boldness and confidence Elijah displayed on Mount Carmel?

Jewish teachings emphasize Elijah's human vulnerabilities, highlighting that even a prophet of his stature faced fear, exhaustion, and discouragement. Most would consider Elijah's response to Jezebel's threat a failure—he fled instead of standing strong in faith.

<https://rabbisacks.org/archive/elijah-prophetic-truth-still-small-voice/>

- Can you recall a time when you felt like you failed a test of faith, only to later realize that God was still teaching and working in you through that experience?

In Elijah's moment of despair, God engaged him gently, not through might or spectacle, but with a still, small voice in the form of a gentle breeze. God's question, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" was not to condemn but to draw Elijah out, to help him confront his fears and feelings of defeat. While Elijah believed he had failed and was the only one left serving God, the Lord revealed His continuous, quiet work and reassured Elijah of his purpose. God used this moment not to rebuke Elijah, but to encourage and restore him, showing that His presence is not dependent on human success or failure.

- How does God's whispered response to Elijah encourage you if or when you find yourself in a trial or challenge?

## APPLICATION

### READ James 1:2–4

*"Count it all **joy**, my brothers, when you meet **trials** of **various kinds**, for you know that **the testing of your faith** produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing."*

*"Is it really faith if it's not tested? Is it really strong if you don't know how strong it is? Our faith must be tested to prove its genuineness and worthiness before our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Through these trials, faith becomes a weapon for us in spiritual warfare."*

**Al Robertson**

Satan works hard to plant seeds of fear and doubt in us, and God allows us to experience failure and fear to prepare us for future spiritual battles. Trials are not a sign of God's absence but His refinement. The testing of our faith is the storm, and when our foundation is strong—built on Christ—we will not only survive but emerge with an even stronger faith. For Elijah, the wilderness became a place of renewal where God ministered to him and reassured him of His plan.

- James encourages us to consider it joy when we meet trials of **various kinds**. Does it shift your perspective to think that all trials—whether a major health crisis, financial hardship, or even small inconveniences like traffic or being stuck in a long line at the store—could be opportunities God is using to build your foundation?
- Can you share a time when a challenge exposed areas in your faith that needed growth?
- How are you allowing God to use your trials to deepen your foundation in Him?

*"God doesn't promise to remove all our trials, but He does promise to walk with us through them."*

**R.C. Sproul**

## CLOSING

Isaiah 40:31

*"But they who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; **they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.**"*

We began with the question, "Have you ever tried to accomplish something important without a clear plan?" Preparation is vital in every aspect of life, especially in our faith journey. Challenges and trials are inevitable, but how we face them is determined by the strength of our foundation.

This week, we'll explore the tenets of building a firm foundation. By orienting our path according to His guidance, we can be prepared to stand strong when the storms of life come. Let's commit to being wise builders, laying a foundation that will not only endure the trials but also allow us to grow in faith through them.

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## Day 9: Know the Lord as Your Savior

**READ** Romans 3:23, Romans 6:23, Romans 5:8, Romans 10:9, Romans 10:13, Romans 5:1, Romans 8:1

Focus Verse: Romans 10:9

*"If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved."*

### DEVOTION

Orienting your path begins with knowing the Lord as your Savior. Salvation is the foundation upon which everything in the Christian life is built. Romans 10:9 reminds us that salvation begins with two essential steps: confessing Jesus as Lord and believing in His resurrection. These aren't mere rituals or recitations—they are a declaration of faith and surrender.

The "Romans Road" helps us understand the journey of salvation. Romans 3:23 reminds us of the human problem: we all have sinned and fall short of God's glory. Romans 6:23 shows the consequence of sin—eternal separation from God—but also reveals the gift of eternal life through Jesus Christ. In Romans 5:8, we see the heart of the gospel: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Salvation is received through faith (Romans 10:9-10), and anyone who calls on His name will be saved (Romans 10:13). This leads to peace with God (Romans 5:1) and freedom from condemnation (Romans 8:1).

But salvation is more than knowing about Jesus—it is about knowing Him personally. In Matthew 7:21-23, Jesus warns that not everyone who calls Him "Lord" will enter the kingdom of heaven. Some will even claim to have done mighty works in His name, yet He will declare, "I never knew you." This sobering passage reminds us that salvation isn't about religion or deeds; it's about a genuine relationship with Christ.

Knowing Jesus as your Savior means trusting Him fully—not just acknowledging Him with your words, but surrendering your heart and life to Him. It's recognizing your need for Him and receiving His gift of grace.

### PRAYER

Lord Jesus, I confess You as my Savior and Lord. I believe in Your death and resurrection, and I thank You for the gift of salvation. Help me to live in genuine relationship with You, surrendering my heart

and life to Your will. May my faith be more than words—may it transform every part of who I am. In Your holy name, Amen.

### **REFLECTION**

If, for the first time, you asked Jesus to be your Savior today, we encourage you to share your decision with your small group, church leadership, or email us at [info@firstmelissa.com](mailto:info@firstmelissa.com). Consider following this step with a public confession of faith through baptism as a testimony of your new life in Christ.

If you already know Jesus as your Savior, spend time memorizing the verses shared here. Let these Scriptures equip you to clearly explain the message of salvation to someone else.

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## **Day 10: Reading the Word**

**READ** John 1:1–5, 2 Timothy 3:16–17

Focus Verse: Psalm 119:105

*"Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path."*

### **DEVOTION**

In today's fast-paced world, it's easy to turn first to our phones, scrolling through social media or checking the news. But what if, during these 40 days, we made the intentional choice to pick up God's Word first? By starting each day with Scripture, we align our hearts with God and build a habit that transforms our lives.

The Bible is not just a collection of stories; it's the living, active Word of God. As John 1 reminds us, Jesus is the Word made flesh. Reading Scripture is a vital part of orienting your path. It shapes our thoughts, guides our decisions, and strengthens our foundation. When we make reading the Bible part of our daily rhythm, it shapes us into the people God has called us to be. Soon, you'll find yourself longing for that time with the Lord, as His Word becomes your source of life, direction, and peace.

### **PRAYER**

Heavenly Father, thank You for the gift of Your Word. Help me to develop a daily habit of reading Scripture and seeking Your presence first. Draw me closer to You as I grow in understanding and obedience to Your truth. In Jesus' name, Amen.

### **REFLECTION**

Each day, make it a priority to read the recommended passages each day during these 40 days. Intentionally open your Bible before checking your phone or other distractions. Afterward, consider starting a Bible reading plan to continue your journey in the Word. How can you replace other habits with the life-giving habit of reading God's Word daily? What steps can you take to ensure that reading Scripture becomes a natural part of your daily routine?

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## **Day 11: Worship Through Song and Praise**

**READ** Psalm 100:1-5

Focus Verse: Psalm 100:2

*"Serve the Lord with gladness; Come before Him with joyful singing."*



## **DEVOTION**

Worship is an essential part of our foundation. Singing is a powerful way to express our love and gratitude to God. It lifts our hearts, aligns our focus, and reminds us of His goodness. Psalm 100 invites us to serve the Lord with gladness and to come before Him with joyful singing—a reflection of a heart overflowing with praise. Worship not only glorifies God but also strengthens our spirit, giving us hope and encouragement in our daily walk.

Listening to worship music can also orient your path each day, setting the tone for your thoughts and actions. Whether it's a song of praise, reflection, or gratitude, music draws us closer to God and keeps His truth present in our minds. As you sing, let the words of praise flow from your heart and draw you closer to the One who is worthy of all worship.

## **PRAYER**

Heavenly Father, thank You for the gift of worship. Teach me to approach You with gladness and to sing Your praises with a joyful heart. May my worship be pleasing to You and a reflection of my love and gratitude for all You have done. In Jesus' name, Amen.

## **REFLECTION**

How can you incorporate worship through song into your daily life? This week, choose a song that speaks to your heart and make it part of your morning routine. Reflect on its lyrics and let it guide your thoughts and actions throughout the day.

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# **Day 12: Pray Without Ceasing**

**READ** 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18, Philippians 4:6-7

Focus Verse: 1 Thessalonians 5:17

*“Pray without ceasing.”*

## **DEVOTION**

Prayer is the foundation of a strong relationship with God. It is through prayer that we align ourselves with His will, seeking guidance, strength, and wisdom for every step of our journey. Paul's exhortation to “pray without ceasing” is not about spending every moment on our knees but about maintaining a constant awareness of God's presence and a heart attuned to Him throughout the day.

Orienting your path begins with making prayer a daily habit. Just as we need daily nourishment for our bodies, our spirits require the sustenance that comes from communicating with God. When we pray, we build a foundation of trust and reliance on Him, allowing His peace to guard our hearts and minds, even in the face of life's challenges. Prayer transforms us, aligns our desires with His purposes, and prepares us for the storms we might face.

## **PRAYER**

Father, thank You for the gift of prayer and the privilege of coming before You. Teach me to seek You in every moment and to keep my heart open to Your voice. Align my steps with Your will, and let my life be a reflection of Your love and grace. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

## **REFLECTION**

How can you incorporate prayer into your daily routine as a continuous dialogue with God? This week, set aside specific times for focused prayer, but also practice lifting short prayers throughout the day—whether in gratitude, need, or praise. What can you do today to make prayer the cornerstone of your walk with God?



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## Day 13: Engage in a Body of Believers

**READ** Hebrews 10:23-25, Acts 2:42-47, Ephesians 4:11-16

Focus Verse: Hebrews 10:24-25

*“And let us consider how to encourage one another in love and good deeds, not abandoning our own meeting together, as is the habit of some people, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.”*

### **DEVOTION**

The Christian life was never meant to be lived in isolation. God designed us for community, and the church is His gift to us—a place to belong, to grow, and to serve. Hebrews 10 reminds us to gather regularly with fellow believers to encourage and equip one another. Engaging with a local body of believers strengthens our foundation, offering accountability, support, and spiritual growth.

Within the church, small groups serve as a vital extension of this community. They provide opportunities for deeper relationships and a more personal connection to God’s Word. As we orient our path, walking alongside others who are on the same journey helps keep us aligned with God’s will. The early church modeled this beautifully in Acts 2, devoting themselves to teaching, fellowship, prayer, and breaking bread together. Such relationships are essential for staying on the narrow path and building a life rooted in Christ.

### **PRAYER**

Lord, thank You for the gift of the church and the fellowship of believers. Thank you for the friendships I have found there. I am grateful for a community of believers that encourages and strengthens my walk with You. Help me to be a welcoming presence to others, inviting them into the fold of Your love and grace. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

### **REFLECTION**

How are you engaging with our church family? If you’re not already connected, take a step this week—whether joining a small group, attending a Bible study, or serving in a ministry. How can fellowship with other believers strengthen your foundation and help orient your path?

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## Day 14: Serve

**READ** 1 Corinthians 12:12–27

Focus Verse: 1 Corinthians 12:27

*"Now you are Christ’s body, and individually parts of it."*

### **DEVOTION**

Serving is a tangible expression of a faith that is alive and active. James reminds us that faith without works is incomplete. Orienting your path includes putting faith into practice. Serving others builds your spiritual foundation, strengthening your trust in God and your testimony to those around you. It’s not about earning salvation but about showing the transformative power of faith in action. Each act of service, no matter how small, is an opportunity to glorify God and reflect His heart to a world in need.

Scripture teaches that every believer is a part of the body, and just as a body cannot function without all its parts, the church cannot thrive without everyone's unique contributions. Some serve by rocking babies in the nursery, others by working with kids, mentoring students, or greeting at the door. Even behind-the-scenes roles, like preparing crafts or making coffee, are vital.

The church is more than just attending a service—it's participating in the life of the body. Your gifts and talents are essential to the church's mission. When we serve, we reflect Christ's love, strengthen our spiritual foundation, and help the church grow into the fullness of God's design.

**PRAYER**

Lord, thank You for making me a part of Your church. Show me the unique ways You've gifted me to serve and help me to use those gifts to build up the body of Christ. Give me a heart that desires to contribute, no matter how small the task, so that Your church may flourish. In His Name, Amen.

**REFLECTION**

Reflect on your gifts and how they might be used in the church. Is there a ministry you feel called to serve in or a task you can help with? Pray about where you might fit into the body of Christ and take the first step toward getting involved this week. Email [info@firstmelissa.com](mailto:info@firstmelissa.com) about serving.

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## **Day 15 – Notes from Pastor Trey's teaching**

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# Small Group Lesson – Week 3

## N – Navigate the Culture

Navigating the culture is a call to live faithfully in a world that often pulls us in opposing directions. It's about engaging with the world around us while staying rooted in God's truth, using the opportunities, tools, and knowledge of the culture to point others to Christ. Faithful navigation requires discernment, courage, and a foundation firmly established in God's Word.

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- When you think about the culture around you, what are some examples of its influence—both positive and negative—on your daily life?
  - What advice would you give a new believer about how to navigate the tension between living in the world and being set apart as a follower of Christ?
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### READ Acts 17:16–34 (Paul in Athens)

Focus Verses: Acts 17:22-23

*“So Paul, standing in the midst of the Areopagus, said: “Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. <sup>23</sup> For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription: To the unknown god.’ What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you.”*

### DISCUSSION

- What is Paul doing in these verses?

### Historical Context of Athens in Paul's Time

Athens was a hub of intellectual and cultural activity, renowned for its artistic beauty, philosophical schools, and pagan religious practices.

#### 1. Philosophical Influence:

- Athens was the birthplace of famous philosophers like **Socrates** (470–399 BC), **Plato** (427–347 BC), and **Aristotle** (384–322 BC), whose teachings shaped Western thought.
- Paul's time in Athens was around **50-51 AD** during his second missionary journey. There were two dominant philosophical schools: **Epicureanism** (seeking pleasure and avoiding pain) and **Stoicism** (pursuing virtue through reason and self-control). Paul encountered followers of these schools and debated with them in the marketplace (Acts 17:18).

#### 2. Idolatry and Pagan Worship:

- The city was filled with idols and temples dedicated to Greek gods like Athena, Zeus, and Apollo. The **Parthenon**, dedicated to Athena, stood as a symbol of Athens's devotion to its gods.
- Sexual immorality and debauchery were rampant in some religious practices. For instance, the **Temple of Aphrodite in Corinth** (near Athens) was infamous for its temple prostitutes. While not specifically mentioned in Athens, this kind of behavior was common in Greco-Roman religious life.

### 3. Marketplace and Cultural Exchange:

- The **Agora (Marketplace)** was a bustling center where people gathered to trade goods, exchange ideas, and discuss philosophy. This is where Paul engaged with Athenians, using their cultural and religious symbols as a springboard for sharing the gospel.

### 4. Areopagus (Mars Hill):

- The Areopagus was both a place and a council:
  1. As a place, it referred to a rocky outcrop near the Acropolis, where the governing council traditionally met.
  2. As a council, the Areopagus was a respected body of leaders who oversaw religious, educational, and moral matters in Athens.
- In Acts 17:19, Paul is taken to the Areopagus, likely to explain his teachings formally before this influential group. They were intrigued by his references to Jesus and the resurrection, calling his message “new teaching” (Acts 17:19-20).
- This setting provided Paul with a platform to address the intellectual elite and present the gospel in a manner tailored to their cultural and philosophical context.

### 5. Religious Pluralism:

- The Athenians worshiped countless deities. Petronius, a Roman satirist, remarked it was easier to find a god than a man in Athens.
- The altar to the **unknown god** (Acts 17:23) was likely an attempt to cover any deities they may have unintentionally offended.

Ferguson, E. (2003). *Backgrounds of early Christianity* (3rd ed.). Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

- Compare and contrast the culture Paul faced with the one we experience today.
- What is our takeaway here as we read about Paul’s witness to the Athenians?

Paul is in Athens, a city known for its philosophy, art, and idol worship. Paul did not dismiss, avoid, or condemn the culture in Athens outright, but thoughtfully engaged with their culture. He used the altar to the unknown god as a bridge. As he walks through the city, he observes their culture, engages with their thinkers, and uses their own altar to an “unknown god” as a springboard to introduce the one true God and share the gospel.

- Can you share an example where you, or someone you know, used a cultural reference or modern-day situation to share the message of Jesus effectively?

### **READ John 17:14-16**

*"I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. I am not asking You to take them out of the world, but to keep them away from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world."*

### **READ Romans 12:2**

*"And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect."*

- What do you think it means to be "in the world but not of the world"?

Jesus prayed for His disciples to remain in the world but to avoid being "of the world." Similarly, Paul warns against conforming to the world but encourages transformation through a renewed mind.

These teachings guide us in maintaining a strong spiritual foundation while actively engaging with those around us.

- For some, the call to not be "of the world" leads to avoiding active engagement in society. How does this approach align—or conflict—with Jesus' command in the Great Commission to go and make disciples of all nations?
- How would you counsel a new believer in ways to remain distinct as a follower of Christ while still engaging in the surrounding culture?
- Do you think being "in the world but not of the world" is constantly evolving? How so?

*"The gospel must be proclaimed, but it must also be explained. Use the language of the culture to bring clarity, not compromise."*

**Tim Keller**

## **APPLICATION**

### **READ Jeremiah 29:4-7**

*"Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: Build houses and live in them; and plant gardens and eat their produce. Take wives and have sons and daughters; and take wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf; for in its welfare you will find your welfare."*

The Israelites were exiled to Babylon, a foreign and pagan culture vastly different from their homeland. Instead of instructing them to rebel, isolate, or despair, God called them to engage productively with their surroundings.

- What specifically were they instructed to do?
- What does it mean to "seek the welfare of the city" in your own context? How can you live faithfully as a believer while actively contributing to the community and culture around you?

## **Key Lessons**

**Live Faithfully:** The Israelites were encouraged to build homes, plant gardens, and establish families, demonstrating a commitment to flourishing wherever God placed them.

**Seek the Welfare of Others:** By praying for and contributing to the prosperity of Babylon, they displayed a witness to God's goodness, even among those who did not know Him.

**Remain Distinct:** While participating in the cultural life of Babylon, the Israelites maintained their worship of Yahweh, setting them apart as God's people.

## **CLOSING**

Just like the Israelites in Babylon, we are called to navigate thoughtfully and faithfully with the culture around us. The Israelites were instructed to build, plant, and contribute to the prosperity of their city while remaining faithful to God. Similarly, Paul in Athens navigated the culture to point people to the one true God. Both examples remind us that we can honor God by being active participants in our communities, using the culture as a bridge to share His truth.

Jesus prayed that His followers would be in the world but not of it, reflecting His light while navigating the challenges of culture.

- Do you trust that God has uniquely placed you here at this exact moment in history? For what purpose does He need YOU to navigate your culture?

*"The only way to drive out culture's darkness is to bring the light of God into its heart."*

**Erwin McManus**

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## Day 16: Joseph in Egypt

**READ** Genesis 39:1-23

Focus Verse: Genesis 39:9b

*"How then could I do this great evil and sin against God?"*

### **DEVOTION**

Joseph's life in Egypt placed him in the heart of a culture vastly different from the one he had known. Potiphar's house, like much of Egypt, was steeped in the worship of pagan gods, with practices that conflicted with the faith of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Yet, despite being surrounded by a foreign culture, Joseph chose to remain faithful to the One True God.

It would have been easy for Joseph to adapt to the ways of the household or compromise his beliefs to fit in. Instead, he stayed true to his convictions, even when faced with temptation and pressure. His unwavering commitment to God set him apart, earning both favor with those around him and the blessing of God. Even when falsely accused and thrown into prison, Joseph continued to trust in God, knowing that his faithfulness was part of a larger plan.

Joseph's faithfulness demonstrated that it is possible to honor God while living in a culture that does not. His story challenges us to consider how we respond to the influences of the culture around us.

### **PRAYER**

Lord, thank You for Joseph's example of remaining faithful in a culture that did not align with his faith. Help me to live in a way that reflects my trust in You, even when the world around me pulls me in different directions. Strengthen my resolve to honor You in every situation. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

### **REFLECTION**

Does Joseph's example inspire you to live out your faith in a world that often holds different values? What cultural influences are you facing? Ask God to help you respond in a way that honors Him.

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## Day 17: Living Counterculturally in Community

**READ** Acts 2:42-47; Acts 4:32-35

Focus Verse: Acts 2:42

*"They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching, and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer."*

### **DEVOTION**

The early church emerged in the midst of Roman rule, a culture vastly different from the values of the

gospel. Roman society valued wealth, status, and power, with its polytheistic religions woven into the daily lives of citizens. Public spectacles like gladiator games were common entertainment, and loyalty to the emperor often involved religious rituals.

In contrast, the early believers lived distinctly, devoting themselves to God's Word, fellowship, communal sharing, and prayer. Their commitment to caring for one another, breaking bread together, and worshiping God reflected a countercultural way of life. They sold their possessions and shared with anyone in need, ensuring no one among them lacked anything.

This selflessness was radical in a culture that celebrated individual achievement and material wealth. By pooling resources and meeting each other's needs, they created a community that reflected God's love and provision. Their unity and generosity stood out to those around them, drawing others to Christ.

Living as a Christian community in such a culture required courage and intentionality. The early church didn't isolate themselves but engaged with the world around them while remaining set apart in how they lived and loved. They demonstrated that navigating the culture requires being united in purpose with other believers.

For us, this is a reminder that being part of a community of faith is essential to our spiritual foundation. As we navigate the culture around us, being rooted in fellowship with other believers equips us to stand firm in our faith, depend on one another, and show Christ's love to the world.

Garnsey, Peter, and Richard Saller. *The Roman Empire: Economy, Society, and Culture*. University of California Press, 1987.

### **PRAYER**

Heavenly Father, thank You for the example of the early church. Help me to engage with others in a way that reflects Your love and brings glory to You. Unite my heart with fellow believers so we can stand strong together as witnesses to the gospel. Help me to see how I can meet the needs of others as they meet mine. It is in the name of Jesus I pray, Amen.

### **REFLECTION**

What specific practices of the early church can you adopt in your own life to stay rooted in your faith? How does being part of a Christian community help you navigate the culture around you?

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## **Day 18: Daniel and His Friends Stay Faithful**

**READ** Daniel 1:8–21

Focus Verse: Daniel 1:8

*“But Daniel made up his mind that he would not defile himself with the king's choice food or with the wine which he drank; so he sought permission from the commander of the officials that he might not defile himself.”*

### **DEVOTION**

Daniel and his friends found themselves in Babylon, a culture far removed from their own. They were immersed in a world of foreign values, practices, and worship, yet they resolved to remain faithful to their God. Daniel's decision not to eat the king's food or drink the wine was a courageous stand. It wasn't simply about diet but about obedience to God's laws and maintaining their identity as His people.



Their commitment was not met with hostility but with favor. By respectfully proposing a test—a diet of vegetables and water—they demonstrated faith in God’s provision. The result? They were healthier and wiser than the others in the king’s court. This story reminds us that navigating the culture doesn’t require compromising our faith. Instead, it calls for wisdom, resolve, and trust in God to honor our obedience.

### **PRAYER**

Heavenly Father, thank You for the example of Daniel and his friends, who remained faithful to You even in a foreign land. Help me to honor You in my daily decisions, staying true to Your Word even when the culture around me pressures me to conform. Grant me wisdom, courage, and favor as I strive to live for You. Amen.

### **REFLECTION**

Daniel and his friends navigated a challenging culture by staying faithful to their beliefs and demonstrating wisdom and respect. Are there small, daily decisions you can make to remain faithful in how you navigate the culture around you?

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## **Day 19: Esther’s Boldness to Save Her People**

**READ** Esther 4:1–17

Focus Verse: Esther 4:14

*“For if you keep silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father’s house will perish. And who knows whether you have not attained royalty for such a time as this?”*

### **DEVOTION**

Esther, a young Jewish woman in the Persian court, faced an extraordinary challenge. When her people were threatened with annihilation, Esther had a choice: remain silent and preserve her own safety or risk everything to intercede with the king. Mordecai’s words, “Who knows whether you have not attained royalty for such a time as this?” challenged her to see her position as part of God’s plan.

Stepping forward was not without risk. Speaking to the king uninvited could have cost Esther her life. Yet, she demonstrated courage and wisdom, calling for prayer and fasting before making her plea. Her boldness saved her people and showcased God’s providence.

Today, standing boldly for Christ may come with risks—losing friends, facing rejection, or even experiencing professional setbacks. Esther’s story reminds us that navigating the culture sometimes requires us to take risks for the sake of God’s kingdom. It also assures us that God’s purposes are greater than our fears, and He equips us for the challenges we face.

### **PRAYER**

Lord, thank You for Esther’s example of courage and faith. Help me to trust in Your plan and to boldly stand for You, even when it feels risky. Give me the wisdom and strength to navigate my circumstances with faithfulness, knowing that You are with me in every step. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

### **REFLECTION**

How can you prepare yourself to respond faithfully when cultural pressures challenge your convictions? Is there a circumstance in your life where God might be calling you to act courageously “for such a time as this”?



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## Day 20: Jesus and the Samaritan Woman

**READ** John 4:1–26

Focus Verse: John 4:13–14

*“Jesus answered and said to her, ‘Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him shall never be thirsty; but the water that I will give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up to eternal life.’”*

### **DEVOTION**

Jesus’ encounter with the Samaritan woman at the well is a masterclass in navigating cultural and social barriers with grace. Jews and Samaritans had deep historical animosity, and it was uncommon, even scandalous, for a Jewish man to speak publicly with a Samaritan woman. Yet, Jesus initiated the conversation, addressing her spiritual thirst and gently confronting her personal struggles.

Jesus demonstrated that no cultural divide is too great for the gospel. He didn’t avoid the Samaritan woman because of her background or lifestyle. Instead, He offered her the gift of “living water,” eternal life found in Him. His approach was both bold and compassionate—He spoke the truth in love, addressing her sin while extending hope and salvation.

In our culture, engaging with those who are different from us—whether due to ethnicity, beliefs, or lifestyles—requires similar courage and grace. Jesus’ example shows us that the message of the gospel transcends all boundaries. Navigating cultural differences is an opportunity to reflect Christ’s love and invite others to experience the living water He offers.

### **PRAYER**

Lord, thank You for crossing every barrier to bring us Your love and salvation. Help me to reflect that love in my interactions with others, especially those who are different from me. Teach me to engage with grace and truth, and to be a witness of Your transformative power. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

### **REFLECTION**

What barriers in your life might prevent you from sharing the gospel with certain people? Is God asking you to extend grace and truth to someone outside your immediate circle?

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## Day 21: Longing for Our True Home

**READ** Psalm 137:1–9

Focus Verse: Psalm 137:1

*“By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down and wept, when we remembered Zion.”*

### **DEVOTION**

Psalm 137 captures the sorrow of the Israelites in exile, living in Babylon far from their homeland. They grieved not only for the loss of their physical home but also for the separation from the temple, the center of their worship and identity as God’s people. The psalm reflects a tension that resonates with believers today—the longing for a world that reflects God’s glory and the realization that this earth is not our final home.

As Christians, we live in a culture that often feels foreign to our faith. While we navigate life here, we carry a deep hope for our eternal home with God. Jesus reminds us in John 14:2-3 that He is preparing a place for us—a place where we will dwell with Him forever. This truth offers comfort as we face the challenges of living in a world that does not fully align with God’s ways.

Navigating culture means engaging with the world while keeping our hearts fixed on heaven. Like the Israelites, we may sometimes feel displaced or out of place, but our hope remains anchored in God’s promises. Remember, this world is not our home; we are citizens of heaven (Philippians 3:20). Our journey here is temporary, but how we live and witness during our time on earth has eternal significance.

**PRAYER**

Lord, thank You for the hope of eternity with You. In this life, when I feel out of place or overwhelmed by the world around me, remind me that my true home is with You. Help me live as a faithful ambassador of Your kingdom, pointing others to the hope of heaven. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

**REFLECTION**

How does remembering that this world is not your true home influence the way you live, work, and interact with others? What practical steps can you take to reflect your heavenly citizenship in the culture you navigate every day?

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## **Day 22 – Notes from Pastor Trey’s teaching**

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## Small Group Lesson – Week 4

### D – Deny Yourself

Deny Yourself is deeply rooted in the call to follow Jesus wholeheartedly, placing His will and glory above our own desires. It is a foundational aspect of the Christian walk.

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- What is something you've willingly given up for a goal or a relationship? How did it feel, and was it worth it?
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#### **READ: John 3:22–36 (John's Final Testimony about Jesus)**

Focus Verse: John 3:30

*"He must increase, but I must decrease."*

#### **DISCUSSION**

#### **READ Isaiah 40:3**

*"A voice cries: 'In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD; make straight in the desert a highway for our God.'"*

#### **READ Malachi 3:1**

*"Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me."*

#### **READ Malachi 4:5-6**

*"Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord. He will turn the hearts of the fathers back to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers."*

In Jewish tradition, **Malachi 4:5-6** serves as a cornerstone for the belief in Elijah's future role. Elijah is seen as a harbinger of the Messiah's arrival, entrusted with preparing Israel through repentance and reconciliation. This expectation is reflected in Jewish rituals, most prominently during the **Passover Seder**, where a place is set at the table for Elijah. A special cup of wine, known as **Elijah's Cup**, is poured but left untouched, symbolizing the hope that Elijah will return to announce the advent of the Messianic age. In some traditions, the door is left open during the Seder as an invitation for Elijah to enter, underscoring the anticipation of redemption.

While Elijah's prophetic role has roots in biblical prophecy and rabbinic tradition, the practice of welcoming Elijah at the Passover table does not appear in historical records until the **11th century**. By this time, Jewish communities had developed the ritual as a way to tie the themes of Passover—liberation, deliverance, and hope for future restoration—to the Messianic promise articulated in Malachi. Elijah's inclusion became a powerful symbol of ongoing faith in God's promises and the ultimate redemption yet to come.

Elijah's presence at the Passover table also highlights his role as a mediator and reconciler, as suggested by Malachi's prophecy. In Jewish eschatological thought, Elijah's return will resolve disputes, heal divisions, and usher in a time of peace and unity. His symbolic presence during Passover reinforces the connection between the story of Israel's deliverance from Egypt and the future redemption that remains central to Jewish hope. <https://www.brandeis.edu/jewish-experience/holidays-religious-traditions/2022/march/elijah-passover-matt.html>

The New Testament confirms that **John the Baptist is the fulfillment** of Isaiah 40:3, Malachi 3:1, and Malachi 4:5-6 in multiple places:

### **Matthew 3:3**

*“For this is the one referred to by Isaiah the prophet, when he said, ‘The voice of one calling out in the wilderness, ‘Prepare the way of the Lord, make His paths straight!’”*

This explicitly links John to the prophecy in Isaiah 40:3.

### **Mark 1:2-3**

*“As it is written in Isaiah the prophet: ‘Behold, I am sending My messenger before You, who will prepare Your way; the voice of one calling out in the wilderness, ‘Prepare the way of the Lord, make His paths straight!’”*

This passage combines references to **Malachi 3:1** and **Isaiah 40:3**, attributing them to John.

### **Luke 3:4-6**

*“As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet: ‘The voice of one calling out in the wilderness, ‘Prepare the way of the Lord, make His paths straight! Every ravine will be filled, and every mountain and hill will be lowered; the crooked will become straight, and the rough roads smooth; and all flesh will see the salvation of God!’”*

Luke attributes John’s mission to the fulfillment of **Isaiah 40:3-5**.

### **John 1:23**

*“He said, ‘I am the voice of one calling out in the wilderness, ‘Make the way of the Lord straight,’ as Isaiah the prophet said.”*

In this verse, John directly identifies himself as the fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy.

### **Matthew 11:10**

*Jesus says of John, ‘This is the one about whom it is written: ‘Behold, I am sending My messenger ahead of You, who will prepare Your way before You.’”*

This identifies John as the fulfillment of **Malachi 3:1**.

- Why do you think it was significant for God to send a forerunner like John the Baptist before Jesus began His ministry?

## **Who Was John the Baptist?**

### **READ Luke 1:5-25, Numbers 6:1–5**

John the Baptist’s life reflected many elements of the **Nazirite vow** described in Numbers, even though the Bible does not explicitly label him a Nazirite. Nazirites were individuals set apart for God through a special vow, marked by outward signs such as abstaining from wine and strong drink and, often, refraining from cutting their hair. John’s abstinence from wine and strong drink, his simple clothing of camel’s hair and diet of locusts and wild honey highlights his ascetic lifestyle, aligning him with the Nazirites’ practice of self-denial. This lifestyle emphasized his consecration to God and his singular focus on preparing the way for the Messiah.

- Aside from how he dressed or what he ate, what else about John reflects a life denying himself?

The angel Gabriel declared that John would be “great before the Lord.” (Luke 1:15). As a baby, he leaped in his mother’s womb upon Mary’s arrival, indicating that he was filled with the Holy Spirit even from the womb (Luke 1:41).

- Did John have an active choice in his lifestyle and mission? Could he have chosen not to follow God’s calling?

## Free Will in the Bible

### **Genesis 2:16-17** – The Choice in the Garden of Eden

*“The Lord God commanded the man, saying, ‘From any tree of the garden you may freely eat; but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for on the day that you eat from it you will certainly die.’”*

From the beginning, God gave Adam and Eve the ability to choose obedience or disobedience. This foundational story demonstrates that God desires willing obedience rather than forced compliance. Their decision to eat the forbidden fruit illustrates the consequences of free will.

### **Deuteronomy 30:19** – Choose Life or Death

*“I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. So choose life in order that you may live, you and your descendants.”*

God directly appeals to His people to make a choice, underscoring the reality of free will. While God provides guidance and urges them to choose life, the decision ultimately rests with them.

### **Joshua 24:15** – Choose Whom You Will Serve

*“But if it is disagreeable in your sight to serve the Lord, choose for yourselves today whom you will serve: whether the gods which your fathers served that were beyond the Euphrates River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.”*

Joshua challenges the Israelites to make a deliberate decision about their allegiance. This verse demonstrates individual responsibility in spiritual matters.

### **John 7:17** – Choosing to Do God’s Will

*“If anyone is willing to do His will, he will know about the teaching, whether it is of God, or I am speaking from Myself.”*

Jesus emphasizes that individuals must choose to align themselves with God’s will. This implies a conscious act of free will to seek and follow divine truth.

### **Revelation 3:20** – An Invitation to Open the Door

*“Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me.”*

This verse portrays salvation as an invitation, not coercion. Each person has the freedom to open the door to Christ or to leave it closed.

### **Romans 10:9-10** – Confession and Belief

*“If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation.”*

Paul highlights the importance of individual choice in confessing and believing. Faith is not imposed but arises from a personal decision to trust in Christ.

- Would these verses about free will apply to John the Baptist?
- Does recognizing the element of choice influence your perspective on John’s faithfulness and dedication?

John’s statement in **John 3:30**, “He must increase, but I must decrease,” captures the essence of self-denial. John recognized that his mission was never about elevating himself but about preparing the way for Jesus. As Jesus’s ministry grew, John **willingly stepped into the background**,

allowing Christ to take center stage. This humility reflects a life fully devoted to God's purpose, prioritizing the glory of the Messiah above personal recognition or influence.

- In what ways does society influence how we view ourselves and our priorities?

John's ministry was not about building a personal following but pointing people to Jesus. He consistently redirected attention away from himself, as seen when John's disciples expressed concern about Jesus's growing popularity. John responded with joy, affirming his role as the "friend of the bridegroom" who rejoices at the bridegroom's voice (John 3:29). His self-denial was rooted in his deep understanding of his God-given mission.

- John's declaration, "He must increase, but I must decrease" challenges our natural tendencies toward self-promotion. Why is humility essential for building a strong foundation in your faith?

*"When Christ calls a man, He bids him come and die."*  
**Dietrich Bonhoeffer**

## **APPLICATION**

In a world that often celebrates self-promotion and personal success, John's self-denial serves as a powerful reminder that true greatness comes from surrendering to God's will.

For John, denying himself meant wearing clothing made of camel's hair, abstaining from strong drink, and eating locusts and wild honey, all while maintaining an unwavering focus on pointing others to Jesus. God doesn't call everyone to the same type of surrender, just like not everyone made the vow of the Nazirite.

- How do you think "denying yourself" applies to life in today's society?
- Discuss examples of self-denial that all Christians are called to embrace.
- What are some ways that self-denial might look different based on an individual's circumstances or calling?

## **CLOSING**

### **READ Philippians 2:3–8**

*"Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. 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."*

This passage reminds us that Jesus Himself set the ultimate example by emptying Himself and taking on the form of a servant. As followers of Christ, we are called to do the same. Just like John the Baptist, we are called to prepare ourselves and others for the coming of Christ, reflecting God's glory in a world longing for redemption.

- What is one step you can take this week to embody the mindset of John the Baptist, decreasing yourself so that Christ may increase? How can you serve others in a way that points them to Jesus?

*"The man who would truly know God must give up his right to himself."*  
**A.W. Tozer**

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## Day 23: Deny Yourself and Follow Jesus

**READ** Matthew 16:24-28

Focus Verse: Matthew 16:24-25

*"Then Jesus said to His disciples, 'If anyone wants to come after Me, he must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.'"*

### **DEVOTION**

Jesus' call to deny oneself and take up one's cross is a radical and shocking metaphor for discipleship. It's a call to die to self-will and embrace God's will, no matter the cost. In Jesus' time, carrying a cross meant walking toward one's death in complete surrender. Similarly, discipleship requires setting aside personal ambitions and comforts to fully align with Christ's purpose.

Verses 25–28 provide compelling reasons for this call. Jesus warns that clinging to earthly life—pursuing money, pleasure, or power—will ultimately lead to spiritual loss. What good is it to gain the world and yet forfeit one's soul? True discipleship may demand sacrifice, but it brings eternal reward. The Son of Man will return in glory, and those who have faithfully taken up their cross will share in His eternal kingdom.

Taking up your cross is not about enduring minor inconveniences; it's about a full commitment to follow Christ, trusting that in surrendering your life, you find a greater, eternal one in Him.

### **PRAYER**

Lord Jesus, teach me what it means to deny myself, take up my cross, and follow You. Help me surrender my desires to Your will and trust that You have a greater plan for my life. Strengthen me to live with courage and faithfulness, even when it's hard. In Jesus' name, Amen.

### **REFLECTION**

Are there areas where you are holding on to your own plans instead of trusting God's will?

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## Day 24: Losing Your Life to Find It

**READ** John 12:20–26

Focus Verse: John 12:25

*"Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life."*

### **DEVOTION**

Jesus uses the image of a grain of wheat to illustrate a profound spiritual truth: life comes through death. A grain of wheat must fall to the ground and die to produce fruit, just as Jesus would give His life to bring salvation. For His followers, the same principle applies. Choosing to love this earthly life—seeking comfort, security, or worldly gain—will ultimately lead to spiritual loss. But surrendering it all for Christ opens the door to eternal life.

Jesus isn't calling us to hate life itself but to put it in proper perspective. When we prioritize God's kingdom over personal desires, we find a deeper and more fulfilling life in Him. Serving Christ may

come with sacrifices, but it carries the promise of His presence and the hope of eternal reward. To follow Him is to choose the eternal over the temporary.

### **PRAYER**

Lord, help me to see life through Your eyes. Teach me to let go of the temporary things that hold me back from fully following You. May my heart align with Your will, and may I bear fruit for Your glory. Amen.

### **REFLECTION**

What "grains of wheat" in your life need to fall to the ground and die so that you can grow closer to Christ? Consider what priorities, habits, or attachments might need to change to align your life with His calling.

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## **Day 25: Serving Others as Jesus Did**

**READ** John 13:1–20

Focus Verse: John 13:14

*"If I then, the Lord and the Teacher, washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet."*

### **DEVOTION**

Washing feet was the work of the lowliest of servants. In the ancient world, hospitality often included the provision for a guest to wash their feet after traveling dusty roads. In households with servants, this task was relegated to the least esteemed—often a Gentile slave in Jewish households. Yet in John 13, we see Jesus, the Son of God, take on this humbling act. He removes His outer garment, wraps Himself in a towel, and begins washing the feet of His disciples.

Jesus' action was more than an act of kindness—it was a parable in action. By performing this task, He demonstrated the depth of self-denial and humility required of His followers. Jesus, the Lord and Teacher, modeled a love that puts others first, even at great personal cost. His act was not merely about physical cleanliness but symbolized the spiritual cleansing and service He calls His disciples to embody.

Through His example, Jesus teaches that true greatness in His kingdom comes not from status but from humility and service. By following His example, we reflect the heart of Christ, denying ourselves for the sake of others and glorifying God in the process.

### **PRAYER**

Father, thank You for the powerful example of Jesus, who humbled Himself to serve even in the lowliest of ways. Teach me to serve others with humility, putting their needs above my own. Help me to reflect Your love through my actions and point others to You. In Jesus' name, Amen.

### **REFLECTION:**

What opportunities do you have to serve others in your daily life? How does Jesus' example of humility challenge you to reflect His love in your actions?

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## Day 26: The Cost of Discipleship

**READ** Luke 14:25–33

Focus Verse: Luke 14:27

*"Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple."*

### DEVOTION

Following Jesus requires complete commitment, and in Luke 14, Jesus uses strong language and vivid illustrations to underscore this truth. When He says that His disciples must "hate" their family and even their own life, He is not calling for literal hatred but using a Semitic expression that means to "love less." This reflects a radical prioritization: Christ must be our ultimate love and allegiance, above even our closest relationships (cf. Matthew 10:37).

Jesus gives two parabolic illustrations—building a tower and going to war—to emphasize the importance of counting the cost of discipleship. The builder must calculate if he has enough resources to complete his tower, and the king must determine if he can win the battle with the resources at his disposal. These parables warn against hasty decisions to follow Jesus without fully considering what it entails. True discipleship involves a deliberate and enduring commitment to Christ.

To carry our own cross means to embrace a life of surrender and sacrifice, laying aside our personal ambitions and desires to align with God's will. It is not about earning salvation but about responding to the incredible grace we have received by living a life wholly devoted to Christ. While the cost is high, the reward—eternal life with Jesus—is beyond comparison. Counting the cost leads to a faith that perseveres and a life that glorifies God.

### PRAYER

Lord, help me to take up my cross daily and follow You, no matter the cost. Teach me to surrender my will to Yours and to place You above all else in my life. Strengthen me to live as Your disciple, reflecting Your love and truth to the world. In Jesus' name, Amen.

### REFLECTION

Like the builder planning his tower and the king preparing for battle, do you have a thoughtful plan for denying yourself in full surrender to Christ? What areas of your life reflect a strong commitment to following Him? How can you build on these strengths to grow even closer in your walk with Him?

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## Day 27: Crucified with Christ

**READ** Galatians 2:15-21

Focus Verse: Galatians 2:20

*"I have been crucified with Christ, and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me."*

### DEVOTION

Denying yourself is not simply a matter of rejecting personal desires, it is about fully identifying with Christ and His sacrifice. Paul's declaration, "I have been crucified with Christ," reveals the radical transformation that occurs when we surrender our lives to Him. To be crucified with Christ means dying to the old self—its sins, desires, and ambitions—and living a new life empowered by faith in Him.

This passage reminds us that denying ourselves does not leave us empty. Instead, we are filled with the very life of Christ. His Spirit lives in us, guiding our actions and shaping our thoughts. This is a profound shift: we no longer live for ourselves but for the One who loved us and gave Himself for us. It's a life of faith, where every step reflects trust in His will and obedience to His Word.

When we deny ourselves, we embrace a life that reflects the love and sacrifice of Jesus. This is the heart of discipleship: letting Christ live through us so that His glory is revealed to the world.

### **PRAYER**

Lord Jesus, thank You for loving me so deeply that You gave Yourself for me. Help me to live a life that is fully surrendered to You, trusting in Your strength and guided by Your Spirit. Teach me to deny myself so that Your life shines through me. In Your precious name, Amen.

### **REFLECTION**

Dying to self can feel daunting, but it opens the door to living fully for Christ.

- Are there areas of your life where you still cling to control or personal desires?
- How does knowing that Christ lives in you encourage you to live a life of faith and surrender?
- What practical steps can you take to let His Spirit guide your daily decisions?

**Take time today to reflect on the truth that your old self has been crucified with Christ. Let that reality shape how you live and how you love.**

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## **Day 28: Offering Your Body as a Living Sacrifice**

**READ** Romans 12

Focus Verse: Romans 12:1

*“Therefore I urge you, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship.”*

### **DEVOTION**

Romans 12 provides a powerful blueprint for living a life of self-denial that reflects the transformative work of Christ. It begins with Paul's plea to present our bodies as living sacrifices—a daily act of surrender that is both personal and comprehensive. In gratitude for God's mercy, we dedicate every aspect of ourselves to Him, offering our lives as worship.

The chapter goes beyond this foundational call to surrender, providing specific ways to live out self-denial in relationship with others:

- **Humble Service in the Body of Christ:** Romans 12:3-8 emphasizes that we are all members of one body, each with unique gifts. Denying ourselves means using our gifts not for personal glory but for the benefit of others, recognizing that we are part of something greater than ourselves.
- **Marks of the True Christian:** Romans 12:9-21 offers practical guidance for Christian living—loving sincerely, honoring others above ourselves, and living in harmony. These actions require us to set aside selfish ambitions and embrace humility, patience, and forgiveness.

Paul's instructions challenge us to think differently, avoiding conformity to worldly values and allowing God to renew our minds. This renewal enables us to discern His will and live in alignment

with His purpose. Living as a sacrifice means choosing God's ways over our own, even when it's inconvenient or countercultural.

Denying yourself doesn't mean losing your identity; it means embracing the identity God has given you in Christ. As we put these instructions into practice, we reflect God's character, bringing His love and truth into the world.

#### **PRAYER**

Heavenly Father, thank You for the mercy that invites me to offer my life as a living sacrifice. Transform my heart and mind and help me to follow the instructions in Your Word. Teach me to love sincerely, serve humbly, and live in harmony with others. May my life be a reflection of Your goodness and grace. In Jesus' name, Amen.

#### **REFLECTION**

Which of the instructions in Romans 12 comes naturally to you? Which are more challenging? Choose one specific action from Romans 12 (e.g., honoring others, forgiving an offense, or serving someone in need) and commit to practicing it intentionally today.

***“Deny Yourself” reminds us that following Jesus requires daily surrender—choosing to set aside our own desires, ambitions, and comforts to embrace His will, enabling us to live with joy and purpose in fulfilling His plan.***

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## **Day 29 – Notes from Pastor Trey's teaching**

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## Small Group Lesson – Week 5

### E – Encourage Others

Encouraging others is a vital part of the Christian walk, rooted in love and grounded in the understanding that our words and actions have the power to build others up in faith.

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- Who has been a source of encouragement in your faith journey? How did their words or actions impact you?
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#### READ 1 Samuel 23:14–18 (David and Jonathan)

Focus Verse: 1 Samuel 23:16

*“And Jonathan, Saul’s son, rose and went to David at Horesh, and strengthened his hand in God.”*

#### DISCUSSION

Historical Context:

At this point in the story, David was on the run from King Saul, who sought to kill him out of jealousy. David was isolated, weary, and likely wrestling with fear and discouragement. Jonathan, Saul’s son and David’s closest friend, sought him out in the wilderness of Horesh to encourage him.

Jonathan’s encouragement wasn’t superficial—it was deeply rooted in God’s promises. By reminding David of God’s plan to make him king and affirming his own loyalty, Jonathan strengthened David’s faith and resolve to endure the trials ahead.

- How does this example challenge us to be intentional in encouraging others?

Jonathan didn’t wait for David to come to him. He actively sought David out, traveling into the wilderness to offer support.

- If you did not already know the story of their friendship, how might you expect Jonathan to feel toward David?

In Jewish tradition, the relationship between David and Jonathan is often seen as the epitome of covenantal friendship, grounded in loyalty, selflessness, and mutual respect. The Talmud (*Pirkei Avot 5:16*) describes their bond as an example of "love that is not dependent on any specific thing," meaning it was pure, unconditional, and enduring.

Jonathan's unwavering support of David, despite knowing that David was destined to take the throne instead of him, exemplifies profound humility. This type of friendship is contrasted with relationships based on personal gain or fleeting interests, which are not lasting. Jonathan's support of David, even at great personal cost, demonstrates this ideal. True humility involves living by the light of that which is greater than oneself, allowing individuals to value others and cooperate rather than compete.

*“Humility is not thinking you are small. It is thinking that other people have greatness within them.”*

**Rabbi Jonathan Sacks**

Jonathan’s encouragement and love for David aligns with the Jewish value of **tzedek** (righteousness or justice), which encompasses acting with integrity and fairness, often tempered by compassion. **Tzedek** is a key concept in the Torah, representing more than legal justice; it signifies **"the right**

**and decent thing to do."** Jonathan's actions demonstrate this righteousness, as he prioritized divine will and the greater good over his rightful claim to the throne, embodying both humility and **tzedek**. <https://rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation-family-edition/shoftim/the-greatness-of-humility/>

- Encouraging others may come at a personal cost to us? What might be an example to act out of tzedek—doing what is right and decent—when it may not align with our own self-interest?

The phrase "*strengthened his hand in God*" from 1 Samuel 23:16 carries profound meaning. It implies that Jonathan's encouragement went beyond mere emotional comfort. Instead, he provided David with moral and spiritual reinforcement, grounding his support in God's promises and faithfulness. By reminding David of God's providence and plan, Jonathan offered the kind of encouragement that renews trust in the divine and rekindles courage during times of uncertainty.

In Jewish tradition, this act aligns with the concept of giving *chizuk*—a mitzvah that involves strengthening or uplifting others, especially those facing despair or doubt. *Chizuk* is not merely about offering words of solace but also about directing someone back to their faith in God, helping them see beyond their immediate struggles to the greater purpose and hope that God provides. Jonathan's actions exemplify this practice, serving as a model for how believers can be instruments of God's encouragement to one another. This perspective highlights the sacred responsibility of offering support that fosters spiritual resilience and draws others closer to God.

- Sometimes we may feel ill-equipped to provide spiritual encouragement and instead focus on meeting physical needs, like bringing a meal or sending a card. While these acts are valuable, how can we grow in our ability to also point others back to God's promises and strengthen their faith during challenging times?

Just as Jonathan helped David fulfill his calling, true companions are meant to strengthen one another in their faith and adherence to God's will.

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## DEFINITION

### **Mitzvah:**

A mitzvah (plural: mitzvot) is a Hebrew term that means "commandment" and refers to the commandments given by God in the Torah. In Jewish tradition, there are 613 mitzvot outlined in the Torah, covering moral, religious, and ethical obligations. These include both positive commandments (things to do, such as honoring parents or keeping the Sabbath) and negative commandments (things to avoid, such as not stealing or bearing false witness).

Over time, the concept of mitzvah has expanded beyond its literal meaning of "commandment" to encompass any good deed or act of kindness, even those not explicitly required by Jewish law. For example, helping someone in need, giving charity (tzedakah), or offering words of encouragement are often referred to as mitzvot, reflecting the broader understanding of righteous behavior.

In essence, performing a mitzvah is seen as fulfilling God's will and contributing to the betterment of the world, both spiritually and practically.

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## APPLICATION

### READ Acts 11:22-26 (Barnabas the Encourager)

Focus Verse: Acts 11:24

*"For he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a great many people were added to the Lord."*

Barnabas' role in Antioch reveals his heart for encouragement. He didn't just observe the work of God; he actively participated in it by urging believers to remain steadfast in their faith. Luke describes Barnabas as "a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and faith," which speaks to his character and the impact of his encouragement. His influence helped strengthen the church and brought many to the Lord.

- Which verse specifically speaks to Barnabas encouraging the early church?

**Exhort** means to strongly encourage, urge, or advise someone to do something, particularly in a way that motivates them toward positive action or moral improvement. In a biblical context, exhortation often involves urging others to follow God's will, remain steadfast in faith, or pursue righteous living.

**Exhortation** is listed among the gifts given by the Holy Spirit to believers for the purpose of building up the body of Christ:

### Romans 12:6-8 (ESV)

"Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness."

The gift of exhortation involves encouraging, comforting, and urging others to act in faith and obedience to God's will. It often includes motivating people to persevere, grow spiritually, and align their lives with biblical truth. People with this gift play a vital role in edifying and strengthening the church.

- Can you think of a time when someone encouraged you in a way that deeply impacted your life? Do you know someone you would describe as an "encourager"?
- What are the traits or characteristics of an encourager?

Though we may not all possess the specific spiritual gift of exhortation, as followers of Christ, we are all called to encourage others in their faith. Like Barnabas, we can:

- Look for evidence of God's grace in others and celebrate it.
- Speak words of life that strengthen and sustain others in their walk with Christ.
- Be intentional about supporting and mentoring others, helping them grow in their faith and ministry.

## CLOSING

### Hebrews 10:24-25

*"And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near."*

Encouragement is not just a kind act; it is a spiritual discipline that builds up the body of Christ and equips others to live out their faith. Just as Barnabas was known for his encouragement, we too are called to reflect this vital aspect of Christ's love in our relationships.

- Discuss ways we can emulate Barnabas by being a source of encouragement for someone else. How can you live in a way that reflects the description in **Acts 11:24**, being “full of the Holy Spirit and faith,” so that your life points others to Christ?

*"No matter how weak you are, you are strong enough to pray, and no matter how poor you are, you are rich enough to pray. Never say, 'I cannot encourage others,' for you can pray for them, and that is the mightiest encouragement of all."*

**Charles Spurgeon**

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## Day 30: Jonathan and David

**READ** 1 Samuel 20

Focus Verse: 1 Samuel 20:17

*“And Jonathan made David vow again because of his love for him, because he loved him as he loved his own life.”*

### DEVOTION

True encouragement often requires humility—a willingness to put others' needs and God's purposes above our own desires. In 1 Samuel 20, Jonathan, the son of King Saul, exemplifies this humility by choosing to protect David, even though he was the rightful heir to his father's throne. Jonathan's actions show profound selflessness and trust in God's will, prioritizing David's safety and God's plan over his own ambitions.

Jewish thought makes a critical distinction between **anava** (ענווה) (humility) and **shiflut** (שפלות) (self-abasement). Humility is not thinking less of yourself but thinking of yourself less. It involves recognizing your value as a creation of God while valuing others and embracing God's purposes. Jonathan's humility wasn't rooted in self-neglect but in a secure faith that allowed him to support David without resentment.

However, humility can become distorted into **shiflut**—a mindset of excessive self-deprecation that diminishes our God-given worth. An example of **shiflut** (self-abasement) could be someone who consistently belittles their own abilities or worth to the point where they refuse to step into roles or responsibilities God has called them to fulfill. This excessive self-deprecation can lead to an unwillingness to act, not out of humility, but out of fear, insecurity, or an incorrect view of their value in God's eyes.

For instance, consider someone who feels prompted to lead a Bible study but refuses, saying, “I'm not good enough,” or, “I could never do what others do.” While this may appear humble, it actually denies the truth that God equips those He calls (2 Corinthians 12:9). True humility acknowledges personal limitations but also trusts in God's strength and provision to accomplish His purposes.

In contrast, **anava** (true humility) would involve recognizing one's limitations but still being willing to serve, trusting in God's ability to work through them. Humility is rooted in placing God, not the self, at the center of our lives. When we make God our focus, we avoid both pride and self-abasement, allowing us to live with confidence in our identity and a genuine desire to encourage and uplift others. Jonathan's humility reminds us that true encouragement flows from a heart aligned with God's will, ready to serve and support others, even when it comes at personal cost.



## **PRAYER**

Lord, help me to understand true humility, rooted in Your love and centered on Your will. Teach me to encourage others selflessly, putting Your purposes above my own. May my life reflect the beauty of serving You and lifting up those around me. In Jesus' name, Amen.

## **REFLECTION**

Why is there a danger that too much humility can lead to shiflut (self-abasement)?

Let this serve as a reminder today that we are not called to think less of ourselves but to think of ourselves less, keeping God at the center of our lives. When we shift the focus from ourselves to Him, we are better equipped to encourage others in their faith.

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# **Day 31: Barnabas: The Son of Encouragement**

**READ** Acts 4:32–37; Acts 9:26–31; Acts 11:22–26

Focus Verse: Acts 11:24

*"For he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a great many people were added to the Lord."*

## **DEVOTION**

Barnabas, whose nickname means “son of encouragement,” stands as a model of what it means to build up others in the body of Christ. Throughout the passages in Acts, Barnabas consistently chooses to uplift, support, and advocate for others, creating an environment where the church could thrive.

When Barnabas, whose given name was Joseph, first appears in Acts 4, he demonstrates generosity and unity by selling his land and bringing the proceeds to the apostles to help those in need. Later, in Acts 9, when Paul faced skepticism and fear from the disciples due to his past as a persecutor of Christians, Barnabas stepped forward. He did not criticize the church for their doubt; instead, he served as a bridge, vouching for Paul and pointing to the evidence of God's work in his life.

In Acts 11, we see Barnabas encouraging the new believers in Antioch. He didn't come with a critical spirit but sought out ways to build them up. Barnabas exemplified a heart aligned with Christ—one that looks for God's grace in others, celebrates it, and points them toward further faithfulness.

As followers of Christ, we must also guard against the tendency to withhold encouragement due to someone's past mistakes or to let our critical spirit hinder our ability to uplift. A discerning spirit is a gift, but it must be used in love and grace, not as a tool for tearing others down. Barnabas teaches us the power of seeing people not as they were, but as they could be through Christ. He reminds us that encouragement is an essential ministry, one that strengthens the church and advances God's kingdom.

## **PRAYER**

Lord, thank You for the example of Barnabas, who showed us how to encourage with love and grace. Help me to see the potential You have placed in others, to look beyond their past, and to trust in Your transformative power. Teach me to use discernment wisely, balancing truth with encouragement, so I may build up those around me in faith. May I reflect Your love in all my words and actions. In Jesus' name, Amen.

## **REFLECTION**

Barnabas consistently sought to build up the church rather than tear it down. How can you follow his



example in your relationships and ministry? Are there ways you can balance discernment with encouragement to ensure you strengthen others in their faith? Who in your life needs to be uplifted?

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## Day 32: Onesimus and Philemon

**READ** Philemon 1:8–20

Focus Verse: Philemon 1:16

*"No longer as a bondservant, but more than a bondservant, as a beloved brother—especially to me, but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord."*

### **DEVOTION**

The story of Onesimus and Philemon is a powerful example of encouragement through reconciliation and restoration. Onesimus, a runaway slave, had encountered Paul and experienced a transformation through the gospel. Paul writes to Philemon, a follower of Jesus and master of Onesimus, appealing for Onesimus not merely as a bondservant but as a beloved brother in Christ.

Paul's approach in this letter reveals the heart of encouragement: he speaks with love and gentleness, appealing to Philemon's faith and character rather than commanding him to act. Paul recognizes the social and relational complexities but frames them within the higher calling of the gospel. By calling Onesimus a "beloved brother," Paul shifts the focus from past wrongs to the new identity both Philemon and Onesimus share in Christ.

This story reminds us that encouragement often involves stepping into difficult situations with grace, aiming to restore and reconcile. Paul models how to use influence and relationships not for personal gain but for the growth of others in faith and love. His words demonstrate how the gospel breaks down barriers and creates a new family in Christ, where mutual love and respect transcend social and cultural divides.

As believers, we are called to be agents of reconciliation, encouraging others to live out the truth of the gospel in their relationships. This may require us to mediate difficult conversations or challenge others to act in ways that reflect Christ's love. Encouragement rooted in the gospel has the power to transform not only individuals but entire communities.

### **PRAYER**

Lord, thank You for the example of Paul, who encouraged reconciliation and unity among Your people. Help me to approach difficult situations with grace and love, seeking to build bridges rather than walls. Give me the courage to speak truth in love and the wisdom to promote peace and understanding. May my actions reflect the transformative power of Your gospel in every relationship. In Jesus' name, Amen.

### **REFLECTION**

Encouragement sometimes involves stepping into messy situations to foster reconciliation. Who in your life needs encouragement to reconcile with someone or embrace their identity in Christ? How can you be a bridge-builder, helping others live out the gospel in their relationships?

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## Day 33: Ruth's Loyalty to Naomi

### READ Ruth 1

Focus Verse: Ruth 1:16

*"But Ruth said, 'Do not urge me to leave you or to return from following you. For where you go, I will go, and where you lodge, I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God my God.'"*

### DEVOTION

Ruth's words to Naomi are among the most profound declarations of loyalty and love in Scripture. Ruth, a Moabite, faced no obligation to remain with her mother-in-law after the death of her husband. Yet, she chose to leave her homeland, her people, and her gods to journey with Naomi to Bethlehem. Ruth's commitment was not just to Naomi but also to the God of Israel.

Ruth's loyalty teaches us that encouragement often involves walking with someone through pain and uncertainty. Naomi was bitter and broken, mourning the loss of her husband and sons. Despite Naomi's insistence that Ruth return to her own people, Ruth remained steadfast. Her presence and faithfulness were a source of encouragement and strength for Naomi.

Ruth's decision to adopt Naomi's God as her own shows that encouragement is not only about emotional or physical support but also spiritual affirmation. By choosing to follow the God of Israel, Ruth became part of His redemptive story, ultimately becoming an ancestor of King David and Jesus Christ.

Encouragement, like Ruth's loyalty, often requires sacrifice. It may mean putting aside our own plans or comforts to journey alongside someone who is struggling. It calls us to look beyond ourselves and see the needs of others, offering our presence, prayers, and steadfast love.

### PRAYER

Heavenly Father, thank You for the example of Ruth's loyalty and love. Help me to see the needs of others and be willing to walk with them through difficult seasons. Teach me to encourage others not only with my words but with my actions and faithfulness. May my life reflect Your love and commitment to those around me. In Jesus' name, Amen.

### REFLECTION

Ruth's loyalty to Naomi required sacrifice and steadfastness. Who is God leading you to that may need this kind of encouragement and faithfulness? How can you demonstrate a commitment to walk alongside someone in their journey, pointing them to the hope we have in Christ?

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## Day 34: Moses, Aaron and Hur: Encouragement in Action

### READ Exodus 17:8–13

Focus Verse: Exodus 17:12

*"But Moses' hands grew weary, so they took a stone and put it under him, and he sat on it, while Aaron and Hur held up his hands, one on one side, and the other on the other side. So his hands were steady until the going down of the sun."*

### DEVOTION

The story of Moses, Aaron, and Hur during the battle against Amalek is a vivid example of encouragement in action. As Joshua led the Israelites in battle, Moses stood on a hill with the staff of

God raised in his hands. When his hands were lifted, the Israelites prevailed. But when his hands grew weary and dropped, the Amalekites gained the advantage.

Recognizing Moses' struggle, Aaron and Hur stepped in. They provided Moses with a seat and physically held up his hands, ensuring that the Israelites triumphed in battle. Their actions were not dramatic speeches or grand gestures, but simple, practical acts of support. Yet, their willingness to assist Moses was pivotal to the victory that day.

This account reminds us that encouragement can take many forms, including offering practical help and being present during someone's struggles. Sometimes, encouragement is as simple as lightening someone's load or standing by their side in moments of exhaustion or weakness.

Moses' leadership was strengthened because Aaron and Hur recognized his need and responded selflessly. Similarly, we are called to lift up those who lead, serve, or are facing battles in their own lives. Encouragement can be quiet and unseen, but it is powerful and necessary in the life of every believer.

### **PRAYER**

Lord, teach me to be sensitive to the struggles of others and willing to offer practical help and encouragement. Help me to lift up those who are weary and to stand with them in faith. May my actions point others to Your strength and love. In Jesus' name, Amen.

### **REFLECTION**

Has someone ever been your 'Aaron,' supporting you in a time of need? Maybe you can thank them today. Ask God to show you who might need you to 'hold up their hands' offering strength and encouragement during their struggles.

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## **Day 35: The Encouragement of Elijah and Elisha**

**READ** 2 Kings 2:1–14

Focus Verse: 2 Kings 2:9

*"When they had crossed, Elijah said to Elisha, 'Ask what I shall do for you, before I am taken from you.' And Elisha said, 'Please let there be a double portion of your spirit on me.'"*

### **DEVOTION**

The relationship between Elijah and Elisha is a powerful example of spiritual encouragement and the passing of faith from one generation to the next. Elijah, knowing his time was near, didn't hoard his wisdom or ministry. Instead, he invested deeply in Elisha, walking with him and equipping him for the immense task of carrying on God's prophetic work. Elijah's offer, "Ask what I shall do for you," was not just about generosity but about empowerment, ensuring that Elisha had what he needed to succeed.

Elisha's bold request for a double portion of Elijah's spirit revealed his deep respect for Elijah's ministry and his recognition of the challenges ahead. This wasn't arrogance but a humble acknowledgment of his dependence on God's power. Elijah's encouragement helped prepare Elisha not just to carry on but to thrive in his calling.

This story reminds us that encouragement often involves sacrifice—giving time, wisdom, and energy to invest in someone else. Like Elijah, we are called to pour into others, equipping them to carry on

the work of the Lord with confidence and faith. Encouragement is more than kind words; it's about equipping others for what God has called them to do.

### **PRAYER**

Lord, thank You for those who have encouraged and equipped me in my journey of faith. Help me to be like Elijah, willing to invest in others, and like Elisha, eager to learn and grow in Your strength. Teach me to see the potential in others and to be intentional about empowering them to fulfill their calling. In Jesus' name, Amen.

### **REFLECTION**

Encouragement requires intentionality. Elijah's investment in Elisha shaped his faith and prepared him for God's work. Who in your life might need encouragement to step into their God-given calling? In what ways can you be intentional about walking alongside them, providing support and spiritual guidance?

Ask God to reveal to you one person in your life whom you can encourage in a meaningful way. Write them a letter, pray with them, or share something God has taught you to strengthen their faith. Remember, true encouragement equips others for God's purpose in their lives.

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## ***Day 36 – Notes from Pastor Trey's teaching***

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## Small Group Lesson – Week 6

### R – Run the Race

The Christian life is not a sprint; it's a marathon. Running the race requires perseverance, focus, and a reliance on God's strength. It's not about competing with others but about pressing forward to become who God has called us to be.

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- Why do you think the author of Hebrews uses the analogy of "running the race"?
  - What about this imagery motivates or encourages you?
- 

#### **READ Hebrews 12:1-3**

Focus Verse: Hebrews 12:1

*“Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.”*

#### **DISCUSSION**

##### **The Race Marked Out for Us**

The writer of Hebrews uses the imagery of a race to describe the Christian life. Unlike earthly races, this one is unique to each of us. It's not about being faster, stronger, or better than someone else. It's about faithfulness, perseverance, and staying focused on Jesus, “the founder and perfecter of our faith.”

##### **Lay Aside Every Weight**

Just as a runner sheds unnecessary gear, we're called to let go of sin, distractions, and burdens that hinder us from running well.

- Sometimes we feel like the weight of the world is on us. What are some examples of the things in our daily lives that weigh us down?

##### **Fix Your Eyes on Jesus**

A runner's success depends on focus. Jesus is both our goal and our guide. He's run the ultimate race, enduring the cross and finishing triumphantly.

- In the hymn "Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing," the lyric says, "Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it, Prone to leave the God I love." Why do you think even the most faithful among us are prone to wander?
- The hymn continues, "Here's my heart, O take and seal it, Seal it for Thy courts above." What practical steps can we take to guard our hearts and fix our eyes on Jesus?

##### **Run with Endurance**

The Christian race isn't easy—it requires perseverance through trials and discipline.

- Share a time when God's strength helped you endure a difficult season -even when at the beginning you saw no way through.

## WHY WONDER? The Path of the Runner

A runner doesn't enter a marathon unprepared. Success requires intentional preparation—training to build endurance, eating the right foods, and having the proper shoes and gear. This preparation ensures the runner knows what to expect and minimizes uncertainty. While they may push themselves beyond their limits, they run with confidence, knowing their foundation is strong.

As believers, the same principle applies. When we practice spiritual disciplines, rely on God's Word, and stay rooted in faith, we are equipped to face the challenges of life's race. With a strong foundation, we don't have to wonder if we'll endure. Instead, we run secure, trusting in God's faithfulness and His promises.

- **Wait for the Lord:** Like a runner preparing for the race, we learned to trust God's timing.
- **Orient Your Path:** A successful runner must stay on the right course. We explored how to align our lives with God's Word.
- **Navigate the Culture:** Running in the world but not of the world requires focus and discernment.
- **Deny Yourself:** Just as a runner sacrifices comfort for victory, we learned to set aside selfish desires to follow Christ.
- **Encourage Others:** Runners don't compete alone; they cheer each other on. We learned to strengthen and support one another.
  - If you were to mentor someone just beginning their race, which step of WONDER would you emphasize first, and why?
  - Which area do you find the hardest: waiting, orienting, navigating, denying, or encouraging? Why?
  - When you have found yourself wandering off the course, what brought you back to the race? How did God reveal His presence to you during that time?

*"The Christian life is not a sprint; it's a marathon. Stay the course, trust the process, and rely on God's strength to carry you."*

**Billy Graham**

## APPLICATION

### READ 2 Corinthians 12:7-10 (Paul's Thorn in the Flesh)

Focus Verse: 2 Corinthians 12:9

*"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 about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me."*

Paul's race wasn't without obstacles. The "thorn in the flesh," though unspecified, was a constant challenge in his life—a metaphor for the struggles, limitations, or suffering that many of us face in our own journeys. Yet Paul didn't quit the race. Instead, he relied on God's strength to sustain him, recognizing that his weakness became a platform for God's power.

Running the race doesn't mean everything will go smoothly. It means persevering in the face of adversity, trusting in God's grace to equip us for every step. Paul's response to his thorn—boasting in weakness because it reveals God's strength—is a profound encouragement for anyone feeling weary or discouraged in their race. The enemy often whispers lies, especially to new believers, suggesting that

God should protect us from all hardships. But the opposite is true—Jesus Himself said, "In this world, you will have trouble. But take heart; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). We are not promised a life free from challenges, but we are equipped with His Word as our guidebook for navigating them. As we learned in the first week, when you build your house on a firm foundation, the storms may come, but you will stand firm because you are prepared.

- What are some examples of "thorns" you have faced or are facing in your life right now? Do they challenge your ability to stay the course?

The Bible does not reveal the specifics of Paul's thorn—only that he struggled with it and that God chose not to take it away, even though He had the power to do so.

- Why do you think Paul's thorn isn't identified for us?

No matter what challenges we face, His grace is sufficient, His power is made perfect in our weakness, and through His strength and the firm foundation we've built in Him, we too can finish the race with faithfulness and victory.

*"God will not protect you from anything that will make you more like Jesus."*

**Elisabeth Elliot**

## **CLOSING**

### **Matthew 28:19-20 (The Great Commission)**

*"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."*

It's not enough to simply run the race ourselves; we are called to bring others along with us. A revival begins with us, as we take the foundation we've built through waiting, orienting, navigating, denying, and encouraging, and boldly step into the mission of sharing the good news of Jesus. We've been equipped by His grace and strengthened through His Word—now it's time to be bold in our faith, reaching out to a world in desperate need of His love and truth.

- How can we be intentional in bringing others to the race and encouraging them to run toward Christ?

Pray for boldness to share your faith and take a step to invite someone to know Him.

*"The gospel is only good news if it gets there in time."*

**Carl F. H. Henry**

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## **Day 37: Perseverance in the Race**

**READ** Nehemiah 4:1–6, 6:15–16

Focus Verse: Nehemiah 6:9

*"But now, O God, strengthen my hands."*

### **DEVOTION**

Nehemiah faced incredible challenges as he led the effort to rebuild Jerusalem's walls. Ridicule, threats, and discouragement surrounded him, yet he refused to give up. Instead, he prayed for strength and relied on God to guide him and sustain him. His perseverance united the people and



completed the wall in just 52 days, an extraordinary achievement that even their enemies acknowledged was due to God's help.

Like Nehemiah, we often encounter obstacles in our race of faith. Running with endurance means staying focused on what God has called us to do, even when the path is difficult. Perseverance is not about our strength alone but about trusting God to equip us for every step.

### **PRAYER**

Lord, help me to persevere in the race You have set before me, trusting in Your strength when challenges arise. Remind me that my response to trials can inspire and encourage others to remain faithful. May my actions reflect Your glory and point others to Your steadfast love. In Jesus' name, Amen.

### **REFLECTION**

Nehemiah's perseverance inspired others to work alongside him. How can your endurance in faith encourage those around you? What "walls" might God be calling you to rebuild in your life or community?

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## **Day 38: Running with Purpose**

**READ** Philippians 3:12-21

Focus Verse: Philippians 3:13-14

*"Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, <sup>14</sup> I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus."*

### **DEVOTION**

Paul reminds us that the Christian race has a goal—our upward call in Christ. Running with purpose means keeping our eyes on the eternal reward, not on earthly achievements. It means striving forward, even when we stumble or face challenges, because the prize of knowing Christ is worth every effort.

Each of us has a God-given purpose. We are not here by accident or without meaning; God has uniquely crafted us for His plans. Discovering and living out that purpose requires us to press on, aligning our steps with His will. Like a runner straining toward the finish line, we must let go of what lies behind—past failures, distractions, or even successes—and focus on what God has set before us.

To run with purpose is to live intentionally, pursuing Christ with all our heart. It's about more than just achieving a reward; it's about glorifying God through a life devoted to Him. As we press on, we can be confident that our purpose is part of His greater story, and fulfilling it brings Him glory and us joy.

### **PRAYER**

Lord, thank You for giving my life purpose and meaning. Help me to let go of anything that holds me back from running the race You've set before me. Keep my heart focused on Your eternal call and give me the strength to press on, trusting in Your guidance every step of the way. May my life reflect Your glory and fulfill the purpose You've given me. In Jesus' name, Amen.



## REFLECTION

Are there areas of your life where you feel unsure of your purpose? Ask God today to clarify His calling for you! Are you daily pressing toward the goal He has set for your life?

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## Day 39: The Victory and the Call

**READ** 2 Timothy 4:6-8, Philippians 3:20-21

Focus Verse: 2 Timothy 4:7

*"I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith."*

### DEVOTION

Paul's triumphant declaration in 2 Timothy 4:7-8 reflects a life poured out in service to Christ, with eyes firmly fixed on the eternal reward. The race is not without challenges—there are battles to fight, moments of weariness, and sacrifices to make. Yet, Paul's words remind us that the crown of righteousness awaits all who persevere in faith.

Victory in Christ is already secured for those who know and follow the Savior. The goal of hearing those precious words, "Well done, my good and faithful servant," is the ultimate affirmation we long for. Every step of the race, every act of faith, and every moment of perseverance draws us closer to the day when we will see Jesus face to face.

As we approach the finish line of this 40-day journey, let this truth energize your spirit: The God who began a good work in you will carry it to completion. Run with joy, knowing that your life is part of His redemptive story. The crown isn't just for Paul—it's for all who love Jesus and long for His appearing. Let your life echo the faith, hope, and victory Paul proclaimed.

### PRAYER:

Heavenly Father, thank You for the promise of victory through Jesus Christ. As I run this race of faith, strengthen me to fight the good fight, to finish strong, and to keep my eyes fixed on You. Let every step I take bring glory to Your name and draw me closer to the day when I will hear You say, "Well done, my good and faithful servant." May I live each day with purpose, passion, and perseverance, knowing the reward that awaits in Your presence. In Jesus' name, Amen.

### REFLECTION:

What does "finishing the race" mean to you personally? As a follower of Jesus, reflect on how each day of your life is preparing you for your eternal reward:

*"WELL DONE, \_\_\_\_\_ (your name), MY GOOD AND FAITHFUL SERVANT!"*

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## Day 40: Why Wonder?

**READ** Exodus 15:11

*"Who is like You, O LORD, among the gods? Who is like You, majestic in holiness, awesome in glorious deeds, doing wonders?"*

### DEVOTION:

As we come to the final day of our journey, we return to the heart of this series: standing in awe of God's majesty, holiness, and wondrous deeds. The question, "Who is like You, O Lord?" reminds us

that everything we've studied—waiting, orienting, navigating, denying, encouraging, and running—is grounded in His greatness. God is the One who equips us, strengthens us, and leads us every step of the way.

The acronym **WONDER** has guided us as we've laid the foundation of our Christian walk:

- **W**ait for the Lord: Trusting in His timing builds faith and patience.
- **O**rient Your Path: Aligning our lives with God's Word keeps us steadfast.
- **N**avigate the Culture: Living in the world but not of the world requires discernment.
- **D**eny Yourself: Embracing selflessness allows Christ's love to shine through us.
- **E**ncourage Others: Building up the body of Christ reflects His heart.
- **R**un the Race: Persevering in faith leads to the ultimate reward—eternity with Him.

The foundation we've built over these 40 days enables us to marvel at God's glory without fear or hesitation. Like a runner who has prepared and trained, we no longer wonder if we are capable. We do not have to wonder about the worries of this world. Instead, we stand in wonder of the One who carries us through every trial and triumph. He is majestic, holy, and worthy of **all our wonder** and praise.

**PRAYER:**

Lord, You are majestic in holiness, awesome in power, and wondrous in all Your ways. Thank You for guiding me through this journey of building a firm foundation in my walk with You. Help me to live each day in awe of Your glory, trusting in Your strength, and proclaiming Your greatness. You are a good, good Father! In Jesus' name, Amen.

**REFLECTION:**

As you complete this journey, take a moment to reflect on how you've grown spiritually over the past 40 days. What aspect of WONDER has impacted you the most? How can you continue to stand in awe of God's majesty as you move forward?

Write your own statement of wonder:

*"Who is like You, O Lord, in my life? You have shown Yourself to be \_\_\_\_\_."*

Fill in the blank with how God has revealed His greatness to you during this time.

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