

KINGDOM CULTURE

21 DAYS OF DEVOTION, FASTING, & PRAYER



BC Family

2024 was an incredible year at Believers Church. We witnessed the power of God through our outreach, life change in Sunday morning worship, growth for kids and students, and deep relationships were built within our groups. From feeding Green Tech on Mondays to help with the flood, God worked in so many ways. The highlights are numerous and the hard times served as incredible growth moments.

For me, this all began in January with 24/7. Many of us made the decision to spend an intentional twenty-one days in God's Word accompanied with prayer and fasting. This time of devotion was built around our vision series, *More than Sunday*.

This year, *Kingdom Culture* will serve the same purpose as it ushers in our 2025 Vision series, *BC25*. And we have a completely new group of contributors that have written the daily devotionals! There has been a lot of time and planning go into this effort and I'm so excited about the work God is going to do. As we begin, I want to provide some helpful information if this experience is new to you:

Daily Devotional

Kingdom Culture is a daily devotional that we read together for twenty-one days. Day 1 begins on Monday, January 6th. Day 21 will be January 26th. We urge you to take your own notes. Use the time of day that works best for you. And don't get discouraged if you miss a day. It's easy to catch up and still participate. There aren't any rules. This is about your time with God for the purpose of shaping a strong 2025!

Prayer

Each day includes a personal prayer, but we encourage you to develop or deepen your own prayer life during this time. Talk to God about what you're learning. Ask for His will to be done in your life. Ask Him to open your eyes to things you need to see during this time. Seek Him in ways you never have before.

Fasting

Fasting is a way of abstaining from daily needs or routines in order to focus on growing closer to God. We recommend you pick something that is part of your daily life that would be hard to go without. This could be a certain kind of food, a special diet, caffeine, social media, sleeping in, TV, reduce screen time, or something else that might serve as a daily distraction. People often wonder what purpose fasting serves. If you decide to fast, you realize on Day 1 how hard it is and also how it begins redirecting your thoughts, revealing your weaknesses, and bringing a new desperation.

When considering what to fast from, think about your daily life and something that is often a go-to for comfort. This is often going to be what you should choose to fast from. Don't choose anything that could be detrimental to your personal health.

Final Thoughts

In closing, I have two strong recommendations. First, consider the outcome of this important time. Develop one important question you'd like to work through during this experience. Some examples: God, what is my next step? God, what are You doing in my life that I need to be aware of? God, how do I learn to trust you deeper and follow you closer? God, how do I overcome this pain or this area of doubt?

Second, walk through *Kingdom Culture* with someone else in our church. This is for the purpose of companionship, accountability, and to learn from others. This might be your spouse, child, parent, or even your community group. God wants to do amazing things! And I will be on this journey with you.

Grace and Peace,

Pastor Matt

Day 1: A Fresh Perspective for 2025

By: Mickey Murray

Ask God for insight as you read: Philippians 3:12-13; Isaiah 43:18-19; Jeremiah 29:11

“You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you.” (John 15:16 ESV)

Many people make the mistake of living in the past. As we dwell on the mistakes and sin we have made, it makes it close to impossible to accomplish what God has in store for us. On the flip side, we may be reliving our past successes, accomplishments, and accolades while sitting in an ivory tower accomplishing nothing. Do not look to the past only to do nothing now!

Looking to the past causes our lives to be stagnant. Being stagnant causes us to do nothing to accomplish what God knows we are capable of. We have been chosen by God. Give God our all! After that, give some more!

“Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize.” (1 Corinthians 9:24 NIV)

Instead of looking back, look forward and plan to give your all to God. Since we are humans living in a fallen and sinful world, we will mess up. It’s like the diet or resolution one may have started at the mark of the New Year. We can go strong, lose weight, accomplish our early goals, then BAM! We eat that cookie. We skip leg day. We cut off that slow driver in the left lane. Satan’s desire for us is to focus on that sin, dwell in the past, and cease all progress towards God’s plan and purpose for our lives.

Believers can’t give in to sin and reside in the past. We must ask God for forgiveness and pray for Him to lead us back on His path. Our challenge is to identify that #1 sin we have struggled with and fight it. Do something different so that our lives can be completely focused on living fully for God.

“I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.” (Romans 12:1 ESV)

Prayer

Dear Lord, thank You for Your mercy and forgiveness. Please help me to look forward, focus completely on You, and guide me on the plan and purpose that You have for my life. When I stumble, please forgive my transgressions.

I love You, Lord.

Amen

Day 2: Why We Reach Beyond the Walls

By: Beth Smith

Ask God for insight as you read: **Luke 5:30-32; Luke 14:23**

It was a rainy, otherwise gloomy day when we went to *The Dollar Tree*. Matt and I were purchasing supplies for Hope Bags, a ministry I started a couple of years ago, to give backpacks full of supplies to the homeless in our community. On this particular day, we had three shopping carts full of toiletries, snacks, and personal care items for the next supply of bags. *The Dollar Tree* was so crowded, and a sweet lady shut down her register so that she could help us check out our huge order. I will never forget her kind smile and gentle spirit. Anytime we purchase items for the Hope Bags, there is always a comment from the cashier about why we are buying 100 toothbrushes or 100 bars of soap. This sweet lady was curious, as well, and I began to explain how this ministry came to be. Next, she shared a little of her story, which she has given me permission to share. She was homeless, living out of her car in a church parking lot. She was working as many hours as she could at *The Dollar Tree* and saving for an apartment. Something about her connected with my soul. I don't know how to explain it, but I knew it was God's plan for me to meet her that day. Her heart, her work ethic, her kindness were evident even when I saw several customers be rude to her. I went home and prayed. Then, I did what most people might do with a spare moment, pulled up Facebook. I wanted to help her in a small way, so I shared a little bit about the morning and a link to where people could give to her if they felt led. I was hoping to have enough for her to buy some food. After a few hours, I checked my account, and I could not believe my eyes. There were thousands of dollars in there! I couldn't believe it. My post had been shared dozens of times, and people had donated to someone they didn't even know.

Sometimes we think of ministry as something that happens within the four walls of a church. We think we have to be called into ministry to love the way Jesus did. In our typical day, the people we "just happen" to encounter – they ARE the ministry. **In Mark 16:15, Jesus says "Go into the whole world and proclaim the gospel to every creature."** For this massive call to action, we have to understand that it will take all of us together in every gas station, grocery store, drive-through, practice, school, and workplace to accomplish this. It will require us to know that nothing "just happens." Before time began, God knew how each and every detail would fall into place. It's a matter of stopping to recognize our place and our role in His Story.

God always amazes me in the tiny details of His glory. Me and this sweet lady? We share the same name. In the past year, I've seen her move into an apartment. God has been able to supply her needs through our church without initiating another word. So, who will you run into today? Will it be a quick cup of coffee, or a divine intersection of your purpose and His will? Could it be that the self-checkout scanning error is a nuisance or an opportunity to make eye contact and share a kind word with the store clerk when they might not feel seen or known at all?

Prayer

*Father, please help us to remember that **our lives are the ministry**. All the little moments we take for granted, that is our purpose. Guide us to those who need to see and know You today. Help us to stop and see who You see, help who You'd help, and shape us to be more like Jesus.*

Amen

Day 3: Cultivating Personal Prayer

By: Rhonda Nelson

Ask God for insight as you read: Matthew 6:6; Hebrews 4:16; Romans 8:26

Cultivating may sound like work, but it's being intentional to acquire or develop our personal prayer lifestyle. We can't publically lead where we don't go in private! God needs to be our first call on all occasions. Practice talking to Him first in your day. Be deliberate with gratitude for all the good and perfect gifts He gives. Ask Him for the bread, what He wants us to know about Him, about our plans and what He wants us to do in any situation. Ask Him for eyes to see what your friends, family and neighbors need most then intercede. When you run out of words, wait for the Spirit to give you utterance.

Prayer doesn't have to be intimidating, just intentional. It requires practice coming to God in private (Matthew 6:6), so we can learn to be transparent in who we are and to process how we feel. Then, He can show us what He wants us to know to grow more like Him. When we put a greater emphasis on hearing, it takes US out of the equation and expands our measure of faith in the Great I Am, our Yahweh! Hebrews 11:6 tells us how to come to God. We must learn to believe who He actually is and what He really does, so we have faith to please Him in obedience. Hearing transforms us into His likeness because His perspective is perfect. (Hebrews 4:16) We no longer must wait till we get to the temple each week. Knowing who we are in Him, as sons and daughters, we can come directly and boldly to the One that already knows what we need even before we ask! We can learn to ask without human limitations by listening and transforming our prayer lives.

Regularly hearing Yahweh's voice makes it most recognizable. His voice can be like a spontaneous flow of thoughts, it can be heard only by you, or even seem audible. A healthy prayer life produces FAITH that can move mountains. Hearing from God produces His desires in our hearts, so He can make them happen. Matthew 21:22 mentions our reward. If we have faith, we receive what we ask. Our desires should be that our prayers are full of God's wisdom and seeking His perfect will. In Romans 10:17, the Bible mentions hearing to obtain faith. "Word" referred to in this scripture is not logos (written) but *rēma* (as that which is or has been uttered by the living voice, thing spoken, word). With God all things are possible. When what we hear aligns with His word, we come in agreement with His wisdom and partner with Yahweh to transform our impossibles to be His possibles.

Prayer

*Father, Thank You that the veil is torn and we can come boldly to You because Jesus finished His work at the cross! Give us the right questions to ask, so we can grow our measure of faith to speak Your will most effectively and fervently. When we don't have the words to pray, give us Your words. Help us to be disciplined to come to You first, never seeking You as last resort. Teach us to recognize Your voice above all other voices, so we learn to hear before we speak as Your representatives calling Kingdom come here as in Heaven!
Amen*

Day 4: Loving Our Enemies

By: Shelia Shelton

Ask God for insight as you read: Romans 5:8; 1 John 4:8-11; Mark 12:30-31

My first thought was 'why'? Why would anyone want to love their enemies? (That was my old self talking.) I knew what God expected from me.

Sometimes we can go through life like everything is 'A-Okay'. That is until something just slams into our life and it's as if the whole world has turned upside down! People you assumed would always be there for you when needed, are not. My family had always been there for each other when they were needed. Suddenly, my two brothers wouldn't even talk to me. It was like I had become their enemy. I was a basket case, crying buckets of tears off and on every day. God knew my pain and He helped me through it all - one day at a time.

Proverbs 3:5-6, one of my go-to passages, helped me deal with this issue. My brothers were certainly at the top of my prayers. I'm thankful that God is 'on call 24/7' and like Psalms 121:4 says, He doesn't slumber or sleep.

Even on very bad days I refused to be bitter and unforgiving. No way could I have made it through all of those hard days without my Jesus. Dealing with this was possible because of Him. After 17 months of not hearing from my brothers, we are talking to each other again.

Now I know I can love my enemies! I pray that you, too, can love yours. Talk to God – He's waiting to hear from you. He will not just hear you – He will draw you closer to Him. And yes, God can give you the peace you need.

Prayer

*Thank you, God, for not giving up on me. Also, thank you for the 'peace' in times of worry and trouble. I love my church family and I'm thankful for all of them! I thank You, Lord, that You are just a whisper away!
Amen*

Day 5: Building on a Firm Foundation

By: Lily Baker

Ask God for insight as you read: Isaiah 33:5-6; Psalm 1:1-3; Matthew 7:24-27

Rock is a solid and stable foundation that does not shift over time. Through any storm, and no matter how much weight is put on it, it persists. Most people say rock is one of the best things you could build your home on. Have you ever heard people say that the Lord is their rock? God, in many ways, is very similar to a rock or a solid foundation. Unlike the many different foundations of the world, the Lord provides stability and strength. He is the base that we, as Christians, should build our house upon.

Like many others, sometimes I have chosen things for myself that were of this world, things that may have gotten me further in this world, but nothing that brought me truly closer to God. Then when storms hit, my house came crumbling down. It is easy to get stuck when building on the false ideologies and hopes that the world offers. To combat this, we need to turn to God and obediently follow Him every day.

How do we accomplish this? To begin with, lay a spiritual foundation. A spiritual foundation is one that is grounded in biblical truths. Once you do this, you will start to notice shifts in your life or your "house." When building on that spiritual foundation, God becomes not only your base, but your center. Every decision you make, every thought you have, and every routine you follow will always shift back to God.

This may not be easy at first, but we have to continuously choose God and keep His commandments. Because what the world gives us is fleeting, while God's promises are everlasting. Choose God as your foundation for He has shown us that He is stable and trustworthy. He is the foundation that will not shift or fail in the times you need Him most.

Prayer

Lord, I come to You today to thank You for the peace that you have given me knowing that You are a solid foundation. Thank You for always showing me that following You is a plentiful way to live my life. I pray that I continue to make decisions and live in a way that is pleasing to You.

I love You, and in Your holy name I pray.

Amen

Day 6: Humility

By: Ginger Lane

Ask God for insight as you read: John 13:1-15; Philippians 2:1-8; 1 Peter 5:6-7

Someone once said humility is not thinking less of myself but thinking of myself less.

Oh, how I struggle with this! Simply put, pride is the cause of everything that makes me believe I am better than I truly am.

I tend to be a mean creature in my car, embarrassing but true. As much as I would like it to be, patience is not my best virtue. I become angry when I have to wait for someone who is habitually late. Knowing it will happen, I fume. These are just a few times I don't exercise humility.

I fail at putting others' interests ahead of my own. Philippians 2:3-4 instructs us to "let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others."

When pride rears its ugly head, I look to Jesus' perfect humility and what it cost Him – His life for mine. He is the ultimate example of love and humility, and He is my Master. Only when I have a right view of my own weaknesses, sinfulness and my complete dependence on Him, can I achieve godly humility.

Prayer

Father, give me the grace to see myself as I truly am and to humbly recognize my moment by moment need for You.

Amen

Day 7: Radical Repentance

By: Kaylee Honeycutt

Ask God for insight as you read: Joel 2:12-13; Luke 5:32; Acts 3:19

In Greek, the word for repentance is *metanoia* or “changing one’s mind” which translates as “conversion”. The Greek philosophical concept of *metanoia* (repentance) is associated in Christianity with our prayers.

Expressing the spiritual condition of one’s soul through the physical movement of falling face down before the Lord, prostration, is a demonstration of radical repentance.

As we all know, when we fast, a change in one’s heart occurs. For me it’s also a chance to start fresh, fully repent of my sins and move forward to whatever God has in store for my life and His church.

The enemy has recently been trying to remind me of my past and telling me I can’t fully reach the potential that God has for me. I know through my repentance that when I turn to God my sins will be wiped away. I can have firm belief in Yahweh and His overwhelming peace, love and mercy through this act of *metanoia*.

Throughout my whole life, God has always proven He has been by my side. Everything I’ve experienced, He’s been there guiding me along as His lost sheep that I am. Remember, God doesn’t call the righteous but sinners to repentance. I’m so glad that as a church and family, together, we can completely repent and let God take control.

I like to keep in mind the flowers that bloom in the valley. There are steps we take on the dirt road God has allowed because of His plan. I never fully understood “no rain, no flowers” until I walked that dirt road in my own spiritual warfare.

So, as a church, through *metanoia*, let’s all cry out to our Savior as an act of repentance and truly embrace who we are as the sons and daughters of Christ Jesus.

Prayer

Adoni, thank You for the valleys I have been through. Thank You for my past and redemption. Thank You for Your church as a whole repenting and crying out to You for everything we need. Thank You for the flowers and growth through this season. Jesus, we praise you.

Amen

Day 8: Obedience

By: Callie Smith

Ask God for insight as you read: John 14:15; 1 John 5:3; James 1:22

According to the Oxford dictionary, obedience means “compliance with an order, request, law, or submission to another’s authority.” This said, how is one obedient as a Christian? A follower of Jesus must submit to the commands of God. Christian obedience is the practice of living by faith and following the teachings written in the Bible.

From the beginning, God gave us a choice – to follow Him or to turn away. He will not force us to make the right decision. God calls us to use our judgment, then should the right choice be selected, call on Him for guidance.

Obedience is not always a walk in the park. Sometimes, obedience does not feel absolute. We tend to take the idea of “obedience” and run with it; choosing to obey certain commands and shying away from others. However, this is not what God asks of us. John 14:15 says, “If you love me, keep my commands.” Following the Ten Commandments, explained in detail in Exodus 20, is what God requests from us as we benefit from His love and mercy.

Obedience is also considered an exhibition of one’s faith in God. Genuine faith leads to obedient actions, and as stated in James 2:26, “As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.” To love God is to obey. Through the deep analysis of His words, we can learn just what He wants from us.

Prayer

*Lord, thank You for the opportunity to share Your wisdom through this devotional. I pray that the reader will assimilate the knowledge gained by consuming Your word. Give us all the correct questions so that, when we do not know where to turn, we will know how to please and obey Your commands. Thank You for the renewal of Your mercies each morning, and thank You for the fact that, even in disobedience, You will not give up on us.
Amen*

Day 9: Caring for the Weak

By: Abigail Bailey

Ask God for insight as you read: Matthew 25:40; Galatians 6:2; Luke 6:36

Driving by a man on the side of the road holding a sign saying, "I'm hungry, please help". Seeing a woman crying in the checkout line because she does not have enough money to pay for her groceries. A teenager sleeping on the streets because they have nowhere to live. A friend giving you a hug and although she may be smiling on the outside, she is crying on the inside because she is struggling with mental health.

We have all encountered someone in need or someone hurting, but how have we helped? God places us in situations to be His hands and feet, and He wants us to reach out to those that are wounded or feel unseen.

To comfort those around us, we can perform acts as simple as offering a meal, sitting and listening, or just showing kindness to one another. We are called to live with a heart of compassion and mercy. God wants us to see each person as he sees us, full of worth and love.

As we think about why we are meant to care for the weak, let's remember caring for others is a blessing and an opportunity to remind ourselves that we are a walking testimony of God's faith and love.

Let us be an example of God's mercy in our everyday lives. Let us love one another as God loves us. Let us show compassion by helping others in need; whether it be opening a door, serving in our community, or helping in a crisis. God desires that we do that which is good without expecting anything in return. Let us be merciful just as God is.

Prayer

Lord, fill our hearts with compassion and love for one another. Guide us to be Your hands and feet; show us how to be merciful as You are to us, Lord. We love You. We praise You.

In Jesus name.

Amen

Day 10: God & Money

By: Bryan Smith

Ask God for insight as you read: **Matthew 6:34; 1 Timothy 6:17-19; 1 Corinthians 16:2**

- Displaced affections • Out of sync priorities • Self reliance

When I started my working career, one of the driving factors was cash - and plenty of it! I felt having plenty of money insulated me from many of the world's problems. I could pay my debt responsibilities (self-sufficiency), have nice things (entitlement), and it went a long way in determining where I fell in society (pride). American culture encouraged me to pursue this goal. After all, didn't Madison Avenue tell me I deserved it? As the years began to accumulate, I saw family and friends on both ends of the spectrum. It seemed some were destined to live from paycheck to paycheck, while others engaged in careers that afforded them what I so desperately sought for the first 15 years of my working life. It didn't happen all at once, but *I slowly began to realize that the career ladder I was climbing was leaning against the wrong wall!* Through a series of painful and thought-provoking events, God allowed me to learn where the true meaning of success could be found.

Let's dispel a myth: Being financially successful makes one less likely to be in a right relationship with God. The truth lies not in having money, but does money have us? It is our attitude toward it and the control it has (or does not have) over us. (1 Tim. 6:10)

Make sure you take the time necessary to evaluate your circumstances and priorities. At the beginning of the New Year there is no better time than this moment to fast and pray regarding your view on money and where God fits into the picture. It's imperative we have the proper view on self-sufficiency and reliance on God. Another area to consider, those outside of the church (and even some inside) totally misunderstand the biblical view of finances. Many think their local church is all about how much they can take. There is nothing further from the truth as far as God sees it. Sure, it takes money to operate a ministry such as the local church, and we should not give grudgingly to support the local place where we choose to worship. Nor should we withhold an opportunity to help a person in need if we have the resources to do so.

Prayer

Father, as we are heading into a new year we know various influences, not of Your making, will be pressing against us from all sides. We ask for Your ever-presence and protection. May we dig deep into the truths found in Your words. Help us as we prioritize our lives and may our affections be upon You.

Amen

Day 11: Prayer at Believers Church

By: Lisa Herman

Ask God for insight as you read: **Colossians 4:2; 1 John 5:14; Ephesians 6:17-18; 1 Thessalonians 5:17**

Some words that stood out to me in these scriptures that I could not shake. Words like an **alert mind** which means to be mentally focused, attentive, actively engaged with God. **Confidence** which means trust, reliance and assurance, never giving up, to keep pressing (persistent), and **without ceasing** (never stopping).

Those are strong words of instruction for prayer. Prayer is the chief spiritual weapon in our battle with the enemy. Intercession is where we enter into battle; it is taking ground that the enemy has been holding. Prayer is our strongest weapon of warfare. It brings us into a close relationship with our Father to bring heaven to earth.

What about corporate prayer? And what is it? Corporate prayer is a body of people praying in unity (oneness). We are fighting spiritual battles, so we need spiritual tools to fight. One of those tools is uniting as one in prayer with our church family.

Roman soldiers had armor to protect their bodies from being penetrated with the enemy's weapons, but the armor did not work well if the troops did not plan their strategies of defense and work as a group. They fought as one. When the enemy sent a sky full of arrows, there was a command given "testudo formation" then the soldiers knew to lock arms and put up their shields. To stand as an individual they could not protect themselves completely, but as a group the shields could be joined together to provide more complete protection for all.

That is how corporate prayer works. We fight with a common cause grouped as one. God has given us the armor, but without corporate prayer we are left vulnerable to the enemy's arrows. United we stand; divided we fall (Matthew 12:25). I know I want to utilize all my defenses. It's time spent that I cannot do without, such as eating to live.

Prayer

Father, teach us to unite with our brothers and sisters and hunger for a closer walk with You. Let us learn to use all our weapons wisely, so when the arrows of the enemy are raging, we will stand with You in victory. In all things we are more than conquerors through You, Father, who loves us.

Amen

Day 12: Seek First the Kingdom

By: Rose Bullington

Ask God for insight as you read: Matthew 6:33-34; Colossians 4:2; Matthew 10:38-39; Matthew 13:44-46; Matthew 22:37-40

How magnificent the sunrise every morning across the multicolored field of blooms, gently swaying in the wind. How softly their pedals unfold as the first rays of sunshine dance across their faces, and they welcome the day with peace and worryless care. How carefully and precisely the Master cares for each of their needs as they stand continuously day after day, solely existing because of His tender touch.

This is the beautiful picture the Father provides for us in Matthew 6:33-34. Seeking first the Kingdom is to recognize the provision of the Master, placing His agenda and concerns before our own, and knowing He has our needs taken care of. Worry and toil and fear of the future, rob us from living in a state of gratitude. Christ always provides. Everything I need, He has in ample supply. As a Father, caring for the needs of His children, He gives us in abundance. But, how quickly we forget. How quickly we take our focus off His goodness and place it upon our worry. The flowers of the field have no need of worry. They know the Master will care for them. They do not hurry about but are solely focused upon existing within His plan.

Colossians 4:2 puts our prayer life into perspective as it relates to our focus throughout the day. So often our prayers read like lists of all the things we would like to see God answer. We focus on waiting for His reply between breaths and hope He understands our needs as if we were leaving Him a “honey-do list”. When the answers do not come in the timing or form we believed we needed, we come to Him in a panicked state of frustration and feel somehow His care for us is not quite to the level we expected from an all-loving Father.

But He says to come to Him with a thankful heart, an alert mind, and eyes wide open in gratitude. It is hard to present God with a list of demands when we are focused on being grateful for all He has already done for us. It is also equally as hard to believe we are responsible for our own happiness and problem-solving, when we are fixated on all He has done to see us through. To truly embrace a kingdom culture this side of heaven, we must believe He is all-providing and capable of meeting our needs as we seek Him first. Through thick or thin, good or bad, happy or sad, if we have our focus on Him, all the rest will take care of itself (Matthew 10: 38-39).

Prayer

Father, as I seek Your Kingdom first, will You help me remember that worry is the thief of peace. Help me to place all my thoughts of what could, would, or should happen into Your hands and keep my eyes open to see Your provisions over my life. Help me to find satisfaction in what You give me, knowing You are a Good Father. Amen

Day 13: Trusting God in Suffering

By: Jamie Amer

Ask God for insight as you read: Job 2:8-10; Acts 5:40-42; Psalm 6:6-9

Suffering is hard. No matter what form it comes in, it feels all consuming.

It is completely exhausting.

Five years ago, I can vividly remember begging God to die. I could not see a purpose or any benefit of me being alive. My suffering was mental that flowed to the emotional and physical. Job also wished to perish at one point in his suffering. Like King David cried agonizing tears at night, I also spent countless nights crying in my pillow asking God why. I was convinced my husband and children would be better off without me and my issues. My sin was so great. It was piled so high against me that I could barely see above the pit I was in. As I cried out to God, the mental image then changed to Jesus reaching down His hand to help me up.

I took Jesus' hand that day. He promised to walk beside me during this suffering. He gave me strength and breathed new life in me. I can't say life got easier after that, in fact, it became harder. I am not even sure when it became better. One day I noticed life was beautiful and peaceful. I also realized how much I loved Jesus. He brought restoration, peace, and the strength that I still have today. I am stable and able to stand firm in Him.

If you are currently suffering, there is hope. Cling to Jesus. His word is an anchor for your soul in the midst of pain and suffering. Prayer will breathe new life into you. Piece by piece, He will put you together. It may be different than the you that once was, but trust that He is doing a good thing in you. Tell Jesus how you feel. Give Him your fears, your anger, and all of the hurt that you are experiencing. He will hold your hand and guide you out of the mire and the muck, one step or one breath at a time. Beloved, you are His child, and you are deeply loved. His arms are open, waiting to hold you and give you strength.

Prayer

*Jesus, please give me strength to take the next step that leads to Your firm foundation. I ask that You allow Your peace to cover me in all I do. Help me to focus on your promises and the goodness as I walk through the valley of suffering. In Your precious name I pray,
Amen*

Day 14: Letting God Lead Our Emotions

By: Kyle Jackson

Ask God for insight as you read: Proverbs 3:5-6; Psalm 13:1-6; Jeremiah 1:6-9

Follow your heart. We've all heard it said. Maybe you've said it to someone, yourself. What exactly does that mean? It seems that most people believe the heart is where our emotions live. There is even some science that would support that notion. When you have a strong emotional response—fear, anxiety, excitement—your heart rate increases. Soothing words and touch that make you feel safe can reverse that effect.

Clearly, though, there is a conflict between emotion and knowledge. Have you heard someone say, "I know it in my head, but I don't feel it in my heart?" Just as the heart represents our emotions, our head represents knowledge. Many times, we know what our response to a situation should be (knowledge) but we don't feel like responding in that way (emotion).

The Psalm we read above is a great example of the conflict between knowledge and emotion. In the first four verses, David is complaining to God, as he has so often done in the Psalms. He's feeling abandoned, sorrowful, and jealous of his enemy. Feelings he had every right to feel. After all, David had been chosen by God to be king of Israel, but Saul was still king and was doing everything he could to destroy David. We see the despair and anxiety David was feeling in so many of the Psalms. But in this Psalm, David comes back to what he knows. He knows God loves him, and he has seen God provide and protect so many times before. He knows, despite how he feels, that God will do it again.

So, coming back to my first statement—follow your heart, is that really such a good idea? In Jeremiah 17:9 we read, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?" Does that mean, then, that we should deny our emotions? Why do we even have emotions if we can't trust them? There is no question that God created us as emotional beings. In Genesis 1:27 we read, "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them." If we are created in God's image, then clearly, God intended for us to have emotions. So, what is their purpose? I read a quote in a book that stuck with me. "Be driven by emotion, but ruled by reason." It is often our heart, our emotion that is pushing us to do something—something good or bad, but we need to learn to temper that with our head, and more importantly with guidance from God. I think Proverbs 3:5 – 6 gives us some good instruction in how to do that. Don't follow your deceitful and wicked heart, but trust in God and He will guide your path.

Prayer

Father, I acknowledge that my emotions deceive me and drive me to actions that do not please and honor You. Please help me to trust You to guide me through those emotions. Please remind me of the knowledge I have of Your faithfulness now and always.

Amen

Day 15: Being Salt and Light

By: Noah Anderson

Ask God for insight as you read: **Matthew 5:13-16; Mark 9:49-50; Daniel 12:3**

Psychologist Carl Rogers once wrote: “When I look at the world, I’m pessimistic, but when I look at people, I am optimistic.” His observation invites us to consider transformation not as an isolated event, but as a deeply relational one that often defies worldly odds. Throughout the Bible, we see a God who constantly redirects us to the central importance of fostering these sorts of relationships: deeply emotional, intentional, and authentic—despite any worldly circumstances or current events. Further, Jesus’ call to *expectantly* invest in others (Matt. 28:16-20) reminds us to act out this important truth if we are to have a more fulfilling, more Kingdom-conscious life.

In Matthew 5, Jesus identifies His followers as those who embody the characteristics of salt and light. If you’re like me, you may wonder what this looks like when applied to your life. Most fundamentally, we know salt enhances flavor, preserves, and is essential for health. Likewise, light illuminates darkness, guides us, and regulates our natural rhythms. These are good things! Yet, both elements can also have disastrous effects. Salt, in excess, can turn things bitter and accelerate decay, while intense light can become blinding and detrimental to our health.

This spectrum encourages us to reflect on what it means to “put on Christ” (Romans 13:14) in the context of a deeply relational mission. Jesus undoubtedly understood these dimensions of salt and light, and His message here calls us toward a deeper *intentionality* and purposeful *examination* with one another on how to utilize these traits from a place of love. As we live out the Great Commission, we’re reminded to thoughtfully engage with one another, carefully discerning when and how to extend our salt and light in ways that bring glory to God.

If we find ourselves yielding a bitter, rotten, or useless fruit, then we may need prayerful recalibration of our understanding of salt and light (Proverbs 3:5-6; Matt. 7:16-20).

If conversations with others lead to gossip, blind judgements, or raised tempers, then we may need heart transformation (Proverbs 4:23; Colossians 3:8-10).

If our religion causes us to adopt Pharisaic patterns, worldly practices, or a blurred vision of Christ, then we need Spirit-filled renewal (Psalm 51:10-12; Matt. 15:8-9).

Today, take time to prayerfully address areas in your life where you can invite the Holy Spirit to refresh your “saltiness” so that it enhances and preserves the faith. Challenge yourself to express the light within you in ways that are irresistible to others, and ask God to help you embody His intentional and relational grace in each interaction. Reflect on your individual gifts and consider how you might become a manifestation of His presence in a world that deeply needs it.

Prayer

Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting! Amen. [Psalm 139:23-24 ESV]

Day 16: Turn the Other Cheek

By: Mongo Harrison

Ask God for insight as you read: Matthew 5:38-39; 1 Peter 3:8-9

Oh, how evil we get when we are wronged or offended. Whether it's a stranger who cuts us off on the interstate, a friend who betrays our trust, or a family member who hurts us with their words and actions. The first thing that flashes in our minds is anger. "How dare they do that to me, the greatest person that ever lived." The short fuse of temper is lit. The desire of the sweet nectar of REVENGE immediately starts oozing into our hearts. That revenge is either an instant reaction of venom and hate spewed towards the offender, or even worse, we stew over it for a few hours or days and strategically build those poisonous words. Then at the most opportune time, we unleash a scathing wall of destruction into the ears of our offender.

Any of y'all ever been there? Any of y'all still struggle with this?

It is in our human nature to desire revenge. It has been in our DNA since conception in our mama's belly. The world promotes the sweetness and nobleness of revenge; a large portion of movies, books, and television glorify revenge. The enemy also waits for exactly the right time for the fuse to be lit, then he is in our ear cheering us on to be as destructive as possible. This is not an excuse, this is reality!

The only two things in this life that we have control over are our actions and reactions. If we are born-again children of God, it is our free choice to obey our evil human nature or obey the Holy Spirit. This choice is only through the grace of God.

In our text, Jesus and Peter are teaching us the importance of our actions and reactions and how we, as disciples of Jesus, are to respond differently. Non-believers expect others to act and react as they do, but when our actions are love and forgiveness, they cannot comprehend this response. That's the difference Jesus expects from us.

In Colossians 3, Paul instructs the children of God to act and react differently. We are to deny pride, love unconditionally, stay humble, give mercy and grace as freely as Jesus gives to us, to be kind, be patient, pray for our enemies, and to be quick to forgive. The only way we can achieve this kind of life is through our intimacy with Jesus, time absorbing His Word, fully submitting our lives to Him, desiring what He wants over what we want, and daily asking the Holy Spirit to fill us and to guide and guard our hearts, minds, words, thoughts, actions, reactions, temper, and passions.

Always remember, sometimes we are the only Bible others read! We are representatives of Jesus every second of our lives. The world is watching us, dissecting our integrity, and analyzing our actions and reactions. Jesus holds us to the highest standard and will hold us accountable for how we represent Him!

Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank You so very much for who You are. Thank You so very much for creating me and creating me the way that I am. Please make me more like Jesus and less like me. Please make me the best child of Yours and the best representative of You that I can be. Please guide and guard my heart and mind, my words and thoughts, my actions and reactions, my temper and passions. I fully submit to You, Lord, please fill me with Your Holy Spirit, so that my actions and reactions may be pleasing to You. I love You and appreciate You so much. In Jesus name I pray, Amen.

Day 17: Character in Crisis

By: Taylor Grindstaff

Ask God for insight as you read: John 15:5; Romans 5:3-4

Take a minute to think about your character...what would your coworkers say about it? What about the people at church or even your family? Let's take it a step further, what would *YOU* say about your character? To add to this, more specifically, what about your character during a crisis? During the intense stress? During the hard times?

I know personally, sometimes my character can be very flawed during times of crisis. Between a full load of work and school, watching my finances, and working on relationships, I have a difficult time managing everything. With so much going on, it's sometimes very easy for me to allow myself to dwell in a pit of self-despair and lose the perspective of the hope I have through Christ. This, however, doesn't have to be the endgame for my character.

Paul states in Romans that we can rejoice in our suffering, and in the hardships, knowing it produces a character of hope through the Holy Spirit. How does this happen? Paul explains that these hardships produce endurance, which ultimately grows our character. Not only that, but he goes on to tell us that we even develop a hope and confident assurance of eternal salvation (vs.4). The best part is verse 5 that says that this hope NEVER disappoints us, because of God's love. The adversity through any crisis that we may face doesn't have to be what shapes our character. The perseverance of relying on God through any crisis will grow and shape our character faithfully, if we choose to allow it.

Prayer

Father, guide us. Use each crisis and difficult time in our lives to glorify you. Mold us and shape us through the perseverance of relying on You. Take our situations and allow us to grow our character to be more like the character of Christ.

Amen

Day 18: The Danger of Complacency

By: Nate Wilkinson

Ask God for insight as you read: Galatians 6:9; Romans 12:10-11, 21

Being complacent is easy. But it is also lazy. In work, in life, and in my spiritual walk, when I am complacent, I like to think I have it all together. But in reality, it could have devastating consequences. Complacency is defined as being satisfied with our accomplishments, even when there might be looming danger.

Being complacent has been a struggle of mine; I would tell myself that I have done the work (erroneously) to the best of my abilities. I might have taken shortcuts, because I didn't want to put in the effort that was actually needed. I told myself that "It just means I was more efficient, because I found a faster way of doing something." However, as I continue to mature spiritually, I have learned that if I don't put in the work that God has called me to do, I cannot bear spiritual fruit. And that fruit is not only meant for me, but it is meant to be shared with others.

Paul encourages me to keep up the work for God's kingdom because not only can it affect me personally in my spiritual walk, but it could affect someone else who looks up to me. Being intentional and invested in someone else is the essence of discipleship. Relationships cannot rely on complacency, because it takes work to continue them.

I've had to teach myself to make sure I am doing my best with the abilities that God has gifted to me. And in doing so, it has translated into my day to day life. I can see the fruit with the blessings I receive in one way or another.

If I don't put in the work and am complacent, the fruit that God has called me to grow and take care of dies. If I leave a garden by itself, weeds will grow. Drought can decimate crops if there is no proper irrigation system. Without fences, animals can eat all the fruit as they please. The same things can happen when I am complacent in my own spiritual work. It might be hard, but I must take up the mantle and encourage others to do the same. My ability to disciple others ends when I decide to do the bare minimum.

Prayer

Lord, please help me to not be complacent, but to do everything to the best of my ability with the gifts You've given me. Help to fuel the fire to do what You called me to do with a servant's heart. Help me produce spiritual fruit so that I can share it with others.

Amen

Day 19: Hope in the Darkness

By: Sarah Wilcox

Ask God for insight as you read: John 1:4-5; Romans 5:5; Isaiah 41:13

When we hear the word “darkness” most of us conjure visions of night terrors or horror movies. Job 23:17 NLT says it perfectly, “Darkness is all around me; thick impenetrable darkness is everywhere.” I think we are all familiar with that feeling of being surrounded by the darkness or the feeling of darkness. The unsettling, painful feeling. There seems to be no way to make the darkness go away.

Isaiah 41:9-13 changes this. We have the Creator of the universe standing with us, holding our hand and walking us through. Not only is He walking us through, He has given us His authority to defeat the darkness. We carry the authority of God in us to conquer the darkness! Think about what that means. Psalm 23 is typically used to encourage us to know God is with us, but verse 5 shows us He is walking us through the darkness, so that He can bring us to a place to defeat our enemies and darkness and bring us anointing and blessings.

One of my favorite lines in a movie is found in the movie *Labyrinth*, when the main character, Sarah, realizes that the enemy, the Goblin King, can be destroyed. “You have no power over me.” As soon as she speaks these words, the Goblin King’s world is destroyed. All the things he has set up for her to fail and lose are completely demolished. As soon as we realize the enemy has no power over us, we can destroy the darkness and be part of God’s hope - to ourselves and the world around us.

Ephesians 6:12 reads, “For we are not fighting against flesh-and-blood enemies...but against mighty powers in this dark world...” This verse is the Biblical version of that line in *Labyrinth*. When we realize that all the darkness we face is spiritual and God has control of all things, we can bring His hope to all circumstances. John 1:5 reads, “The light shines in the darkness and the darkness can never extinguish it.” We are the light in the darkness, we bring the hope of Christ to the world. Not just because we have the Holy Spirit in us, but through trusting, believing, and knowing Christ, we are destined to defeat the darkness.

Prayer

God, give me wisdom to understand my authority in You. Give me strength to stand against the enemy of darkness and be the hope. Give me courage and remind me of all these things when I am faced with darkness all around me. Help me remember that I am CHOSEN.

Amen

Day 20: Jesus is the Light of the World

By: Rachel Anderson

Ask God for insight as you read: John 8:12; John 12:46; 2 Samuel 22:29

No one will be on fire all the time – hardships come, doubts creep in, and burnout tries to make itself at home. Life can be pretty dark sometimes, and it's hard to spread light when you feel anything but light. As someone who holds high (sometimes impossible) expectations of herself, I often feel as if I have failed in the times where my light is flickering or even extinguished.

The good news, though, is that we don't have to be on fire all the time – that's what Jesus is for. Jesus is the Light of the world, and the darkness of this fallen world can never overcome Him. Any darkness we feel inside, and any pain we face in our day-to-day lives is no match for the everlasting Light that is in Christ Jesus. Here's some more good news: Jesus wants to help us. We are the only thing getting in our way of seeing and receiving that Light. He is waiting patiently for us to receive it.

Our feelings are so fleeting, and they run rampant throughout our lives, pulling us one direction and then another. God knows that. He knows each struggle that we will ever face, both internally and externally, and He has exactly what we need to overcome and thrive as we pursue Him. The key here is that we need to pursue Him, just as He pursues us.

There has never been a time when our God has not known. There has never been a time when Christ has not understood our battles and prepared us to defeat them. There has never been a time when God's mercy has not prevailed. There has never been a time that our Savior's light has diminished.

It's important to remember that even when we are in the trenches and we can't see our hand in front of us, we have the opportunity to turn around and see the Light that's beside us and can guide our way. Don't worry – Jesus has enough light for everyone, and there's more than enough for each moment of our lives. He just longs for us to see it.

Prayer

Father, thank You for who You are. Thank You that Your light shines for the world to see, and through You, we can shine Your light, too. Help me to step into Your light and let it wash over me so I can best represent You and Your kingdom. Guide me in Your light and remind me in dark times that the darkness can never overcome You.

*In Jesus Name,
Amen*

Day 21: Dealing with Idols

By: Jon Stoner

Ask God for insight as you read: Exodus 20:3; Deuteronomy 29:26; 1 John 5:20

If you are anything like me when you think of idols, your mind immediately goes to the golden calf erected by the Israelites in Exodus 32. But throughout the Bible we often see that when times got tough, God's people turned away from Him and looked for salvation in all the wrong places. This is not, however, purely a biblical issue. While I don't foresee any golden calf dedication ceremonies taking place in the town square that does not mean we aren't in jeopardy of turning to idols now more than ever.

Simply put, idols are anything and everything we give more affection and adulation to than we do to God. Idols today come in all shapes, sizes, and varieties; and while we may not worship them the same way the ancient Israelites did at the foot of Mount Sinai, we are in no less danger of wrongly placing our faith in them. I'd argue that the most dangerous aspect of idol worship today is that with modern technology every person can create a personal idol that is specific to themselves and therefore incredibly effective at pulling our attention away from God. If we ever want to envision a way in which our lives can be better, all we have to do is unlock our phones.

I personally have always struggled with my pride and ego, building an idol of self-identity as a representation of my abilities. *I* wanted to be responsible for *my* success and failures and given all the praise that *I* deserved. I tried to build my own life away from God and put more faith in myself than Him to provide for me and my family. Then God happened. I was forced to take an inventory of myself, and what I found was a life full of anxiety, anger, fatigue, and the most pathetic altar imaginable. I alone was not capable of creating a life worth living, because (as I imagine Paul would have sternly reminded me), "All things are from Him and through Him and for Him" (Romans 11:36).

For you it may be a different idol that you struggle with, but I believe there is a common theme across them all; we all become distracted by the pressures, temptations, and desires of this world and turn our attention away from the glory of everlasting life that is promised to us through Christ. Admittedly, I was initially nervous about having day 21 of this devotional series. I was afraid that if I dropped the ball at the goal line, it would somehow sully the hard work of everybody else that produced amazing devotionals, but in the end the message could not be simpler or clearer. Let's put away our phone, close our emails, log out of the social media accounts, turn off the cable news, quit worrying about the things of this world, and turn our eyes to the **Lord of heaven and earth**. Let's strive every day to live in fellowship with the one true God.

Prayer

Lord, we love You and worship You as the one true God. Thank You for being a generous God, and the source of all blessings. Please remind us this year to place our faith and hope in You alone.

Amen