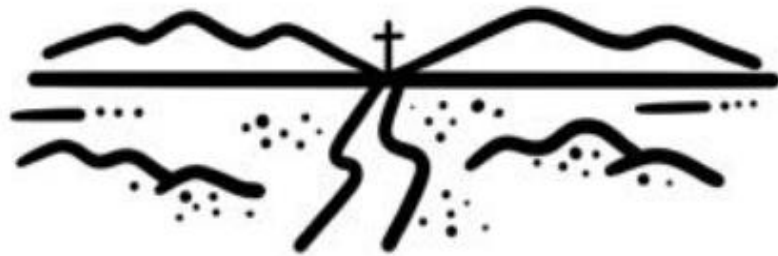


forward



21 days of devotion, fasting, and prayer

BC Family,

2025 was an incredible year at Believers Church. We witnessed the power of God through eden nights, Cultivate Women's Ministry, GMen, life change in Sunday morning worship, growth for kids and students, and deep relationships were built within our groups. We had incredible opportunities to serve our neighbors, pack and distribute Hope Bags, and meet many local needs both within and outside our congregation.

For me, this all began in January with Kingdom Culture. 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, BC25.

This year, *Forward* will serve the same purpose as it ushers in our 2026 Vision series, Prepare the Way. And we have a completely new group of contributors that have written the daily devotionals! There has been a lot of time and planning going 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

Forward is a daily devotional that we read together for twenty-one days. Day 1 begins on Monday, January 5th. Day 21 will be January 25th. 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 2026!

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 *Forward* 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: The Mission Moves Forward

By: Matt & Beth Smith

TEXT: Philippians 3:13-14

Beth is very grounded in the present. She thinks about the many activities that revolve around the Smith home. I'm always thinking about the future. This causes conflict when I forget to do things (because my mind is preoccupied with the future) and I can't get her to think about retirement. We operate differently, but make a good team.

In his letter to the Church in Philippi, Paul prioritizes both the present and especially the future as he challenges his readers to leave one thing behind: the past. The same is true for us. We can collect memories, talk about the good old days, and appreciate our past, but we can't idolize it. God is doing a new thing. And we must consider our present moment while pressing into the future that God has for us.

As we begin these twenty-one days, we hope to convince you of this: enshrining the past will cripple the future. We must appreciate where we've been. We must "recall the works of the Lord" and "remember the good deeds he has done" (Psalm 77:11), but we can't worship or long for the past. We must reach ahead for what's in store because it's where we're being sent. I sense that many of you are embracing this historical moment while others are wavering. This wavering is something I want to address.

For some of you, this move will strip the comfort you're holding onto because it will require more of you. For others, God will shape and refine a calling He has placed on your life. And then for others, you will see those around you come to know Christ for the first time. We must live in the present and press into the future. The future can feel scary. Unknowns can bring anxiety. But I can promise you that we are exactly where we're supposed to be.

As you pray and prepare, know that we love you. We're honored to serve you. We believe His grace is sufficient and that He always meets our expectations. I will continue to dream, pray, and prepare for the future. Beth will be right here to keep me grounded.

Day 1 Prayer

Father, lead us. Guide us. Reveal what could be wavering in our hearts and help us deal with it. Show us how to walk in unity with deep love for You and for one another.

In Jesus' name,

Amen

Day 2: Honoring the Past; Embracing the Future

By: Justin and Rebekah Grindstaff

Text: Isaiah 43:18-19; Isaiah 46:9

When we think about honoring the past as a church, we often think about the wonderful memories from our current location. For example, both of our children were baptized here. We watched them become deeply involved in serving here. Although Taylor, our daughter was called away through marriage, when she and our son-in-law come back home, they want to come to Believers to visit.

Maybe for some of us, the past also had some parts that were painful. The joy, the pain, and everything in between are all a part of honoring or remembering the past. However, if we're stuck dwelling on the past, even the good parts of it, we could easily miss what God is doing in the present and even the future.

In our Scripture reading for today, the verses in Isaiah seem contradictory at first. God tells the Israelites in chapter 43 not to remember the former things. Then in chapter 46, God tells them to remember the former things. Why? The Israelites were so focused on their circumstances that they couldn't see what God was trying to do. God wanted them to look past their current situation and put their eyes on the "new thing" He was going to do.

If you've ever driven through a heavy fog, you sometimes aren't sure where you are. You can't really see where you're going all the time, but you do know where you've been. God knows the whole story. He sees the end of every situation just as much as we see the beginning of it. (Isaiah 46:10) He knew the great things we would celebrate, as well as the pain we would endure in our current location. At the same time, He knows the challenges and the victories we will see in our future location. He even knows where we'll ultimately end up.

The same is true for you as much as it's true for our church. God sees your current situation and He knows your future. He isn't unaware or uncertain about your life or our church. He's asking us to look forward to the new thing He's going to do. There will be times when it will be hard not to look back and long for what we had: the comfort, the ease, the familiarity, and that's ok. We honor those times. We thank God for them. And we remember. We must choose to call to mind, move forward with trust, knowing that God sees it all and is in complete control. Then, we can be thankful and embrace what's yet to come. Behold, He is doing a new thing!

Day 2 Prayer

Father, we thank You for Your faithfulness in the past - for how You've led us and how You've kept Your promises. We look forward to what You have in store for us. Though we can't always see what lies ahead or understand Your ways, we trust Your plans. Help us to keep our eyes on You through it all.

In the name of Jesus we pray,

Amen

Day 3: It's All About the Kingdom

By: Jamin Arnold

1 Corinthians 3:9-11

Serving is one of the vital aspects of our walk and how the church body can be effective in spreading The Good News. Paul teaches us in this passage that it's not important who plants, who waters, or who harvests, but that we are obedient in doing and performing one of these. God will provide the rest.

The same goes with serving. When I came back to church, one of my first prayers to God was to to give back in some capacity. I knew about tithing and generosity but beyond that I didn't realize much more. I was given the opportunity to start helping others with parking and at the time I didn't think much of it. You just point people where to park, without much interaction with others; this would fit me just fine! But God has His ways and they are always better than mine! Little did I know He would allow me to get used to familiar faces, regular attenders and visitors alike. As I was learning names, He was carefully guiding and preparing my steps. Soon I was asked to get involved on a more personal level. Now I help with Pre-K, Bible Smart Groups, and am very involved with one of our Men's Groups. I am truly thankful for each and every one of these opportunities and the privilege it is to serve Kingdom Purposes over my own.

When serving in any capacity of church ministry, we should go about it after much prayer and with a humble nature, as it states in the latter part of this passage; ^[10] "Because of God's grace to me, I have laid the foundation like an expert builder. Now others are building on it. But whoever is building on this foundation must be very careful. ^[11] For no one can lay any foundation other than the one we already have—Jesus Christ." The posture of our heart is vital when going about serving and requires an element of faith on our end. God always places us where we can be an effective part of the body. In most cases, including my own, He places us in uncomfortable roles so that His glory will be seen and not ours.

I wanted to serve but be as far away from interactions with others as I could. What did God do? He placed me in a parking lot where I would have to greet everyone as they drove in on Sunday morning! I wanted to be isolated in my growth. He put me in the middle of a group of men where accountability and growth play a huge role in becoming the Followers we're called to be. I was apprehensive about being a leader, and He placed me helping with children. From what I've learned, each of these has shown me more about myself as I've grown to be humbled by the ministries I thought I would never perform.

That's what God does for us, He takes all our weaknesses and makes them strengths for His Glory as we become a vital part of the body of Christ in a local setting.

Day 3 Prayer

Father, may we always have the mind that Kingdom comes before self - that Heaven is eternal and our existence here is at best, temporary.

Amen

Day 4: Exercising Courage

By: Dillon and Allyssia Morriss

TEXT: Joshua 1:9 and Isaiah 41:10

There are moments in life when God asks us to step out before we can see what's next. A leap of faith requires us to trust God's voice more than our comfort, our plans, or even our sense of stability. God does not call us to follow Him occasionally. We often become so focused on our own desires and plans that we forget about Him.

Joshua stood in that same kind of moment. He was being asked to step into something bigger than himself—something he didn't have all the details for. God didn't hand him a map; He handed him a promise: "I will be with you wherever you go." It is important to remember the faith and sacrifice of Joshua. When reading through this book, keep the context in mind. The faith shown by Joshua and the people around him was never meant to last only one generation. There was no expiration date. This level of commitment is expected from every believer.

Isaiah echoes the same heart: God doesn't just point us toward a new season—He walks beside us in it. He doesn't say, "Good luck." He says, "I will strengthen you, help you, and uphold you." God is our sustainer through the seasons we go through in life. Obedience always positions us exactly where God can move, guide, and bless.

There are seasons when He calls us into the wilderness. Just because this does not happen every day, He is still directing our steps. We are called to walk deeply with our Lord and Savior. We should set aside our own wants and ask Him, Father, "How can we serve You today?"

When we step out in faith because we feel God leading, God reminds us that He is the One who fills the space between what we leave behind and what's coming next. We don't have to fear the transition, the unknowns, or the waiting. The God who guided us to this moment is the same God guiding us through it. Each time we feel the weight of "What now?" or "What's next?", we should declare Isaiah 41:10. "God will strengthen me, help me, and uphold me."

We are not walking into the next season alone. When things feel uncertain, remember; we don't jump blindly—we follow God's voice. That means His provision, strength, and peace are already in the place He's taking us toward.

Day 4 Prayer

Lord, thank You for guiding us into this new season. Thank You for giving us the faith to let go of the familiar and step into what You have prepared next. When fear tries to rise, remind us that You are with us. When uncertainty grows heavy, uphold us with Your righteous right hand. Strengthen us, lead us, and let Your peace steady our hearts. We trust You with every step ahead.

Amen

Day 5: Leaving the Familiar

By: Elaine Snapp

Text: Genesis 12:1-4

I was 40 years old, married for 19 years when God spoke to me to go back to school to get my teaching degree. My husband, the kids' dad, had his own business and I was working at a dental office. I had the thought that God wanted me to go into teaching to help out my family. I would have a steady income and provide health insurance for my family. It was scary going back to school at this time in my life. It looked like a huge task, but God whispered to me, "Prepare. Move Forward. Trust Me."

I moved forward and started attending education classes at LMU. I attended off campus classes in Knoxville on Tuesday and Wednesday evenings. I also went to Alcoa, TN, for Saturday classes. Within three weeks of beginning classes my husband left. The father of my children walked away. My world was turned upside down. I didn't know how I would survive. I didn't know how I would take care of my children, continue to work, go to school, parent and hold myself together. I did not see how I could attend classes that were two hours away. Once again God whispered, "Keep Going." I obeyed. I obeyed because I was desperate for God to lead me. Every mile became a prayer. Getting up at 4 a.m. became a prayer. I prayed continually for my kids.

My son was 14 and he babysat his two younger sisters while I attended classes. I faced many obstacles and challenges during this time, including losing my vehicle and my home being foreclosed. I faced late nights and early mornings. I was beyond tired, but I kept moving forward. Many times I was fearful of failing and of the unknown, but this scripture would come to my mind. 2 Timothy 1:7, "For God has not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind."

When I was beyond exhausted, this scripture encouraged me to keep moving forward. Philippians 4:13, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me".

Church friends, this is exactly what stepping into a new building, a new season, a new place of worship feels like. It is leaving what is familiar and driving into an unknown. It feels like trusting God deeply. But, listen to this truth that was proven to me OBEDIENCE IN THE MIDDLE OF UNCERTAINTY IS WHERE GOD DOES HIS GREATEST WORK.

When my life broke, God helped me. When I didn't know the next step, God guided my feet. When I didn't have strength, God carried me. He brought me through it, and He can do it for us as we move forward.

Day 5 Prayer

Dear Lord,

Help me to always trust You and to move forward. There are many times I tried to do things on my own and realized if I had just listened to You, things would have worked out better. I realize that moving forward is not easy and there could be many obstacles in many situations, but You know the outcome. You will help us get through every single obstacle. I thank You for the reminder that You are always with us when we are trying to do Your will and move forward for Your glory. Please help others as they move forward in various situations. Dear Lord, it could be just moving forward to get out of bed in the morning to face the day and to trust You. It could be moving forward to a new building to worship with all of the unknowns. We know if it's Your will and we obey Your voice then You will bless us. Then we will be equipped to help the broken become devoted followers of Jesus. I want to thank You for everything You have done for us, for all of the things You have brought us through, and for dying on the cross for our sins.

In Jesus' name I pray,

Amen

Day 6: It's OK to Weep

By: Mark McGill

Text: Ecclesiastes 3:1-15

In Ecclesiastes 3, the teacher lays out life in rhythms. “For everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under heaven.” As Believers Church prepares to leave a beloved building and step into a new one, this passage becomes a lens for understanding what God is doing in our midst. A move, especially a church move, is never just logistics. It is a transition of the heart. It stirs memories: baptisms in that sanctuary, friendships built in the entrance rooms, prayers whispered in those seats. There is joy in what’s ahead, but there is also grief in what is changing. And Ecclesiastes reminds us: it’s OK to weep.

God Himself acknowledges that real growth often requires real emotion. “A time to plant, and a time to uproot what is planted.” Uprooting is not painless. We feel the pull of what was familiar and the uncertainty of what’s next. But Scripture does not ask us to hide that discomfort. Instead, it gives us permission to let the tears fall if they need to. Yet, this same passage anchors us in confidence: “He has made everything beautiful in its time.”

Not everything feels beautiful in the moment, but God is shaping the story through seasons. Our church is not leaving a building because something is ending. We are following God into the next chapter He has already prepared. We are wired not only to remember, but to hope.

As we move into the new building, remember this: tears don’t mean we are ungrateful, or that we doubt God’s plan. They just mean that we loved what God gave us in this last season. But after the weeping comes the planting again. New memories. New ministry. New ways that God will work. Buildings may change, seasons may shift, but the God who led us this far is already waiting for us in the next room, the next service, the next work He has planned.

It’s OK to weep. But it’s also OK to hope, and in Christ, we are free to do both.

Day 6 Prayer

Heavenly Father,

As we stand in this moment of change, we bring You our whole hearts. Thank You for every prayer prayed, every life touched, every step of faith taken in our old building. As we grieve what we leave behind, remind us that it is OK to weep—because our tears honor the work You have done. But Father, also steady us with hope. Open our eyes to the beauty You are shaping in this new season. Go before us into our new space, filling it with Your presence, Your peace, and Your purposes. Unite us as one church family. Let this transition deepen our love for one another and strengthen our faith in You. May everything we do bring glory to Your name.

In Jesus’ name,

Amen

Day 7: God is in Control

By: Esteban Mendoza

Texts: Ephesians 1:11; 2 Chronicles 20:17

One of the greatest struggles – and yet one of the deepest needs – of every believer, and really every person, is trust. Trusting is one of those things that is easy to say, but difficult to do. This is especially challenging because of our human nature. When things do not go our way, we tend to ask ourselves, “Why?” or even “Why me?” Failing to see the “big picture” can sometimes make us doubt God.

When we give our lives to Christ, we are not just free from sin, nor did we just “gain a place” in Heaven. It is a daily surrender that we must accept and cling to. Whenever we take matters into our own hands, most of the time, they tend to fail. But, when we give it all to God, we have hope and security because He never fails and always keeps His promises. We can find one of these promises in Ephesians 1:11. This verse is a great reminder that even when it feels like God has turned away, He is only working things out for the greater good. It is all part of His unfailing plan.

In the book of 2 Chronicles, specifically chapter twenty, we find Judah and Jerusalem in a difficult situation. They are surrounded with a sudden threat consisting of several nations planning to attack them. The Lord spoke to Judah and Jerusalem through the Levite Jahaziel. God told them not to worry. For the battle belongs to Him. Verse 17 which also reminds us of a comforting and assuring phrase, “Be still”. What lesson can we learn? How can we apply this to our daily lives? We might not face the attack of multiple nations, but it can feel like the world is against us. We need to know how to surrender to God (“Be still”) and let Him fight our battles. God is in control.

Day 7 Prayer

Dear Lord, help us to remember that even in the most difficult times, You are in control no matter how hard it may seem. The battle is not ours to fight, but Yours.

We submit and give everything to You.

Amen

Day 8: The Church: A People, Not a building!

By: Dennis & Teri Deese

TEXT: Acts 7:48; Romans 16:5a

The church is a community of believers, not a building. When Rick Warren founded Saddleback Church in California, they had no building and moved (relocated) **79** times in just 13 years.

Jesus builds His church (Matthew 16:18) and is the head of the church (Ephesians 5:23); thus, we have the joy of adapting, adjusting and changing, at His good pleasure, knowing He leads us to green pastures as our Shepard. His view is always that of eternity and He knows every aspect of His directives as we follow Him by taking up our cross daily (Matthew 16:24).

Our mission is to listen to every prompting of the Holy Spirit with the end result of precious souls being saved as we are. Can it be challenging? Yes! But the fruit of people giving their lives to Jesus is why we are still here on this planet. When a space has reached 80% attendance capacity, it is maxed out. It has reached its limit, and no more growth or improvement is possible. If those we invite attend and they are unable to sit together, most likely they will not return. I greatly respect, support and appreciate our pastor and leadership team in following the Lord even though it is challenging, uncomfortable and demanding. Thank God for their obedience and submission to the Lord.

Maintaining a spiritual perspective is imperative as Kingdom people and Ambassadors of another country (2 Corinthians 5:20). Let's bring the force of the supernatural onto the scenes of the Elizabethton region for our ordained time in this next assignment. Keep in mind – sometimes our directives serve as tests that turn us in a sudden new direction which is far better than we initially dreamt. God always wants the best for His children, His Bride. He's no cheap, broke God. Trust Him. The best, our best, is yet to come! Hallelujah!

Day 8 Prayer

Lord give us a willing and receptive spirit to Your leading. Let Your joy overwhelm us with a faith-filled expectation of an uncommon spiritual breakthrough.

In Jesus, name!

Amen

DAY 9: Call to Action

By: Nate and Ashlee Wilkinson

TEXT: Colossians 3:23-24; Isaiah 30:21, Hebrews 11:8

A “call to action” is a familiar phrase in church, but what does it really mean? Many people think it refers to helping in a ministry—serving at a soup kitchen, participating in Operation Christmas Child, giving financially, or responding to a crisis. These are valid examples, but a call to action is more than physical activity. It is also emotional and spiritual readiness.

Sometimes action simply means being present.

A lesson from Pastor Matt has stayed with us: the Hebrew word *Hineni*—“Here I am.” When Moses hears God call from the burning bush, he responds, “Here I am,” but the meaning goes deeper. *Hineni* expresses, “Here I am—fully. My whole being is ready for whatever You ask.” It is a posture of complete availability to God.

That kind of openness can feel intimidating. The unknown often takes us out of our comfort zone and exposes our vulnerability. We like control; when we don’t have it, fear can take over. Nate struggles with “analysis paralysis”—running every possible scenario until he freezes instead of acting. Ashlee, by contrast, is quick to decide and trusts the Lord to guide her steps. Both approaches have value; we should think through decisions wisely, but we must also be willing to take the first step when God calls. As Isaiah 30:21 reminds us, God guides us as we walk, not as we stand still.

There is a difference between being ready for anything and being willing for anything. God works through willing hearts—even when we feel unqualified. Scripture is full of people who seemed unprepared or unlikely: Moses, Joseph, Rahab, David, Paul, Ruth, and the disciples. Yet their willingness allowed God to use them in extraordinary ways. Hebrews 11:8 shows us how Abraham stepped forward in faith, not because he knew what was ahead, but because he trusted the One who did.

We may never become the next Billy Graham—and that’s okay. Or we might be, if we’re willing to let God use us. Trust Him fully, and respond when He calls. God cannot work through a life that never steps forward.

Day 9 Prayer

Lord, we don’t know what You have planned for us today, but lead us with wisdom and understanding. Help us step into what You ask with faith and a Christ-like heart. Thank You for loving us enough to invite us into moments that require courage and action. Teach us to trust You and respond faithfully when the next call to action comes.

Amen

Day 10: Personal Change

By: Hunter and Aurora MacDowell

Text: Ephesians 4:22-24, Romans 12:2

In 2020, while serving in the United States armed forces, there was a season of our lives filled with immense darkness and despair. At this point in our marriage, we felt as if darkness was winning. Our hope and faith were shattered as I was battling suicidal thoughts convinced by the enemy that I was worthless, of no value to my wife and others, while having no chance of a future. My mind had become a warzone. In my shame, guilt, and hopelessness, God had a plan through my wife who refused to give up on me. She prayed when I couldn't. She had faith in the storm when I had turned away from Christ. Through Aurora's love, and faithfulness in Christ, He began a transformative work in renewing my mind and my faith.

In Ephesians 4:22-24, Paul emphasizes the importance of "putting off the old self" or former way of living, to include your thoughts. For myself, that meant a complete and total surrender of my own life over to Christ (Luke 9:23). I had to filter out the negative thoughts and bring them to Him in prayer (2 Corinthians 10:5). It meant that I had to put on my new self and pursue holiness (Ephesians 4:24). Additionally, I had to actively step up to be the Godly husband Aurora needed me to be. Our identity was no longer shaped by shame, doubt, and guilt, but shaped by hope, faith, and love that could only be found in Christ.

Romans 12:2 tells us to "not be conformed to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind". I know this may seem easier said than actually done, which is why this was not an overnight transformation for us (Philippians 1:6, 2 Peter 3:18). It took daily deliberate spiritual and biblical disciplines to continue to see, and experience the change that God was doing in our lives (1 Timothy 4:7-8). It meant actively choosing God over our circumstances (James 1:2-4). It took choosing to get up earlier in the morning to invite Him into our day with prayer. It meant sacrificing ourselves, our wants, and dreams to come in alignment with God and what He wanted for us. God did not just restore us and our marriage, but He renewed us. Our faith grew. We became more mature. Our life completely changed. The same Spirit that raised Christ from the dead dwells within us. He was able to resurrect us and give us new spiritual life (Romans 8:11).

If you are struggling as we were, or you are experiencing a season of change, doubt, or uncertainty, know this: You are not alone. God loves you and wants to restore and renew your mind. There is hope and healing on the other side of the pain, restoration for broken marriages and relationships, and "peace that surpasses all understanding" (Philippians 4:7). Remember that this did not happen overnight for us. It took real work, prayer, faith, and community while actively pursuing Christ with all of our being to grow in the Spirit and experience change.

Day 10 Prayer

Dear God, we come to You with our racing thoughts and anxious hearts. We recognize our need for a Savior every day because we cannot do this alone. Your love is greater than any circumstance we face. We believe in the transformative power of the Holy Spirit who can restore and renew our minds and set us on the path to healing. Today, Lord, we commit our lives to You in all that we do. Thank You for never leaving us. Continue to teach us, guide us, and keep our minds and hearts focused on You in all of our circumstances.

We ask these things in Your Heavenly precious name,

Amen

Day 11: Take Up Your Cross
By Richard and Amanda Crain
Text: Matthew 10:38-39

Have you ever been asked to do something hard – something beyond uncomfortable? Maybe the person asking tried to soften the request, but it didn't change the difficulty of the task. No matter how painful, confusing, or frustrating the assignment, we crave safety. We naturally run from the hard things. Now imagine the One asking is Jesus – inviting you into suffering, surrender, and even death. What will your answer be? In Matthew 10:38-39, Jesus called His disciples to do just that. Were they available for a hard mission? It was a call to a death to the only lives they knew. Their families would split; safety, status, and social peace would compete for their loyalty.

Jesus speaks this sobering truth, "Whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me." To "take up their cross" was not a metaphor for everyday annoyances; it meant public, costly identification with Jesus. The cross was not a symbol of hope to Jesus' pre-resurrection followers, it was the symbol of shame and excruciating torment. This cross bearing command would cost them. They would lose things and people they loved, even their own lives.

"Following" means getting in line behind Jesus and obeying His commands, even when it is not convenient. But why? When the God of the universe could take away hard things, give safety, grant peace. Why must we take up our cross? Jesus simply answers... "For my sake." Suffering produces in us what safety never will. And our weapons are forged through suffering.

Cross bearing looks more hopeful to us than it did to Jesus' disciples in Matthew 10. We now see the cross as freedom, not fear. It's a symbol of peace and new life yet, it is still a call to completely die to ourselves. This call is lived out, through us, in ordinary places. Nevertheless, the call to die to our earthly kingdoms will bear a cost that the early disciples knew.

Speaking the truth in love risks comfort. Hiding our faith in daily life to avoid awkwardness will be a temptation. Avoiding pain, shame, and the pressure to please will call us to lay down our crosses for a path that seems easier. Honestly, must we always surrender; that seems a little extreme? Cross-bearing means living for Christ and speaking truth with humility, even if we do not understand. Integrity will cost us earthly benefit, gain, and relationships. A shortcut feels easier. However, if we circumvent God's best for gain of our own, instead of pursuing the cross of Christ, we choose our own kingdoms over soul saving surrender.

"Losing your life" means choosing obedience over income, yet it releases freedom no paycheck can buy. Family expectations pressure us. Loved ones will not understand. Giving generously versus climbing ladders requires sacrifice. Raising children to take up crosses seems strange to a world raising media influencers. Serving the church and honoring God with our time is foreign to a world of cross avoiders. Allegiance to Christ will cost our lives, but dead lives, they are, apart from Him. The cross is the only true source of life and through the blood shed on it for our sins, we can live! It cost Jesus everything. It will cost us everything. Every. Temporary. Worldly. Thing. Cling to this world, and you will lose your life, regardless, but carry your cross in obedience and "exchange it someday for a crown."

Day 11 Prayer

Lord Jesus, You carried Your cross for us. Give us courage to carry ours for You, not protecting our reputation or comfort. We surrender our control at the Cross.

Day 12: Uncharted Territory

By: Rusty and Brandi Isaacs

Text: Matthew 14:22-23

There are seasons in life when we find ourselves standing at the edge of something unfamiliar - the job we didn't expect, the move we didn't plan, the change we didn't choose, or the calling that feels too big. These moments feel like stepping into uncharted territory, where the map is blank and the path is anything but predictable. But God does some of His greatest work in places we have never been.

When God called Abraham to leave everything familiar, He didn't give him a detailed itinerary, just a promise, "Go to the land I will show you." When Peter stepped out of the boat, he didn't know how to walk on water. He only knew the voice that called his name. Over and over in scripture it shows that God doesn't require us to understand the whole journey, only to trust the One who leads us.

Uncharted territory is often where faith becomes real. It's where self-reliance ends and dependence on God begins. It's where comfort loses its grip and courage starts to grow. It's where God reveals that He is not just the God of the known but the God of the unknown as well

Day 12 Prayer

Lord, when we face what feels unfamiliar, uncertain, or impossible, remind us that You go before us. Give us courage to trust You more than we trust our own understanding. Help us see that the territory unknown to us is already known by You. Lead us step by step and make our paths straight as we follow Your voice.

Amen

Day 13: The Journey of God's People

By: Nathaniel and Amber Townsend

TEXT: Exodus 13:17-22

Giving up control and not knowing where we are going brings about debilitating anxiety. When we have control, we feel like we are prepared, but when we lack that control, we feel overwhelmed, disoriented, and adrift. Then we are reminded that our own understanding will fail us, but when we trust and allow God to direct our paths, He guides us in the right direction every single time (Proverbs 3:5-6).

The journey of God's people has never been about speed, but rather about trust. When God led Israel out of Egypt, He was intentionally avoiding the shorter route. Even though He knew the battles ahead would overwhelm them, He guided them by the longer path. What felt like a delay or punishment was actually an act of love and protection. God still leads us this way today. There are seasons when we must hand over control to God. The path may seem roundabout, confusing, or slow, but His direction is always purposeful and deliberate.

As Israel stepped toward the wilderness, God Himself went before them "a cloud by day and fire by night". His presence shifted to meet His people's needs in every moment, reminding them that the journey was never theirs to control. What they lacked in certainty, they gained in guidance from the Author of perfection. They didn't have to map out the path or predict what was ahead; they only had to follow the One who knew the way.

And through every step, He never left them, teaching them that surrender is not losing control, but trusting the God who leads with perfect wisdom (Isaiah 28:29).

We, like many of you, have experienced this firsthand. For years, neither of us pictured ourselves as parents. Then, when God laid the desire on our heart and confirmed this step through prayer, the struggle came. Month after month, hope rose and fell, and we had to trust that this longing was something God Himself planted. When we finally conceived, joy quickly gave way to heartbreak as we lost our first child.

It felt like the wilderness—uncertain, painful, and completely out of our control. Yet even there, God's presence remained alongside us (Jeremiah 29:11). And in a way only He could orchestrate, exactly one year after our miscarriage, we saw our son for the first time. In that moment, we realized the path wasn't random, it was divinely guided. Not easy, not short, but held by a God who leads with purpose and never leaves His people, even in the wilderness.

And now, we see the same truth unfolding in our church. A move can feel unsettling, like stepping out onto unfamiliar ground without a clear map. It's easy to feel out of control, unsure, or even afraid. But just like Israel, and just like our own story, God is going before us. The cloud still moves. The fire still shines.

What feels uncertain to us is already known to Him. We are not drifting; we are being led. This is His church, His plan, and His journey. Our job is not to control it, but to follow Him with trust, believing that the God who guided His people then is guiding His people now.

Day 13 Prayer

Father, help us to release control and trust Your perfect guidance in every step of our lives and in the journey of our church. May we follow Your lead with faith, knowing You go before us and never leave us. Strengthen our hearts to surrender fully and embrace Your timing, purpose, and plan. God, lead us through the wilderness and remind us that You are the only perfect Author.

Amen

Day 14: A New Song

By: Kourtney Daniels

Scripture: Psalm 96:1-2

So much fear consumed me; I was afraid almost every waking moment. Even breathing was hard on many days. My life had become a rollercoaster of emotions. While trying to suppress the fear by replacing it with drive, I sank into depression until it became too much. Then the cycle would repeat.

No one could tell what was going on inside me because I did what I was told. I “sucked it up, got it together, moved on” and just – kept - going.

So, I kept trying to be better by being more organized, healthier, attending Bible study, and apologizing often. I worked hard to read my bible and pray more. I kept working toward a better me until I couldn't.

I finally gave up, and I walked away. This life wasn't getting better. I needed a new one. I was convinced that this would be better for everyone and that God had a different life planned for me. When it hit me how wrong I was, I couldn't take it! It broke me when I realized the pain I had caused, the mistakes I had made, the sins against God I had committed! This time when I cried out to God, I could see Him because He was the only light in the dark empty pit I had dug for myself. I remember the relief I felt as He carried me and covered the darkness with the most beautiful peace I had ever known. Almost a year of learning to trust Him had gone by when I finally let go of my life to place it in His hands. He gave it back immediately, giving me the most precious New Song which reminds me daily to sing back to Him in praise, for all that He is and has done for me!

Psalm 96:1-2 says, “Sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord, all the earth. Sing to the Lord, praise His name; proclaim His salvation day after day.”

What is it that we need to let go of and place in our Father's hands? Are we trying to create the future that only God can? Are we trying so hard to be good in a world that is broken? Do we struggle to have a song to sing to God in praise?

Day 14 Prayer

Father, we have tried so hard for so long, and we can't anymore. We place our lives into Your hands for You to carry us down the path You have created. Thank You for Your grace, forgiveness, and love! Thank You for finding us in the darkness and bringing us to the Light. Please remind us daily what You've saved us from, so that our New Song will be lifted up in praise to You always!

Day 15: The Purpose

By: Anita Allen

TEXT: Philippians 2:12-13 and Ephesians 2:10

Philippians 2:12-13

Paul gives a command using “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.” This unique remark speaks of ongoing obedience for those already saved. It’s crucial to recognize that Paul is not telling them to work for their salvation. It implies a need to live out - to practice, demonstrate, and exhibit the salvation that believers have in Christ. The concept of “fear and trembling” addresses worshipful respect for God. This goes back to the context of every knee bowing before the Lord mentioned in verse 11. God is acting through the lives of believers. This understanding should lead Christians to a deep sense of awe and appreciation. While God provides everything we need to act righteously, it is up to us to obey. One of my favorite quotes states that, “Integrity is doing the right thing when no one is watching.” (C.S. Lewis). This Scripture deepens the concept of integrity. It teaches us that doing the right thing when no one is watching is both our responsibility and God’s work within us. It is shaping our character and empowering our actions to do right by Him. Integrity is not only human willpower; it’s a result of God’s transforming work in our hearts.

Ephesians 2:10

God calls us His workmanship or His artwork. We are crafted and skillfully designed by God for His purposes. We are specifically created in Christ Jesus for good works. Good works alone will not give us salvation, but they are absolutely meant to be the result of salvation. God prepared what He wanted us to do for Him long ago. He already planned what He wants us to do with our lives. We do not need to replicate what someone else has done or is doing as He has a unique plan for each of us to serve Him in this world. This includes spiritual gifts and the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Good works, human effort, and our best intentions will never be enough to earn salvation. Every person is marked with sin, both deliberate and accidental, and for this reason we deserve to be separated from God. There is no cause for hostility between believers; we are all unworthy, and all saved by the same kindness of God. Ephesians 2 offers the good news of what God has done in Christ and the hope of a different way of living. We can live in Christ with Him and experience the power of the resurrection that is meant for us. We can begin now to live as God’s workmanship, contributing to God’s work in the world and knowing that our lives really matter. If we’re the kind of people who want to run our own lives, and if we question our purpose, then we must take the time to allow the story of God’s grace to sink in. Grace changes us. It changes our stories. Let grace rewrite our story.

Day 15 Prayer

*Lord, we pray that You keep reminding us to never lose the desire to live a life that is pleasing to You. We pray that You help us to have the same humble and selfless attitude that Christ displayed. Keep us grounded so we can keep following Your purpose for our lives. In fulfilling Your purpose, Lord, remind us that our goal is to earn Your approval and not the approval of man. Lord, use our circumstances, our situations, our gifts and our talents for Your purpose and glory. Lord, please guide and direct those who are feeling unsure of their purpose, so they may bear fruit as they pursue Your will. Thank You for how You created and blessed us. Thank You, Jesus, for equipping us with what we need to confidently pursue what You have uniquely crafted **just for us**.*

We ask all these things in the name of Jesus.

Amen

Day 16: Trusting the Process

By: Debbie Hodges

Text: Proverbs 3:5-6, Isaiah 43:2

As a young nurse caring for severely burned patients, I came to believe no other injury or illness rivaled the pain, misery and sheer torture of the *process* of trying to live through burn recovery.

Recently, a local homeowner described his fear of rising waters - the same hurricane related waters that had almost destroyed his home - confessing that he could not live through the *process* of flood recovery again.

God's words in Isaiah 43:2 for the Israelites - and for us - are both realistic and assuring. No "ifs" - only "when." When we find ourselves walking through deep waters, rivers of difficulty and fires of oppression in this life, God assures us of His faithful and constant presence and His protection from the effects of those fires and rising waters. And, yet, if I'm honest with myself and God, there are times when I feel like I am burning. When I feel like the rising waters are overtaking me. When the path seems dark and definitely not smooth even though I thought I was trusting God with my heart surrendered to His ways and not my own.

Do I become disappointed with God? Wondering if His words of protection and guidance are for real?

Process: a series of actions or steps taken in order to achieve a particular end.

I am beginning to understand that as a Christ follower, walking through the fire and experiencing the rising waters of this life is a process. God is working through life's deep waters and fiery ordeals toward this end: to transform my heart into Christlikeness. Trusting this process means that I must choose to lean hard into God's character - and not my feelings - knowing that as my heart is transformed into Christlikeness, He is glorified.

Just as recovery was the intent for the burn victim and our hurricane impacted friend, the process would mean months of excruciating bandage changes for one and months of delays and frustrations for the other.

As Believers Church moves forward, this is our call to trust the process because we have come to know and love and trust the Author of the process. Our good, good God. This is our call to lean hard into Him - into His character - believing that even in the midst of what may seem or feel like fire is getting closer, water is rising higher and the path seems unclear and not very smooth - God's process is transforming our hearts into His image.

For His glory.

Day 16 Prayer

Father God, Help me - help each us - live in a continual state of surrendering our hearts and will to Yours - trusting You to complete that process of forming us into the image of Jesus.

Amen

Day 17: God's Timing

By: Heather Hastings

Text: Ecclesiastes 3:1, 1 Peter 5:6

When I was given the topic of God's timing, I thought I was the worst person for the job. This is an area in which I struggle the most. Why would I be chosen to write about it? I believe it is because this is one of my greatest struggles that I was selected to offer insight into God's timing. My desire is to provide my perspective in order to help all of us trust Him a little more.

As it states in Ecclesiastes 3, there is a time for everything. God is the author of all and has chosen the season for every part of our lives. In verse 11, it says, "He has made Everything Beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the human heart; yet no one can fathom what God has done from the beginning to the end." Oh, how great our God is! We will never understand the Author of the complexities of life. How many times in our lives have we forgotten the power of God and questioned why we are in this current season?

We often forget that God knows best; He cannot do wrong. James 1 tells us that God cannot tempt us. 1 John 1 says that He is light, and there is no darkness within Him. When we ask God for our desires, for a relationship, for clarity, for a raise, we ask Him for good things. We ask for things we believe will help us and be good for us. God will not hold back good things from us. If He hasn't answered, maybe it's not good for us right now, or ever. God knows what He is doing! Waiting often forces us to become patient, and the challenge of patience itself will alone produce fruit. Maybe this season of waiting is God strengthening us and preparing us for the challenges that accompany the desires we are asking for.

However, we cannot forget to examine ourselves and our desires. In my favorite verse, James 4:3, it says, "When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures." Is what we've been asking for becoming an idol? Have we started to desire it more than we desire God? We *must* realize that what we desire cannot be more than our desire for Him. Above all, we are servants for Christ. *HE* is our end goal. He will bless us on Earth, but *Heaven* is our true reward. *He* is our reward.

Let's examine our desires, let's trust God to take care of us. Let's rely on Him.

Day 17 Prayer

Abba Father, help us to know the desires of our hearts. Help us to recognize the true motives behind what we ask for, and to desire You above all. Lord, help us to be patient, to rely on Your timing and trust that the Author of tomorrow knows what's best for us today. We believe; help our unbelief.

In Your mighty name,

Amen

Day 18: New Wine

By: Jerrad Daniels

TEXT: Matthew 9:17

Over the last 6 months, through my relationship with Jesus, I have been COMPLETELY transformed. It's almost as if the hard drive in my brain was wiped clean because I have very little memory of who I was before. What I do remember is that I was trying to follow God while: isolating, leading my family with a lot of anger, creating self-made disciplines, and spending my time almost everywhere except sitting at the feet of Jesus. Shortly before the last six months, I asked God to test my faith. I soon realized I would never ask that again. All the activities I was putting above Him were taken away, mainly long-distance running and other hobbies. It was one of the darker periods of my life, and this time I was unable to run anywhere, except towards the Father. Since coming to Believers Church, I have found much of what I was missing in my walk with Jesus. Discipleship and community were the two most critical, as they broke the chains of isolation. Reading scripture, worshiping, and practicing other spiritual disciplines became a necessity and not a checklist. I now not only want more time with Jesus each day, but I yearn for it.

Jesus told John's disciples, in Matthew 9:17, that people do not pour **new** wine into **old** wineskins, but rather "No, they pour new wine into new wineskins, and both are preserved." Jesus was explaining that the new way of the kingdom will not fit into the old religious practices and observances. The only way to the Father is through Him. Getting to know Jesus intimately and making Him our top priority is a must. We cannot become more like Jesus without spending more time with Him. Run towards the Father, no matter how long the distance. Let the Holy Spirit pour into us today. His mercies are **new** every morning.

Day 18 Prayer

Lord, we come to You today with thanks and gratitude for sending Your son Jesus Christ. For the blood, the love and the sacrifice. Please guide our hearts and help us to become more like Him each day. We praise you for our brothers and sisters in Christ and not having to walk this journey alone.

Amen

Day 19: Remembering the Work of His Hands

By: Amy Friday

Text: Deuteronomy 4:9, Psalm 77:11

As believers, there are many spiritual disciplines and practices that can encourage and strengthen us as we live out our faith; prayer, Bible study, serving, giving, and corporate worship. But what about the practice of remembering? Most of us easily forget our keys, glasses, phones, anniversaries, and schedules. While those are important to remember, we may even more easily forget all that the LORD has done for us. By choosing to focus on trials, frustrations, and hardships, we can forget the multitudes of blessings and miracles He provides for us every day of our lives!

How many times does the LORD provide for our daily needs? When have we seen Him heal, restore, redeem, guide, bless, intervene, and show us His love? How could remembering these things transform us?

“Zakhar” is the Hebrew word for “remember”. Remembrance is a foundational principle in the Israelite covenant and a recurring biblical theme in the Old and New Testament. While we may think of remembering as simply looking back at the past, in Hebrew culture it is actually a spiritual practice of moving forward; a preparation for stepping into an unknown future. Remembering God’s faithfulness in the past encourages confidence to move forward, knowing that because He was faithful before, He will be faithful again. That is Who He is! Jewish festivals often include a time for people to remember and relate their own God stories to their children and others, celebrating His faithfulness in their lives so that these stories will be shared with the generations to follow.

As we move into an unknown future, as a church family and in our own personal lives, let’s be sure to “Zakhar” – we must remember all the ways that the Lord has lavishly blessed our lives day by day and the miraculous things we have already seen Him do. Let’s consider beginning our own tradition of sharing our God stories with our children and grandchildren so that we can all step boldly into whatever our future holds. Someone once said, “I don’t know what the future holds, but I know Who holds the future.” That’s something we all need to remember!

Day 19 Prayer

Dear Father, thank You for all that You are and all that You have done throughout all time and in our lives. We want to remember the days of long ago, meditate on all Your works and consider what Your hands have done (Psalm 143:5). We want to move forward confidently, knowing that You have always been faithful and You will be again and again.

We pray this in the precious Name of Jesus!

Amen

Day 20: Moving Forward with Clarity (and trusting the process)

By Chris and Delaina Davis

Text: Psalms 32:8 NLT; Isaiah 55:8-9 NLT

25 years of ministry had passed, when hard times, really hard times, hit! Was it what He wanted all along? Maybe not, but it causes us to have questions and maybe even doubts. He will and did and is continuing to take care of us and His promises cover us! Rising from ashes that we felt like we never set ablaze is so hard. Standing back and watching the fire turn into smoldering ash only to see ourselves standing in a pile of black, bruised and burnt flesh, is only a pure GOD thing!

God can take a crooked path and make it straight. His plans are so much better than ours. His ways higher. His thoughts are higher. Period. To watch it all, unfold and take our breath away cannot be explained, but He has good plans for us. We must be willing to allow His plans to unfold as He permits. We isolated. We let Him heal us. We waited. We were incredibly quiet, which is not our nature. We had to completely trust the process, the God who drives the process. And pray, believing for all the good and perfect things that He has for us. All the while we waited, trusted, worshiped, and prayed for His hand to be seen in such a huge chaotic mess! Then, we began to see glimmers of fire again. Not the kind that we just walked out of, but the kind that brings peace, comfort, healing and hope. We began to see sparks from underneath us that would soon catch ablaze all the things that the enemy used to destroy God's plans for us.

It starts as a spark that catches the ground beneath us, then catches the wind and begins to start fires around us. Then it catches you and consumes your heart again. There in the midst of the fire we see Him; His eyes of fire, His hand of strength. His plans again are forged in our lives causing us to move forward in faith and clarity knowing that they are coming to pass. Seeing His faithfulness in our lives and ministries is a miracle.

Be encouraged in this upcoming year that when we find ourselves in the place of burning embers, let it burn, wait for God to set ablaze all that is left as we trust His plans, His ways, and His nature because He is always good!

Day 20 Prayer

Lord consume all that we are as Your people and allow us to watch Your plans for us, Your church, our nation and the world burn for You and You alone!

Amen

Day 21: The Blessing

By: Mark & Debbie Seymour

Scripture Passage: Numbers 6:24-26

“Why? Why do you have to leave?” Ten-year-old Matt Smith asked, trying to understand why his Children’s Pastor would choose to leave Elizabethton and move to Kissimmee, Florida.

“Because God said to go.” It was the only answer we could offer – to Matt, and to all the others asking the same question, including our families. To ourselves.

We didn’t understand it – God hadn’t explained Himself. There were no jobs waiting for us there. God was leading us to a specific church, but they had no ministry positions open. God had provided a place to stay for a few weeks, but we had no idea where we would live beyond that. We couldn’t afford housing there, especially since we had just bought a house here in Elizabethton. We didn’t know what was about to happen at the church we were attending, or that God was protecting us from it. All we knew was that God said to go. That was enough.

We arrived on Thursday. Debbie had a job interview on Friday. On Sunday she was offered a position, and on Monday was teaching in her new classroom. That just doesn’t happen. A week later, Mark decided to take a break from job hunting, and volunteer at a local non-profit organization. At midday, they offered him a full-time position. That just doesn’t happen. We were experiencing the blessing that comes through complete trust and obedience to God.

Fast-forward 31 years, and two more moves.

“What anywhere do you want to work from?” Debbie asked.

No hesitation. “Elizabethton.”

For 18 months we had felt that another chapter of our life was drawing to a close, and God was once again saying, “Go.” We had been praying and knocking on doors, seeking exactly where He was leading. Then, out of the blue, Mark received a call from a former boss, asking if he would consider coming back to work full-time. It was a work-from-anywhere position, prompting Debbie’s question. We knew that God was allowing us to come back home, and finish the work He had begun so many years ago.

It wasn’t long before God confirmed that He was calling us to Believers Church, and within six months we were here, experiencing the blessing that comes through complete submission to God.

We have personally experienced the blessing of Numbers 6:24-26. We are now experiencing it together as a church. God doesn’t promise that we won’t face danger or hardship, but He does promise to protect us. He doesn’t promise that everything will work out the way we would choose it, but He does promise to be gracious to us. He doesn’t offer a full explanation, but He does give us peace. His face is shining on us, and we feel His blessing. How incredible that blessing is!

Day 21 Prayer

Father, thank You for being faithful to Your promises. Thank You that You are good and that Your love never fails. Thank You for blessing our obedience. Thank You for Your protection. Thank You for smiling on us, and being gracious to us. Thank You for showing us Your favor, and for giving us peace. May we always respond with trust and complete obedience, so that we can receive Your blessing!

Amen