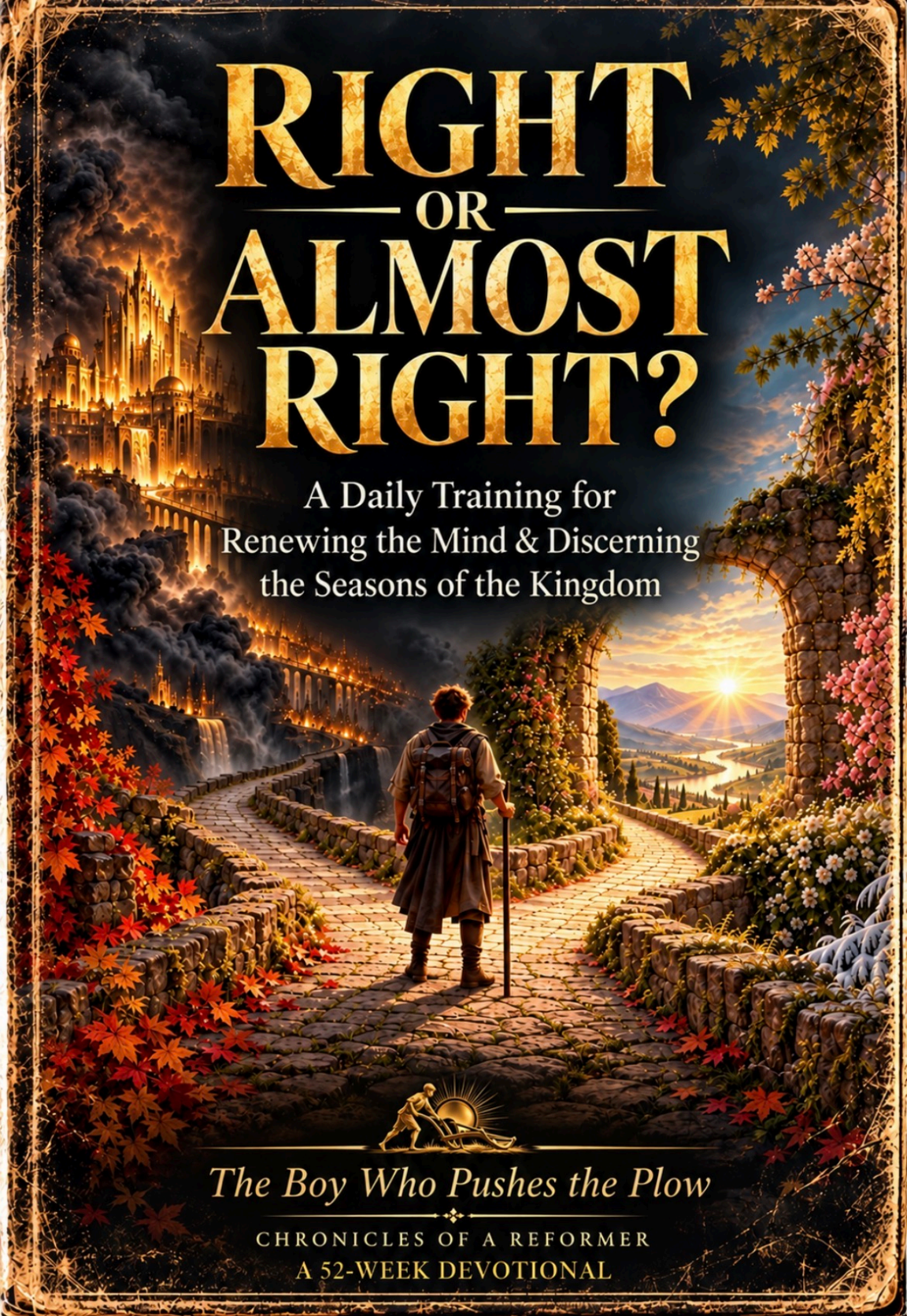
RIGHT OR ALMOST RIGHT?

A Daily Training for Renewing the Mind & Discerning the Seasons of the Kingdom



The Boy Who Pushes the Plow

CHRONICLES OF A REFORMER

A 52-WEEK DEVOTIONAL

Right or Almost Right?

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CHRONICLES OF A REFORMER

"If God spare my life, ere many years I will cause a boy that driveth the plough to know more of the Scripture than thou dost."

WILLIAM TYNDALE

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations are taken from the Holy Bible, New Living Translation (NLT). Other translations are marked where used: English Standard Version (ESV), New International Version (NIV), New King James Version (NKJV) and King James Version (KJV).

Some names and identifying details have been changed to protect the privacy of the people involved. Illustrations told as parables or pictures are offered as such.

Chronicles of a Reformer is a series of books on the nine seasons of the Kingdom of God: Refinement, Repentance, Revival, Reformation, Recalculate, Revolution, Release, Reward and Repeat.

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INTRODUCTION

The Plowboy and the Narrow Difference

> *Then those who feared the LORD spoke with each other, and the LORD listened to what they said. In his presence, a scroll of remembrance was written to record the names of those who feared him and always thought about the honor of his name.*
>
> **Malachi 3:16**

Five hundred years ago, a scholar named William Tyndale argued with a churchman who believed the Bible was safer in the hands of the clergy than in the hands of ordinary people. Tyndale's answer has followed me for years: "If God spare my life, ere many years I will cause a boy that driveth the plough to know more of the Scripture than thou dost."

He kept his word. He translated the Scriptures into the language of the plowboy, and it cost him his life. But the Word got out, and it has never gone back in.

That is why there's no name on the cover of this book. I'm just a boy who pushes the plow. I've learned that the less you know about the messenger, the more room there is for the message. "He must become greater and greater, and I must become less and less" (John 3:30).

WHY A DAILY TRAINING

We live in an age full of deceptive stories, endless noise and distraction dressed up as entertainment. Most of us aren't in danger of falling for something that is obviously wrong. We're in danger of falling for something that is *almost* right. It sounds spiritual. It uses Bible words. It looks like the real thing from across the room.

Discernment isn't a gift for a few prophets in the back room. It's a muscle every son and daughter of God is meant to build, and muscles

are built one rep at a time. So this isn't a book to read in a weekend. It's a training: 260 short readings, five days a week for a year, each one asking a simple question: *Is this right, or almost right?*

The Word of God is "alive and powerful. It is sharper than the sharpest two-edged sword, cutting between soul and spirit" (Hebrews 4:12). That's what I'm praying these pages will do. Not fill a box on a checklist, but cut to the heart, and stay with you through the day.

THE NINE SEASONS

After an orientation week, the year walks through the nine seasons God takes His people through, the same seasons laid out in *A Reason for Your Season*:

Refinement, Repentance, Revival, Reformation, Recalculate, Revolution, Release, Reward and Repeat.

Every season has a purpose. And every season has an "almost right" way of responding that looks faithful but fights what God is doing. God is raising up a people like the sons of Issachar, who "understood the signs of the times and knew the best course for Israel to take" (1 Chronicles 12:32). Friends of the Bridegroom who endure every season with hope because they long for Jesus to receive the reward of His suffering.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Each day has the same shape:

- **A verse** to carry with you.
- **A short reading,** usually opening with a story, a picture or a scene from a movie. Images stick where words alone slide off. Jesus taught that way, and I've tried to follow Him.

Almost right / Right. This is the heart of the day. Read the “almost right” line slowly. If it sounds good to you, that’s the point. That’s what makes it dangerous.

A proverb, one line in bold, short enough to remember at lunch.

For the Road, one question and one prayer.

Five days a week leaves you room to catch up, rest and reflect. At the end of every week there’s a Together page. Don’t skip it. Read this with your spouse, your kids, a small group or one friend over coffee. Malachi says that when those who feared the Lord talked with each other, God leaned in and listened, and wrote their names in a book. Something happens when the Word is shared that doesn’t happen when it’s only read.

Some stories in these pages are mine. Where other people appear, I’ve changed names and details to protect them. Where an illustration is a parable or a picture, I’ve told it that way. Eat the chicken and throw away the bones. Hold everything up to the Word, including me.

Learning to Recognize the Pattern

The movie references in these readings are opportunities to practice discernment. Personal stories matter, and I share mine, but I want the message to remain larger than the messenger. As we learn to recognize biblical patterns in a character’s choices, struggles, and responses, we become better equipped to recognize them in our own lives.

This practice has been significant in my growth in Christ. I think of Christ as the Rosetta Stone through whom these patterns become understandable. His life, His teaching, His cross, and His resurrection

help me interpret what I see, while Scripture provides the foundation for testing every connection.

A movie does not carry the authority of Scripture, and every detail does not need a spiritual meaning. As you read, ask: What biblical pattern is illustrated here? Where is it grounded in Scripture? How might it help me respond faithfully in my present season?

The goal is to carry discernment out of the story and into the life we are actually living.

Still Behind the Plow

I'm not writing as someone who has arrived. I'm still in the field with my hands on the plow. God is still refining me, renewing my mind, and teaching me to recognize what He's doing in the seasons of my own life.

My heart is to share the revelations and biblical truths that helped me break cycles, confront lies I believed, and walk in greater freedom in Christ. But my understanding is still growing. I answer to the same Scriptures I'm asking you to search.

Be like the Bereans in Acts 17:11: receive with an open heart, then open your Bible and check my work. If the apostle Paul could be tested, so can a plowboy. Wrestle with the questions. Pray through the hard passages. Let God's Word challenge both of us.

If these pages send you deeper into the Word and closer to Jesus, they've done their job.

Don't take my word for it. Take His.

A PRAYER BEFORE YOU BEGIN

Heavenly Father, open our hearts to Your wisdom. Help us take in Your Word until it changes how we think, how we speak and how we live. Give us the meekness to love hiddenness, a hunger for Your presence, and friends to walk this road with. Teach us to know the difference between right and almost right, and make us a people who understand the times. In Jesus' name, amen.

Let's push the plow.

WEEK 1

Right or Almost Right

Before we walk through the seasons, we learn to tell the difference.

DAY 1

Right or Almost Right

People may be pure in their own eyes, but the LORD examines their motives.

Proverbs 16:2

Charles Spurgeon is credited with a line that has followed me for years: “Discernment is not knowing the difference between right and wrong. It is knowing the difference between right and almost right.”

Wrong is usually easy to spot. Nobody needs much help seeing that stealing, lying or cheating on your wife is wrong. The real danger is the thing that is almost right. It sounds spiritual. It uses Bible words. It looks like the real thing from across the room. Counterfeit money is dangerous for exactly that reason: it looks almost exactly like the real thing.

Samuel learned this the hard way. When he went to Jesse’s house to anoint Israel’s next king, he took one look at the oldest son, tall and impressive, and thought, *Surely this is the one.* It was almost right. But the Lord said, “People judge by outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart” (1 Samuel 16:7).

The enemy rarely tempts God’s people with something obviously evil. He offers something close. A gospel with the cross removed. Unity without truth. Grace without repentance. Zeal without love. Each one is ninety percent right, and that last ten percent is where people get lost.

That is what this book is about. For the next 52 weeks, we will walk through the seasons God takes His people through, and in every season we will practice one skill: telling the real from the almost real. Not so

we can judge everyone around us, but so we can stay close to the One who is the Truth.

Almost right: Knowing what is wrong and staying away from it.

Right: Knowing what is true and staying close to Him.

The most dangerous lie is the one that is almost true.

FOR THE ROAD

Where in your life right now might you be settling for something that is almost right?

Father, give me eyes to see what You see. Weigh my motives and show me the places where I have settled for close enough. In Jesus' name, amen.

DAY 2

Feelings or Truth

Jesus said to the people who believed in him, "You are truly my disciples if you remain faithful to my teachings. And you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

John 8:31–32

Think about the last sermon, song or conversation that really moved you. Now ask a harder question: did it move you closer to the truth, or just closer to a feeling?

We often judge a person or an experience by how it made us feel. Did I cry? Did I feel lifted? Did I leave encouraged? Those aren't bad things. But Jesus never said the feeling would set you free. He said the *truth* would.

Feelings are real, and God gave them to us. But they're fleeting, and they can be wrong. "The human heart is the most deceitful of all things" (Jeremiah 17:9). A feeling can tell you a toxic relationship is love, that a compromise is freedom, or that God is far away when He has never left your side.

Truth doesn't change with your mood. "All your words are true" (Psalm 119:160, NIV). That's why truth can anchor you when your emotions are in a storm. When feelings and the Word disagree, the Word wins. Every time.

So test it. Paul told us to "test everything that is said. Hold on to what is good" (1 Thessalonians 5:21). Before you trust a feeling, hold it up to the Word. Before you follow a voice, ask whether it leads you closer to Jesus or just makes you feel better about staying where you are.

Almost right: It felt so right, so it must be God.

Right: It agrees with God's Word, so I can trust it, whether I feel it or not.

Feelings make wonderful passengers and terrible drivers.

FOR THE ROAD

What is one feeling you've been treating as if it were the truth?

Lord, Your Word is true even when my heart is confused. Anchor me in what You've said, and teach my feelings to follow. Amen.

DAY 3

Shrewd as Snakes, Innocent as Doves

> *Look, I am sending you out as sheep among wolves. So be as shrewd as snakes and harmless as doves.*
>
> **Matthew 10:16**

Most of us don't mind being compared to a dove. But a snake? Some believers recoil at the word, no matter how Jesus used it.

Here's something about snakes that helps me understand what Jesus meant. A snake doesn't smell through its nose. It flicks its tongue out to gather tiny particles from the air around it, then touches its tongue to a special organ in the roof of its mouth. That's why you see a snake's tongue moving all the time. It's constantly gathering information about its surroundings: where home is, where food is, where danger is.

That is shrewdness. Jesus wasn't asking us to be cunning or deceptive. He was asking us to pay attention. To read the room. To notice what's in the air before we walk into it.

And He paired it with the dove. Shrewd without innocence becomes manipulation. Innocent without shrewdness becomes naïve, and naïve sheep don't last long among wolves. Jesus wants both: eyes wide open and a heart that stays pure.

Proverbs puts it this way: "Love wisdom like a sister; make insight a beloved member of your family. Let them protect you" (Proverbs 7:4–5). Wisdom isn't cold. It's family. It protects what you love.

We are living in a discernment famine. Many sincere believers can quote verses but can't read the air. They walk into relationships, deals and doctrines without ever asking what's really there.

Almost right: I just trust everyone, because that's what love does.

Right: I love everyone, and I pay attention to what's really in the air.

Innocence without wisdom is just an open door.

FOR THE ROAD

Where do you need to be more of a dove, and where do you need to be more of a snake?

Jesus, make me pure in heart and sharp in mind. Help me love people well without being naïve about what is around me. Amen.

DAY 4

The Trojan Horse

> *For a time is coming when people will no longer listen to sound and wholesome teaching. They will follow their own desires and will look for teachers who will tell them whatever their itching ears want to hear.*
>
> **2 Timothy 4:3**

The old story goes like this. After years of failing to break through the walls of Troy, the Greeks built a giant wooden horse, hid soldiers inside, and left it at the gates as a gift. Then they pretended to sail away. The Trojans celebrated their victory and pulled the horse into the city themselves. That night, the soldiers climbed out and opened the gates. Troy fell without a single wall being broken.

The walls held. The gift is what destroyed them.

The idea of "my truth" works the same way. It doesn't storm the gates of the Church. It's wheeled in as a gift. It sounds humble: *Who am I to say what's true for you?* It sounds kind. It sounds like love. But once it's inside, it opens the gates to anything.

Jesus didn't say, "I am *a* way, *a* truth and *a* life." He said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6). Truth isn't a preference that changes from person to person. Truth is a Person, and He has a voice. "All who love the truth recognize that what I say is true" (John 18:37).

When we let each person define truth for themselves, we haven't become more loving. We've made ourselves the final authority, which is the oldest temptation in the world.

Almost right: Everyone has their own truth.

Right: Everyone has their own story, but there is only one Truth, and His name is Jesus.

The enemy doesn't need to break down the walls if you'll pull his gift through the gate.

FOR THE ROAD

What "gift" has your culture handed you that might be carrying something inside it?

Jesus, You are the Truth. Guard the gates of my mind, and let Your voice be the one I trust above every other. Amen.

TRUTH IS LIKE A LION.

Just as a lion does not seek your permission before it attacks, truth does not need your permission or agreement to exist.

It existed before you were born and will persist long after your death.



DAY 5

Understanding the Times

From the tribe of Issachar, there were 200 leaders of the tribe with their relatives. All these men understood the signs of the times and knew the best course for Israel to take.

1 Chronicles 12:32

When David was rising to the throne, warriors came from every tribe of Israel. Some brought swords. Some brought shields. But the men of Issachar brought something rarer: they understood the times, and they knew what Israel should do.

That's a gift we desperately need. Many believers are faithful and sincere, but they fight every season the same way. A farmer doesn't do that. He can't pray winter into spring a month early. He can't command the frost to leave because he's tired of the cold. He learns what season he's in and works with it. He plants, prunes and harvests at the right time.

Over the coming weeks we'll walk through nine seasons God takes His people through: Refinement, Repentance, Revival, Reformation, Recalculate, Revolution, Release, Reward and Repeat. Each one has a purpose. Each one has an "almost right" way of responding that looks spiritual but works against what God is doing.

You may be in a crushing season and keep rebuking it as if it were an attack. You may be in a season of release and keep holding on out of loyalty. You may be in a season of reward and not realize it's a test. Knowing your season doesn't make it easy, but it keeps you from fighting the very thing God is using to form you.

Almost right: Every hard season is an attack I need to rebuke.

Right: Every season has a reason, and I want to understand what God is doing in this one.

Wisdom isn't just knowing what to do. It's knowing when.

FOR THE ROAD

Which season do you think you're in right now? What makes you think so?

Father, make me a son or daughter of Issachar. Teach me to read the times and to know what You want me to do in this season. Amen.

WEEK 1

Together

Meet once after Day 5. These questions are for small groups, families or two friends over coffee. Go first if you're leading, and keep it honest.

1. **Open:** Read Proverbs 16:2 aloud. Ask: what's the difference between something that's wrong and something that's almost right?
2. **Day 1:** Share an "almost right" idea you once believed about God, faith or yourself. How did you discover it wasn't the whole truth?
3. **Day 2:** When has a feeling led you somewhere the Word wouldn't have? When has the Word carried you when your feelings didn't?
4. **Day 3:** Are you naturally more of a dove or a snake? What would balance look like for you?
5. **Day 4:** What "gifts" has our culture wheeled into the Church that might be carrying something inside?
6. **Day 5:** What season do you sense you're in? Let the group pray over each person's season.

Practice together: Pick one "almost right" saying you hear often, such as "God just wants me to be happy" or "Follow your heart." Hold it up to Scripture as a group. What's right about it? What's missing?

Pray: Pray 1 Chronicles 12:32 over one another: "Lord, help us understand the times and know what we should do."

SEASON ONE

Refinement

Divine Training

WEEKS 2–8

WEEK 2

A Reason for Your Season

Before you fight a season, learn to read it: winter, waiting and hard training each have a purpose.

DAY 6

Stop Fighting Winter

But blessed are those who trust in the LORD and have made the LORD their hope and confidence. They are like trees planted along a riverbank, with roots that reach deep into the water. Such trees are not bothered by the heat or worried by long months of drought.

Jeremiah 17:7–8

Picture a woman named Dena in the back row of a crowded conference, arms crossed tight, as if she could hold herself together by force. For months the bills had stacked higher than her hope. So she did what she had always been taught to do when life got hard. She declared war on the season. She fasted until her head spun. She prayed decrees at 3 a.m. She chased every "acceleration" meeting she could find, hungry for the one word that would flip the switch.

Then an old farmer stepped to the microphone. "We keep teaching people how to have faith to change their season," he said, "instead of teaching them how to understand the times."

Dena closed her notebook and cried. For years she had treated enduring faith like failure, as if God were holding out on her because she hadn't found the right formula yet. Now she heard a gentler invitation: *Stop fighting winter. Learn what winter is trying to teach you.*

Many of us were trained like Dena. We were told every hard season is a door to kick down. Faith does move mountains. But sometimes the mountain isn't the problem. Our timing is. Winter doesn't mean God has left the field. Much of His best work happens underground.

Jeremiah describes a tree planted by the water that isn't worried by long months of drought. Notice that the drought still comes. What changes is

what is happening below the surface. Rest is not the enemy of breakthrough. Sometimes rest *is* the breakthrough.

On the drive home, Dena prayed something simple: "Okay, Lord. If this is winter, teach me how to live in winter." It may be the bravest prayer some of us will ever pray.

Almost right: Real faith fasts, decrees and presses until the season changes.
Right: Real faith asks what God is growing in this season and stays planted.

Roots grow deepest when nothing is blooming.

FOR THE ROAD

What have you been trying to force that God may be using winter to grow?

Lord, I'm tired of fighting the calendar. If this is winter, show me what winter is for, and send my roots deep into You. Amen.

DAY 7

When the Days Get Shorter

> *For everything there is a season, a time for every activity under heaven.*
>
> **Ecclesiastes 3:1**

A farmer doesn't panic in October. When the days get shorter and the leaves turn, he doesn't call a meeting to find out what went wrong. He doesn't blame himself, the weather or the devil. He puts away the summer tools and gets ready for what comes next. He knows something normal is happening.

Dr. Henry Cloud makes this point in his book *Necessary Endings*. If we really believe life has seasons, then when one season closes we won't assume something is wrong. We'll accept the change the way a farmer accepts the turning of the calendar, finish what belonged to the old season, and step into the new one. Endings are easier to walk through when we believe they are part of the design.

Most of us don't think that way. A job ends, and we decide we failed. A ministry role is handed to someone else, and we wonder what sin we committed. A friendship that once felt close grows quiet, and we assume someone must be at fault. Sometimes there is a lesson to learn or a sin to confess. But sometimes the days are simply getting shorter because God is turning the page.

Solomon said there is "a time to plant and a time to harvest" (Ecclesiastes 3:2). Both are holy. The farmer who refuses to stop planting in November isn't more faithful than his neighbor. He's just out of step with the season.

This is where discernment matters. The same ending can look like loss from the ground and like promotion from heaven. “For we live by believing and not by seeing” (2 Corinthians 5:7). When we only see with our eyes, every closed door looks like rejection. When we see by faith, a closed door can be the first sign of a new field.

Almost right: When something ends, something must have gone wrong.

Right: When something ends, God may be turning the calendar to the next season.

Where we see a problem, God sees an opportunity. We see giants; God sees the Promised Land.

FOR THE ROAD

What ending in your life have you been treating as a failure that might simply be a change of season?

Father, You set the times and the seasons. Help me release what belonged to the last season with thanks, and step into the next one with faith. Amen.

DAY 8

In Good Company

> *But those who trust in the LORD will find new strength. They will soar high on wings like eagles. They will run and not grow weary. They will walk and not faint.*
>
> **Isaiah 40:31**

Think about who has been in the waiting room before you.

Abraham was seventy-five when God promised him a son and a hundred when Isaac was born. Moses spent forty years tending sheep in the wilderness before the bush started burning. David was anointed as a boy and waited about fifteen years for the crown. Anna was widowed young and spent decades worshiping in the temple until, at eighty-four, she saw the promised Child with her own eyes (Luke 2:36–38). And Jesus Himself lived about thirty hidden years before His public ministry began.

If God is asking you to wait, you are in good company.

Think about a pregnancy. A mother can't rush nine months into five without putting the baby at risk. Every week of waiting is doing something she can't see. The waiting isn't wasted time. It's growing time.

That's why the almost right approach to waiting is so tempting. We go hunting for the right prayer, the right fast, the right declaration that will finally speed God up. But Isaiah doesn't say those who find the right words will renew their strength. He says those who *trust* the Lord will. Waiting on the Lord isn't about the right prayer. It's about the right perspective.

Waiting also isn't idle. Abraham kept building altars while he waited. David led men in caves. Anna prayed and fasted night and day. They didn't sit and stare at the clock. They served where they were, and they kept their eyes on the One who holds the clock.

Almost right: If I can find the right prayer, I can speed up God's timing.
Right: If I keep the right perspective, I can trust God's timing.

If God is asking you to wait, you are in good company.

FOR THE ROAD

What would it look like to serve faithfully right where you are while you wait?

Lord, I trust Your timing more than my own. Renew my strength while I wait, and let me wait like Abraham, David and Anna: faithful, hopeful and awake. Amen.

DAY 9

Instant Faith or Enduring Faith?

> *For you know that when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow. So let it grow, for when your endurance is fully developed, you will be perfect and complete, needing nothing.*
>
> **James 1:3–4**

A woman who had been bleeding for twelve years pushed through a crowd and touched the edge of Jesus' robe. In a moment, it was over. Jesus turned and told her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well" (Mark 5:34). That is instant faith: a bold, unwavering belief that reaches out and receives a miracle now.

Now think about Joseph. He had dreams from God, and he believed them. But no amount of instant faith was going to lift him from the pit to the palace in a single day. He needed a different kind of faith, one with the strength and resolve to trust God through thirteen years of betrayal, slavery and prison. That is enduring faith.

Both are faith. Both please God. The danger is believing there is only one kind.

Some of us only know instant faith. When the miracle doesn't come, we pile on shame. Others only know enduring faith. We've grown so used to waiting that we stop expecting God to move at all. In Nazareth, Jesus "couldn't do any miracles among them except to place his hands on a few sick people and heal them" (Mark 6:5). The people there didn't need more patience. They needed to believe.

So how do you know which one you need? You ask God. Understanding God's will can be more crucial at times than understanding His works. Before you decide how to believe, find out what He is doing. Some

situations call for a bold reach toward the hem of His robe. Others call for a long walk through Egypt with your dream tucked in your heart.

Wisdom doesn't pick a favorite. It listens, then responds with the faith the moment requires.

Almost right: Real faith always gets the answer right away.

Right: Real faith first asks God's will, then believes now or endures long.

Understanding God's will can be more crucial at times than comprehending His works.

FOR THE ROAD

In the situation weighing on you most, is God asking you to reach out now, or to hold on longer?

Father, give me the boldness to believe You for the miracle and the strength to endure when the answer is "not yet." Above all, show me Your will. Amen.

DAY 10

The Coach I Thought Was Trying to Kill Me

> *We can rejoice, too, when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they help us develop endurance. And endurance develops strength of character, and character strengthens our confident hope of salvation.*
>
> **Romans 5:3–4**

When I showed up for college football as a wide-eyed freshman, I met the strength coach. He was a mountain of a man who rarely cracked a smile, and the upperclassmen spoke about his workouts in hushed tones.

There were days I honestly thought he was trying to kill me. My muscles ached, my lungs burned, and some days I could barely walk. And he never let up. He saw something in me that I couldn't see in myself yet.

Year by year I got stronger, faster and tougher. But I didn't fully understand what he had done for me until my fourth year in the NFL. On a humid afternoon at a team facility, I looked across the field and there he was, consulting for NFL teams and pushing a group of rookies with the same intensity I remembered. Our eyes met. A rare smile tugged at his mouth, and we hugged. In that silent moment, I understood. He hadn't been trying to break me. He had been building me.

Here is what I learned in that weight room. When you lift weights, you don't need the weights to assist you. You need them to resist you. A bar that weighs nothing builds nothing.

God works the same way. Paul says we can rejoice in trials because they build endurance, and endurance builds character. The resistance is the

point. When we treat every heavy thing in our lives as an enemy, we end up praying for lighter weights and wondering why we never grow.

Looking back, I realized my real enemy was never that coach. It was the limits I put on myself because I wasn't willing to push myself the way he was willing to push me.

Almost right: The one who makes it hard on me must be against me.
Right: The resistance may be the very thing God is using to build me.

You don't need the weights to assist you. You need them to resist you.

FOR THE ROAD

What "heavy weight" in your life might be building strength you'll need later?

Lord, You are the best trainer I'll ever have. When it's heavy, help me trust that You're building me, not breaking me. Amen.

WEEK 2

Together

Meet once after Day 10. Let everyone answer the first question before moving on, and leave room for silence.

1. **Open:** Read Ecclesiastes 3:1–8 aloud. Which line in that list best describes your life right now?
2. **Day 6:** Have you ever "declared war" on a season, like Dena? What happened? What might winter have been trying to teach you?
3. **Day 7:** Share an ending you first saw as a failure. Looking back, how was God turning the calendar?
4. **Day 8:** Of the people in the waiting room (Abraham, Moses, David, Anna, Jesus), whose story encourages you most, and why?
5. **Day 9:** Are you more naturally an "instant faith" person or an "enduring faith" person? What does the other kind of faith look like for you?
6. **Day 10:** Who in your life pushed you hard and turned out to be for you? How might God be doing that now?

Practice together: Have each person name one situation they're facing. As a group, ask together: Is this a season to push, or a season to stay planted? Is God asking for instant faith or enduring faith? Don't rush to fix it. Simply help each other listen.

Pray: Pray Isaiah 40:31 over each person by name: "Lord, as _____ waits on You, renew their strength."

WEEK 3

The Refiner’s Fire

The fire is purification, not punishment; it trains us, and the real question is whether we stay on board.

DAY 11

The Refiner’s Fire Train

I have refined you, but not as silver is refined. Rather, I have refined you in the furnace of suffering.

Isaiah 48:10

God once showed me a picture of a train heading toward eternity, its engine blazing with holy fire. “This is My Refiner’s Fire train,” He said. “It’s for those who want all of Me.”

The passengers climbed aboard with tears and cheers, ready to change the world. They sang about following the Lamb wherever He leads. But as the train rolled on, the heat rose, and so did the cost. Disappointment scarred their skin. Rejection rattled their bones. Some lost friends along the way.

Then the train pulled into a city called Comfort, Compromise and Convenience, and a crowd stumbled off. “This isn’t what we signed up for,” they said. “Where’s the blessing? Where’s the easy victory?”

The ones who stayed huddled together, bandaging each other’s wounds. “Don’t quit now,” they told one another. “The pain is purifying us.” And when the train finally reached the edge of heaven, the doors flew open into a light where every tear made sense.

Most of us love Jeremiah 29:11: “‘For I know the plans I have for you,’ says the LORD. ‘They are plans for good and not for disaster.’” It’s a true promise. But if that’s the only verse we know, we’ll get off the train at the first hard stop. The same God who has good plans for us is also “a devouring fire” (Hebrews 12:29). His plans don’t go around the fire. They go through it.

Too many of us want a Jesus who heals our wounds without asking us to pick up our cross. We want revival without repentance, power without persecution, and a crown without a cross.

But God's fire isn't here to punish you. It's here to consume what doesn't belong and purify what does, until nothing is left but a desperate love for Jesus.

Almost right: God has good plans for me, so this fire must be a mistake.

Right: God's good plans for me run straight through His refining fire.

We want revival without repentance, power without persecution, and a crown without a cross.

FOR THE ROAD

Is there a "Comfort, Compromise and Convenience" stop where you've been tempted to get off the train?

Jesus, I want all of You, even when it costs me. Keep me on board, and let Your fire burn away everything in me that isn't love for You. Amen.

DAY 12

Karate Kid Christianity

Do not despise these small beginnings, for the LORD rejoices to see the work begin.

Zechariah 4:10

In *The Karate Kid*, a bullied teenager named Daniel begs an old maintenance man, Mr. Miyagi, to teach him karate. Miyagi agrees. Then he hands Daniel a sponge and a row of cars. “Wax on, wax off.” The next day it’s sanding the deck. Then painting the fence. Days of chores that seem to have nothing to do with fighting.

Finally Daniel explodes. He thinks he’s being used as free labor. So Miyagi starts throwing punches, and to Daniel’s shock, his arms block every one. The waxing, the sanding and the painting had been drilling defensive moves into him the whole time. Repetition had built muscle memory, until the right move came without even thinking.

Many believers are living in the middle of that movie, and they’re frustrated. They expected a stage and got a mop. They wanted to preach and got the nursery. They asked for a ministry and got a newborn, a hard boss or a small group of five people. It feels like a waste of a calling.

But God doesn’t waste a season. When Jeremiah complained, the Lord asked him, “If racing against mere men makes you tired, how will you race against horses?” (Jeremiah 12:5). The small things are where the big things are built.

Think about Noah. Before there was ever an ark, how many small skills did he need to learn over the years? How to cut timber. How to measure. How to seal wood with pitch. How to keep working when no one around

him believed. None of those lessons looked like world-saving at the time. All of them were.

The small, repetitive assignment in front of you may be the very thing God is using to build reflexes you'll need in the battle ahead.

Almost right: These small, repetitive tasks are keeping me from my calling.

Right: These small, repetitive tasks are training me for my calling.

Wax on, wax off: there is a reason for your season.

FOR THE ROAD

What "wax on, wax off" assignment have you been resenting that God might be using to train you?

Lord, forgive me for despising small beginnings. Train my hands in the quiet places, so I'm ready when You call me into the battle. Amen.

DAY 13

Enemies Left in the Land

These are the nations that the LORD left in the land to test those Israelites who had not experienced the wars of Canaan. He did this to teach warfare to generations of Israelites who had no experience in battle.

Judges 3:1–2

Here is a verse most of us skip. After Joshua's generation conquered Canaan, God deliberately left some enemy nations in the land. Why? So the next generation, who had only *heard* about the battles, would learn how to fight.

That's a strange idea for modern believers. We tend to treat every hardship the same way. If it's hard, it must be the devil, and if it's the devil, I need to rebuke it. But sometimes God leaves enemies in the land to teach us the art of war.

Parents understand this better than anyone. Our instinct is to shield our children from every scrape and disappointment. Love wants to protect. But a wise parent knows that a child who has never faced a battle will one day face one unprepared. So good parents do more than protect. They prepare. They let their kids wrestle with things they can handle while they're still close enough to help.

God is the perfect Father, and He does the same with us. There is a difference between information and experience. You can read every book about warfare and still freeze the first time you see an enemy. Israel's new generation had plenty of stories. What they lacked was experience. David could praise the God who "trains my hands for war and gives my fingers skill for battle" (Psalm 144:1) because he had spent years actually fighting.

So before you rebuke the next hard thing in your path, ask a different question. Is this an attack to resist, or a classroom to learn in? Some battles are in front of you because God trusts you to grow through them.

Almost right: Every hard thing in my path is an attack I need to rebuke.
Right: Some hard things are left in my path to train me for battle.

Hard and unpleasant may not always be from the devil.

FOR THE ROAD

What "enemy in the land" might God be using to teach you something you couldn't learn from a book?

Father, train my hands for battle. Give me wisdom to know what to resist and what to learn from, and help me prepare those I love, not just protect them. Amen.

DAY 14

The Treat or the Treasure

It was by faith that Moses, when he grew up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter. He chose to share the oppression of God's people instead of enjoying the fleeting pleasures of sin. He thought it was better to suffer for the sake of Christ than to own the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking ahead to his great reward.

Hebrews 11:24–26

Picture Moses at forty. He has grown up in the most powerful palace on earth. He has the best food, the best education and a royal name. Every door in Egypt opens for him. By any measure, he has been blessed.

And he walks away from all of it.

The writer of Hebrews tells us why. Moses looked at the pleasures of the palace and saw that they were "fleeting." He looked at the suffering of God's people and saw something better: treasure. Not because pain is good in itself, but because he "was looking ahead to his great reward."

That's the choice in front of every believer, again and again. There is the *treat* of temporary pleasure, and there is the *treasure* of temporary pain. The treat is sweet right now and empty later. The treasure costs something now and lasts forever.

Here's what makes this hard. The treat rarely looks like sin. For Moses, it looked like a privilege God had placed in his lap. Surely God wanted him to stay in the palace and use his influence. That's almost right. But Moses knew whose people he belonged to.

Paul made the same trade. He said our "present troubles are small and won't last very long. Yet they produce for us a glory that vastly outweighs them and will last forever" (2 Corinthians 4:17). He wasn't

pretending the troubles didn't hurt. He was doing the math with eternity in it.

Facing trials and discipline on this side of eternity is a mercy. The refining fire is hot, but it's preparing us for a reward no palace could offer.

Almost right: God opened this palace door, so I should enjoy everything inside.

Right: God may open the palace door to see if I'll choose His people and His reward.

Choose the treasure of temporary pain over the treat of temporary pleasure.

FOR THE ROAD

What "treat" are you holding onto that might be costing you a "treasure"?

Lord, give me Moses' eyes. Help me see past what is fleeting to the reward that lasts, and give me courage to choose it. Amen.

DAY 15

But Even If He Doesn’t

> *If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God whom we serve is able to save us. He will rescue us from your power, Your Majesty. But even if he doesn’t, we want to make it clear to you, Your Majesty, that we will never serve your gods or worship the gold statue you have set up.*
>
> **Daniel 3:17–18**

Three young men stand before the most powerful king on earth. The whole empire has bowed to the golden statue, and they are still standing. Behind the king, the furnace roars, heated seven times hotter than usual.

Their answer is one of the bravest sentences in the Bible. *Our God is able to save us. But even if He doesn’t, we will not bow.*

Notice what they didn’t say. They didn’t say, “If we have enough faith, we won’t burn.” They had settled the question long before they reached the furnace door: God is worth it, with or without the rescue.

And look at what happened. God didn’t keep them out of the fire. He met them in it. The king looked into the flames and shouted, “I see four men, unbound, walking around in the fire unharmed!” (Daniel 3:25). The only things that burned were the ropes.

When we’re in a trial, we face a choice. We can stare at the process of our pain, counting every degree of heat. Or we can take the seat God has given us, for He “raised us from the dead along with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms” (Ephesians 2:6), and see the same furnace from above. From the ground it looks like punishment. From the throne it looks like preparation.

The fire you're in may be the very place God is preparing you for what comes next. It is a privilege to be prepared.

Almost right: If my faith is strong enough, God will keep me out of the fire.

Right: God is able to keep me out of the fire, and even if He doesn't, I will not bow.

You can focus on the process of your pain, or see the privilege of being prepared.

FOR THE ROAD

What would change if you settled today that God is worth it, even if He doesn't rescue you the way you want?

God, You are able. And even if You don't do it my way, I will not bow to anything but You. Meet me in the fire, and burn away whatever binds me. Amen.

WEEK 3

Together

Meet once after Day 15. Keep the conversation honest; the fire is easier to talk about than to be in. If someone is in a furnace right now, slow down and listen before you answer.

1. **Open:** Read Isaiah 48:10 aloud. How is being refined different from being punished?
2. **Day 11:** Where is your "Comfort, Compromise and Convenience" stop? What has helped you stay on the train?
3. **Day 12:** Share a "wax on, wax off" season. What did God build in you that you only saw later?
4. **Day 13:** Parents and mentors: where are you protecting when you should be preparing? Everyone: what "enemy in the land" has trained you?
5. **Day 14:** What palace door has looked like a blessing but might be a test?
6. **Day 15:** Finish this sentence honestly: "God is able to _____, but even if He doesn't, I will _____."

Practice together: Have each person name one fire they're in. Then, as a group, look at it "from the throne." What might God be preparing in this person? What might the fire be burning away? Speak it out with care, and don't offer quick fixes.

Pray: Pray Daniel 3:17–18 together, then ask the fourth Man in the fire to walk with each person this week.

WEEK 4

The Crushing

What the fire starts, the winepress finishes: crushing, hiddenness and weakness turn grapes into new wine.

DAY 16

Refreshing or New Wine?

He cuts off every branch of mine that doesn't produce fruit, and he prunes the branches that do bear fruit so they will produce even more.

John 15:2

A grape is a good thing. It's sweet, it's healthy, and it's refreshing on a hot day. But a grape left as a grape will be gone in a week. Its true potential is only unlocked when it becomes wine.

Follow the grape's path. First it's cleansed, washed of dirt and impurities. Then it's cut from the vine. Then comes the hard part: it's crushed. Only under that pressure does it release what was inside. Finally it's contained, sealed away in the dark to age. No grape gets to choose its crushing. Most of the time, it seems the crushing chooses the grape.

Notice which branches Jesus says the Father prunes. Not the dead ones. Those are cut off. He prunes "the branches that *do* bear fruit." That's what makes this season so confusing. You're doing well. You're serving, loving and bearing fruit. And it feels like you're being punished for it. No good deed goes unpunished, we say.

Here's the almost right thought: *I'm already fruitful. I'm already a blessing. Why would God crush me now?* Because God wants more than refreshing. He wants new wine.

On the day of Pentecost, the Spirit was poured out, and some in the crowd laughed, "They're just drunk, that's all!" (Acts 2:13). The disciples had become new wine. They carried something that changed everyone who came near them. That didn't happen in spite of the

crushing of the cross and the long wait in the upper room. It happened through it.

Even Jesus walked this road. “It was the LORD’s good plan to crush him and cause him grief” (Isaiah 53:10). And out of that crushing came the wine of the new covenant.

If you’re being pressed right now, it may be because God sees something inside you worth releasing.

Almost right: I already bear good fruit, so I shouldn’t need the press.
Right: Because I bear fruit, God presses me so I’ll become new wine.

No grape gets to choose its crushing.

FOR THE ROAD

Where is God pressing you in an area where you’re already bearing fruit?

Lord, I don’t want to stay merely refreshing. Press out of me whatever You’ve placed inside, and make me new wine that carries Your presence. Amen.

DAY 17

Forty Days or Forty Years?

I will lead her into the wilderness and speak tenderly to her there. I will return her vineyards to her and transform the Valley of Trouble into a gateway of hope.

Hosea 2:14–15

The Bible tells about two famous wildernesses.

In one, Jesus, "full of the Holy Spirit," was "led by the Spirit in the wilderness" (Luke 4:1). He was tested for forty days, answered every temptation with the Word, and came out in the power of the Spirit.

In the other, Israel wandered forty years. God had led them out of Egypt, but when they reached the edge of the Promised Land, they refused to go in. What should have been a short trip became a generation-long detour. Hebrews says simply, "because of their unbelief they were not able to enter his rest" (Hebrews 3:19).

There is a Spirit-led wilderness called obedience, and a self-inflicted wilderness called disobedience. But here's what surprises me: the goal of both is the same. God wants intimacy. He wants to quiet the noise of this world in our hearts until His voice is the loudest one we hear. Hosea says God leads His people into the wilderness to "speak tenderly" there.

That's why the almost right idea is so dangerous. Israel thought that because they had left Egypt, they were free. But there's a difference between being freed from Egypt physically and being freed from Egypt in your heart. They had left the place, but they kept the slave's mindset. Every hardship made them want to go back.

You will face a wilderness. The question is how long you'll stay. Will it be forty days or forty years? Much depends on what we do with the

voice that speaks to us there.

And even if you've been wandering for years, there is hope. God promises to turn the Valley of Trouble into a gateway of hope. The wilderness can still become the place where you fall in love with Him again.

Almost right: God brought me out of Egypt, so I'm free.
Right: God brought me out of Egypt so He could bring Egypt out of my heart.

There is a Spirit-led wilderness called obedience and a self-inflicted wilderness called disobedience, but the goal of both is intimacy.

FOR THE ROAD

Is there an "Egypt" you've left physically but still carry in your heart?

Father, speak tenderly to me in this wilderness. Free my heart, not just my circumstances, and turn my Valley of Trouble into a gateway of hope. Amen.

DAY 18

Necessary Hiddenness

> *I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat is planted in the soil and dies, it remains alone. But its death will produce many new kernels—a plentiful harvest of new lives.*
>
> **John 12:24**

Hold a seed in your hand and you're holding a tree. You can't see it. Nothing about that small brown shell looks like branches and shade. But it's in there. And the only way it comes out is if the seed is buried in the dark.

A caterpillar works the same way. To become a butterfly, it has to disappear into a cocoon. From the outside, nothing seems to be happening. Inside, everything is changing. Carbon is the same. Put it under enough pressure for enough time, and something precious and strong is formed.

Each of these pictures has a hidden season built into it. And most of us hate hidden seasons.

When we're buried, it's easy to believe we've been forgotten. The phone stops ringing. The doors stop opening. Others are being used, promoted and celebrated while we sit in the dark. We start to wonder if God has set us on a shelf.

But Jesus said the seed has to fall into the ground and die before it can produce a harvest. The burial isn't the end of the story. It's where the transformation happens. Paul said our real life "is hidden with Christ in God" (Colossians 3:3). Hidden doesn't mean lost. It means kept.

Some of the greatest work God will ever do in you will happen where nobody can see it. He isn't ashamed of you. He is protecting the process.

The same God who conceals a tree within a tiny seed and a butterfly within a humble caterpillar is the God who hides His resurrection power within the process of divine crushing. If you're in the dark right now, take heart. You've been planted.

Almost right: If I'm hidden, I must be forgotten.
Right: If I'm hidden, I'm being transformed.

The God who hides a tree in a seed hides resurrection power in your crushing.

FOR THE ROAD

Where do you feel buried or forgotten? What might God be forming there?

Lord, I trust You in the dark. Keep me hidden as long as You need to, and bring out of me the life You've planted. Amen.

DAY 19

The Burning Hut

“For just as the heavens are higher than the earth, so my ways are higher than your ways and my thoughts higher than your thoughts.”

Isaiah 55:9

There’s an old story about a man who was shipwrecked on a small island. Every day he prayed for God to send someone to rescue him, and every day no one came. Over the months he built a little hut and stored everything he had inside it.

One day he came back from hunting to find the hut in flames. Everything he owned was going up in smoke. He shook his fist at heaven and cursed God for letting it happen. Later he was on his knees, weeping, when he looked up and saw a ship coming toward the island.

When he got on board, he asked the captain how they had found him. The captain said they had been sailing past when they noticed a column of smoke on the horizon, and they came to see what it was.

One of the greatest deceptions we can fall into is believing we understand how God should love us. We think we know what we need. We think we know what rescue should look like. So when God allows something we would never choose, we decide He isn’t loving us well.

But God’s love is better than our definition of it. His ways are higher than ours, as high as the heavens are above the earth. That doesn’t mean everything that hurts is good. It means we’re not the best judges of what love looks like in the moment the hut is burning.

“Trust in the LORD with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding” (Proverbs 3:5). That takes humility. It means admitting

that I don’t fully know what I need, and repenting of the quiet self-worship that tells God how to run my life.

Sometimes the thing you’re grieving is the very smoke that brings the ship.

Almost right: If God loved me, He wouldn’t let this burn.

Right: God loves me better than I know how to ask, even when the smoke rises.

One of the greatest deceptions is believing we understand how God should love us.

FOR THE ROAD

Where have you been telling God how He should love you?

Father, Your love is higher than mine. When I can’t understand what You’re doing, help me trust who You are. Amen.

DAY 20

The Widow's Oil

Each time he said, "My grace is all you need. My power works best in weakness." So now I am glad to boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ can work through me.

2 Corinthians 12:9

A widow came to the prophet Elisha in desperate trouble. Her husband had been a faithful man, but he died in debt, and now the creditor was coming to take her two sons as slaves. Elisha asked her a simple question: "What do you have in the house?"

"Nothing at all," she said, "except a flask of olive oil" (2 Kings 4:2).

Nothing at all, except. That's where most of us are when God starts to move.

Elisha told her to borrow as many empty jars as she could find, shut the door, and start pouring. She poured, and the oil kept flowing. Jar after jar filled up until her son said there were no more jars. Then the oil stopped. Elisha told her to sell it, pay her debts, and live on what was left (2 Kings 4:7).

Here's what moves me about that story. The same oil that paid her debt became the same oil that sustained her for the rest of her life. God didn't just get her out of trouble. He provided from the very thing she thought was nothing.

The world's way is to get strong so you won't be weak anymore. But in the upside-down Kingdom, the first are last and the last are first. God doesn't wait for us to outgrow our weakness. He fills it.

That's what Paul learned with his thorn. He begged God three times to take it away. God answered, "My grace is all you need. My power

works best in weakness." Paul stopped hiding his weakness and started boasting in it, because that's where Christ's power showed up.

Your small jar may be the only container God needs. Bring Him what you have, and bring Him empty jars.

Almost right: God will make me strong so I won't be weak anymore.

Right: God shows His strength in my weakness, so I can stop hiding it.

In the world you want strength from weakness, but in the Kingdom there is strength in weakness.

FOR THE ROAD

What "nothing at all, except" do you have in your house right now?

Lord, here is my small jar. I bring You my weakness instead of hiding it. Pour Your power through what I have, and let Your grace be enough. Amen.

WEEK 4

Together

Meet once after Day 20. This week touches tender places, so let people pass on a question if they need to.

1. **Open:** Read John 15:1–2 aloud. Why do you think the Father prunes the branches that are already bearing fruit?
2. **Day 16:** Of the four stages of the grape (cleansing, cutting, crushing, containing), which one are you in right now?
3. **Day 17:** Is there an "Egypt" you've left physically but still carry in your heart? What keeps you circling?
4. **Day 18:** Share a hidden season that turned out to be a season of transformation.
5. **Day 19:** Have you ever been angry at God over a "burning hut" that later became your rescue?
6. **Day 20:** What small jar do you have in your house? What would it look like to bring it to God this week?

Practice together: Bring a small jar or cup to the meeting and set it in the middle. Have each person name one weakness they've been hiding and one small thing they can offer God this week. Pray for the people on either side of you to see God's power in what they think is nothing.

Pray: Pray 2 Corinthians 12:9 together: "Lord, Your grace is all we need. Let Your power work best in our weakness."

WEEK 5

Diagnosing the Storm

What you misdiagnose you will mistreat: name the source, see the squeeze, choose the response.

DAY 21

The Operating Table or the Chopping Block

If it is true that you look favorably on me, let me know your ways so I may understand you more fully and continue to enjoy your favor.

Exodus 33:13

Moses had watched the plagues fall on Egypt, the sea split open and bread fall from the sky. If anyone could have asked God for more miracles, it was Moses. Instead, he asked for something else: “Let me know your ways.”

Why? I believe Moses understood how much depends on knowing what God is doing. When you’re lying on a table and someone is holding a knife, it matters a great deal whether you’re on the operating table of the Great Physician or on Satan’s chopping block. The pain might feel the same. The response should be completely different.

What you misdiagnose, you will mistreat. Yet many of us handle every storm the same way. Every hard thing gets the same response: rebuke it, bind it, push through it. Or, for others: accept it, endure it, call it God’s will.

When a storm hits, the first question is not “How do I get out?” It’s “Where did this come from?” Storms can come from several places. Sometimes God is testing or training us. Sometimes the devil is attacking. Sometimes we simply live in a fallen world where bodies break and accidents happen. Sometimes people hurt us. And sometimes, if we’re honest, the storm has our own fingerprints all over it.

Each source calls for a different response. You resist the devil. You submit to God. You grieve what a fallen world takes. You forgive people. And you repent of your own part. Get the source wrong, and

you'll find yourself rebuking what you should repent of, or accepting what you should resist.

You cannot conquer what you will not confront, and you cannot confront what you will not identify. So before you fight, ask. Like Moses, ask God to show you His ways.

Almost right: Every storm gets the same response: rebuke it and push through.
Right: First I ask God where this storm came from, then I respond.

What you misdiagnose, you will mistreat.

FOR THE ROAD

Think of the storm you're in. Which of the five sources (God, the devil, a fallen world, people or me) is most likely behind it?

Lord, show me Your ways. Give me eyes to see where this storm came from, and the courage to respond the way You want me to. Amen.

DAY 22

The “Fire of God” That Wasn’t

> *While he was still speaking, another messenger arrived with this news: “The fire of God has fallen from heaven and burned up your sheep and all the shepherds. I am the only one who escaped to tell you.”*
>
> **Job 1:16**

Job’s servants come running, one after another, each with worse news than the last. Raiders took the oxen. Raiders took the camels. A wind collapsed the house on his children. And in the middle of it all, one servant says, “The fire of God has fallen from heaven.”

But we have something that servant didn’t have. We’ve read the earlier verses. We know that Satan came before the Lord and asked to strike everything Job had. We know the Lord allowed it with a limit: “Do whatever you want with everything he possesses, but don’t harm him physically” (Job 1:12). Then “Satan left the LORD’s presence,” and the disasters began.

The servant called it the fire of God. It was the work of the enemy.

God was sovereign over Job’s storm. Nothing happened outside His permission. But permission isn’t the same as authorship. The servant saw fire from the sky and gave God the credit for what the thief had done.

We still do this. A sickness, a ruined relationship, a spirit of fear that settles on a family, and we shrug and say, “I guess it’s God’s will.” It sounds humble. It sounds surrendered. But Jesus drew a clear line: “The thief’s purpose is to steal and kill and destroy. My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life” (John 10:10).

There is a danger on both sides. One mistake fights the Physician. The other welcomes the thief.

Discernment matters. When you know the source, you know when to say "Your will be done" and when to "resist the devil, and he will flee from you" (James 4:7).

Almost right: Whatever happens to me must be God's will, so I'll accept it.
Right: God is sovereign over everything, but I won't call the thief's work His will.

You cannot resist and bind up God, and you should not accept and tolerate the will of the devil because you think it's God's divine will.

FOR THE ROAD

Is there anything in your life you've accepted as "God's will" that might actually be something to resist?

Father, You are sovereign, and You are good. Give me discernment to know what to receive from Your hand and what to resist in Your name. Amen.

DAY 23

“You Broke My Leg”

For the LORD disciplines those he loves, and he punishes each one he accepts as his child.

Hebrews 12:6

When my son was seven, I spanked him. He looked up at me with complete conviction and said, “You don’t hurt your family. I am your family.” Then, for good measure, he added, “You broke my leg.”

Of course, his leg wasn’t broken. But his confusion was real. In his mind, there was no way a father who loved him could choose to let him feel pain. Love and hurt couldn’t live in the same house.

Many of us talk to God the same way. When His discipline comes, we take it as betrayal. *If You loved me, You wouldn’t let this hurt. You’re supposed to be on my side. You broke my leg.*

Every parent knows the old line: “This is going to hurt me more than it’s going to hurt you.” Children never believe it. But it’s often true. A loving father doesn’t enjoy correcting his child. He does it because he sees where the child is headed and loves him too much to leave him there.

Hebrews says the Lord disciplines those He loves. His correction is evidence that we belong to Him. “No discipline is enjoyable while it is happening—it’s painful! But afterward there will be a peaceful harvest of right living for those who are trained in this way” (Hebrews 12:11).

Not all storms are authored by God, but all storms are filtered by Him. And sometimes He sends one, not to destroy His people, but to refine them, to bring them to honest reflection, and to restore them to closeness with Him.

That’s the hard part to see from the inside. Often, when God is developing us, it can feel like He is destroying us. The purpose of His discipline is never to break the relationship. It’s to restore us, renew our minds, and make us faithful to what He has planned.

Almost right: If my Father really loved me, He would never let it hurt.
Right: My Father loves me too much to leave me untrained.

When God is developing us, it can feel like He is destroying us.

FOR THE ROAD

Where have you been reading God’s correction as rejection?

Father, thank You for loving me enough to correct me. When it hurts, help me trust Your heart, and let Your discipline produce a harvest of right living in me. Amen.

DAY 24

Storms Come to the Obedient

> *Jesus was sleeping at the back of the boat with his head on a cushion. The disciples woke him up, shouting, "Teacher, don't you care that we're going to drown?"*
>
> **Mark 4:38**

The disciples didn't get into that storm by running from God. They got into it by obeying Him.

It was Jesus who said, "Let's cross to the other side of the lake" (Mark 4:35). They did exactly what He told them to do. And halfway across, a fierce storm came up, waves broke over the boat, and it began to fill with water. Meanwhile, Jesus was asleep on a cushion.

Jonah hit a storm because he ran from God. The disciples hit a storm because they followed Him. From inside the boat, both storms looked the same.

Many believers carry a quiet assumption: *If I obey God, I won't have to suffer.* When the storm comes anyway, we're confused. We think we must have missed God somewhere. But Jesus never promised that. In His story of the two builders, both houses got hit by the same rain, the same floods and the same winds. The difference was that one stood "because it is built on bedrock" (Matthew 7:25). Whether we obey or not, storms are promised. Obedience doesn't keep the storm away. It keeps the house standing.

Notice the disciples' cry: "Don't you care?" That's what storms do. They squeeze out what's really in us. Their fear revealed what they believed about Jesus. After He calmed the sea, He asked, "Why are you afraid? Do you still have no faith?" (Mark 4:40).

Jesus either calms the storm, or He wants to calm you through the storm. Sometimes He speaks to the wind. Sometimes He speaks to you. Either way, the storm around you doesn't have to produce a storm within you.

He was sleeping because He wasn't afraid. And He was in the boat with them the whole time.

Almost right: If I'm obeying God, I won't face storms.

Right: Obedience may lead me into the storm, but never without Jesus in the boat.

Jesus either calms the storm, or He wants to calm you through the storm.

FOR THE ROAD

Jesus sleeps through some storms. Do you?

Jesus, You are in my boat. When the waves rise, quiet the storm inside me, and teach me to rest where You rest. Amen.

DAY 25

Do You Know How to Ascend?

David was now in great danger because all his men were very bitter about losing their sons and daughters, and they began to talk of stoning him. But David found strength in the LORD his God.

1 Samuel 30:6

David and his men came home to Ziklag and found it burned to the ground. Their wives and children had been taken captive. These hardened warriors wept until they had no strength left to weep. Then their grief turned to rage, and they started talking about stoning David.

It was one of the lowest points of David's life. And the Bible says David "found strength in the LORD his God."

How do you do that when everything is on fire? You go up.

Psalm 2 opens with the nations raging and rulers plotting against the Lord. If you only read the first three verses, it's terrifying. Then verse 4 lifts your eyes: "But the one who rules in heaven laughs" (Psalm 2:4). Corey Russell calls this "the Father's perspective on the same reality." Same plot. Same rage. Seen from the throne.

That laughter isn't careless. It is the confidence of a righteous Judge who knows the enemy will not overturn His eternal plan. In the storm, we need to feel the weight of the first verses. But we also need the heavenly view of verse 4.

Jesus still extends the invitation John heard: "Come up here, and I will show you" (Revelation 4:1). John saw a throne and living creatures who never stop singing "Holy, holy, holy." Nothing in heaven was panicking.

A line often credited to Rick Joyner says it well: "The peace of God is not freedom from conflict; it is confidence in God during conflict." We

see our way through storms when we see who sits on the throne, high above every power and authority.

So here is the question of the hour: Do you know how to ascend? Do you know how to get above your storm long enough to see it the way your Father does?

Almost right: Peace means the conflict is finally over.
Right: Peace means I can see who sits on the throne in the middle of it.

Godly laughter in the midst of earthly storms is heavenly confidence.

FOR THE ROAD

Are you focused on your earthly circumstance, or on a heavenly perspective of your problem?

Father, lift my eyes to Your throne. Let me see my Ziklag from where You sit, and fill me with Your confidence until I can laugh with You. Amen.

WEEK 5

Together

Meet once after Day 25. Many in your group may be in a storm right now, so listen first and resist the urge to diagnose anyone else's storm for them.

1. **Open:** Read Mark 4:35–41 aloud. Who sent this storm? What did it reveal about the disciples?
2. **Day 21:** Share a time you misdiagnosed a storm. What changed when you saw its real source?
3. **Day 22:** What have Christians sometimes called "God's will" that might be the thief's work? Where's the balance?
4. **Day 23:** How did your earthly father's discipline shape the way you hear God's correction? Where do you need healing in that picture?
5. **Day 24:** When did obedience lead you into a storm instead of away from one? What did you learn about Jesus there?
6. **Day 25:** What helps you "ascend" and see your situation from the throne?

Practice together: Walk through the three diagnosis questions with one person's storm (with their permission): Where did it come from? What is it squeezing or revealing? What response is God asking for: repentance, stillness, endurance, worship or patience? Then let each person do the same quietly for their own storm.

Pray: Pray Psalm 2:4 and Revelation 4:1 together: "Father, lift us up to see what You see."

WEEK 6

Permission to Have a Process

Refining is not numbness: honest pain held inside unchanging truth, with grace for our own process and for others'.

DAY 26

Biblical Feelings, Biblical Facts

Yet I still dare to hope when I remember this: The faithful love of the LORD never ends! His mercies never cease. Great is his faithfulness; his mercies begin afresh each morning.

Lamentations 3:21–23

Picture a man sitting in the ashes of his city. The walls are down, the Temple is burned, and the people he warned for years are dragged off in chains. By long tradition that man is Jeremiah, and the book he left us is called Lamentations.

Read the chapter around today's verse and you'll be surprised how honest it is. He says God has pierced him with arrows, filled him with bitterness and trampled him in the dust. He says his hope in the Lord is gone. That is in your Bible.

Then, right in the middle of the ashes, he turns: "Yet I still dare to hope when I remember this." His circumstances haven't changed. His feelings haven't fully changed. What changes is what he chooses to remember.

That is the balance this season asks of us. Some believers stuff their pain because they think strong faith never says, "This hurts." Others let their pain write their theology, and whatever they feel becomes what they believe about God. Both are almost right. Scripture gives us a third way: biblical feelings held inside biblical facts.

The Psalms do this again and again. "O LORD, how long will you forget me?" (Psalm 13:1). Then a few verses later, the same writer is trusting and singing. God isn't threatened by your honesty. He wrote

lament into His Word so you'd know you are allowed to bring the real thing to Him.

So feel it, and say it to Him. Then, before you get up, remember what is still true: His love has not ended, and His mercies are new this morning.

Almost right: Strong faith keeps a brave face, or else lets the pain say what's true.
Right: I tell God exactly how it feels, then I remind my soul what is still true.

Give your feelings a voice, but never give them the final word.

FOR THE ROAD

What feeling have you been hiding from God, and what truth do you need to remember alongside it?

Lord, You already know what I feel, so I won't pretend with You. Hear my honest prayer, and then remind my heart that Your mercies are new this morning. Amen.

DAY 27

Don’t Lower Your Theology to Match Your Pain

Let us hold tightly without wavering to the hope we affirm, for God can be trusted to keep his promise.

Hebrews 10:23

God had promised Israel a land flowing with milk and honey. Twelve men went in to scout it, and all twelve saw the same fruit and the same fortified cities. Ten came back with a new report: “We even saw giants there… Next to them we felt like grasshoppers” (Numbers 13:33).

Notice what happened. The promise didn’t change. The giants simply looked bigger than the promise, so ten men quietly shrank the promise down to the size of their fear. A whole generation followed them. Joshua and Caleb saw the same giants. They simply measured them against God instead of against themselves: “The LORD is with us! Don’t be afraid of them!” (Numbers 14:9).

Every refining season has a gap in it. On one side is what God said. On the other side are the giants in the land called our problems. And in that gap, pain, frustration and disappointment tempt us to lower our theology to match our pain.

It rarely sounds like unbelief. It sounds mature. *Maybe God doesn’t really heal anymore. Maybe that promise was just for back then. Maybe I heard Him wrong.* We trim the promise until it fits our disappointment, and we call it being realistic. But a faith built that way is more about coping with letdown than trusting the God who spoke.

Scripture is honest about the ache. “Hope deferred makes the heart sick” (Proverbs 13:12). You’re allowed to feel sick at heart. But you’re not

allowed to let the sickness rewrite the promise.

The writer of Hebrews doesn't say hold on because things look good. He says hold on because of who made the promise. God can be trusted. Your circumstances are a report. His Word is the final word.

Almost right: Adjusting what I believe so I won't be disappointed again.

Right: Holding tightly to what God said, because He is faithful even when I can't see it yet.

When the promise and the problem disagree, don't shrink the promise.

FOR THE ROAD

Is there a promise of God you've quietly downsized to protect yourself from disappointment?

Father, forgive me for the times I've made You smaller to make my pain make sense. I choose to hold on to Your Word, because You keep Your promises. Amen.

DAY 28

Under the Broom Tree

Then the angel of the LORD came again and touched him and said, "Get up and eat some more, or the journey ahead will be too much for you."

1 Kings 19:7

Elijah had just called down fire on Mount Carmel. It was one of the greatest victories in the Old Testament. A few days later, he was alone in the wilderness under a broom tree, asking to die. "I have had enough, LORD," he said (1 Kings 19:4).

That shocks some of us. How can a man of such faith fall so low, so fast? But James reminds us that "Elijah was as human as we are" (James 5:17). Great faith doesn't make you immune to exhaustion, fear or despair.

Now look at how God responded. No lecture. No rebuke for a lack of faith. He sent an angel with bread baked on hot stones and a jar of water, and He let His prophet sleep. Then He did it again. Only after Elijah's body was cared for did God speak, and when He did, it wasn't in the wind, the earthquake or the fire, but in "a gentle whisper" (1 Kings 19:12).

God's response to Elijah was compassionate and whole. He cared for his body, his rest and his spirit.

Many believers quietly believe they have to have it all together to belong. They hide their anxiety or depression because it doesn't match the picture of a victorious Christian. So they suffer in silence and wonder whether there is a place for them in the church. Elijah's story says there is.

If you're in a dark place, especially if you've had thoughts of not wanting to live, please tell someone today: a pastor, a trusted friend, a doctor or a counselor. Asking for help is not a failure of faith. Sometimes it's the bread on the hot stones.

Almost right: If I really trusted God, I wouldn't be struggling like this.
Right: God meets me in the struggle with bread, rest and a gentle whisper.

God gives grace for the process, not just for the finish line.

FOR THE ROAD

What would it look like to let God, and the people He has put around you, care for you this week?

Father, thank You that You don't shame me when I'm at the end of myself. Feed me, give me rest and speak gently to me again. Amen.

DAY 29

“You Know What Your Problem Is?”

Always be humble and gentle. Be patient with each other, making allowance for each other’s faults because of your love.

Ephesians 4:2

A couple of months after I retired from football, God whispered a question to me: “You know what your problem is?”

He started with something I thought was a strength. I had taken the blueprint that made me successful in the NFL and was putting it to work in our home church. God appreciated that. His issue wasn’t my love for the truth or my focus and commitment to His Word.

His issue with me was my lack of patience and my failure to honor people’s process.

A blueprint can build a team, but people aren’t a roster. They’re sons and daughters God is growing, and growth takes time. I was holding people to where I thought they should be, instead of walking with them from where they were.

That same idealism is a cancer in many marriages. It puts heavy burdens on a spouse and never gives them time to grow into maturity. Pursuing God’s ideal for marriage is noble. But the enemy loves to take our ideals and turn them into a weapon against the very person we promised to love. Expecting perfection can undermine a marriage that could have been great. It can look like zeal for holiness. It’s often just impatience wearing a spiritual uniform.

Truth matters. Standards matter. But Jesus was “full of unfailing love and faithfulness” (John 1:14). He told His disciples, “There is so much

more I want to tell you, but you can't bear it now" (John 16:12). The Son of God paced His truth to their process.

Love that is patient doesn't lower the standard. It just remembers how long God waited for you.

Almost right: Holding everyone to the standard, because truth is truth.

Right: Holding to the truth while honoring each person's process.

Truth without patience will crush the very people it was meant to free.

FOR THE ROAD

Whose process have you been impatient with, and what would honoring it look like?

Jesus, You have been so patient with me. Give me Your love for the truth and Your patience with people, so I can walk with them and not just stand over them. Amen.

DAY 30

Trouble, Trauma, Triggers and Truth

You intended to harm me, but God intended it all for good. He brought me to this position so I could save the lives of many people.

Genesis 50:20

Joseph's brothers stripped him of his robe and threw him into an empty cistern. Then they sold him to strangers. Later he was falsely accused and forgotten in prison. If anyone had a reason to carry trauma for the rest of his life, it was Joseph.

Years later his brothers stood before him, terrified. He was the second most powerful man in Egypt and could have crushed them. Instead he wept, and he said the words in today's verse.

Here is something I've come to believe: a trigger is often the result of trouble that has turned into trauma because truth was missing from the situation.

Trouble comes to everyone: betrayal, loss, conflict. When that trouble is never brought into the light, and lies fill the empty space (*It was my fault. God left me. No one can be trusted*), the wound goes deeper. Then something small, a tone of voice or a familiar place, presses on it, and the old pain floods back.

Two people can walk through the same trouble and come out differently. Part of the difference is what each of them believes about what happened. Joseph didn't pretend the pit wasn't real. He named it: "You intended to harm me." But he also let the truth of God's sovereignty speak over it. That truth didn't erase his pain. It kept his pain from becoming his identity.

Healing often comes through prayer, through community, and sometimes through a skilled Christian counselor. None of those are signs of weak faith. And in every one of them, the Healer is the same. “He heals the brokenhearted and bandages their wounds” (Psalm 147:3).

Almost right: What happened to me will always define me.
Right: What happened was real, but God’s truth gets the last word over it.

Trouble becomes trauma where truth is missing.

FOR THE ROAD

Where has a lie settled into an old wound, and what truth does God want to speak there?

Father, You see every pit I’ve been thrown into. Bring Your truth into the places where lies have taken root, and heal what I can’t heal myself. Amen.

WEEK 6

Together

Meet once after Day 30. Make this a safe table: no fixing, no rushing, and no one has to share more than they want.

1. **Open:** Read Psalm 62:8 aloud: “O my people, trust in him at all times. Pour out your heart to him, for God is our refuge.” Ask: why do so many Christians find it hard to pour out their hearts honestly?
2. **Day 26:** Are you more likely to stuff your feelings or let them define what’s true? What helps you find the “Yet I still dare to hope”?
3. **Day 27:** What promise of God is hardest for you to hold onto right now? What would lowering your theology look like?
4. **Day 28:** What does God’s care for Elijah (bread, sleep, a gentle whisper) tell you about how He sees your weakness?
5. **Day 29:** Who in your life needs you to honor their process? Where has someone honored yours?
6. **Day 30:** Without sharing details you aren’t ready to share, where do you need God’s truth to speak into an old trouble?

Practice together: Each person writes a short lament in the pattern of Lamentations 3: two or three honest lines about what hurts, then one line that begins, “Yet I still dare to hope, because…” Read them aloud if you’re willing. If anyone shares something heavy, follow up with them this week, and point them toward help if they need it.

Pray: Pray Psalm 147:3 over each other: “Lord, heal the brokenhearted and bandage their wounds.”

WEEK 7

Refined Among People

God refines us through people: the friend who wounds, the approval we crave, the covenant that tests our love.

DAY 31

Not Everyone Who Crushes You Is Against You

Wounds from a sincere friend are better than many kisses from an enemy.

Proverbs 27:6

One minute Peter was the star of the class. He had just declared, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God” (Matthew 16:16), and Jesus had blessed him for it. A few verses later, Peter pulled Jesus aside to talk Him out of the cross, and Jesus turned and said, “Get away from me, Satan! You are a dangerous trap to me” (Matthew 16:23).

That had to crush him. In front of everyone. From the One he loved most.

But Jesus wasn’t against Peter. He was fighting for him. Peter had a picture of the Messiah with no suffering in it, and if no one confronted it, that picture would have broken him later. The rebuke was a wound from the truest Friend he ever had.

Paul faced the same thing with the Galatians. He loved them enough to tell them they were drifting from the gospel, and some of them took it as an attack. So he asked, “Have I now become your enemy because I am telling you the truth?” (Galatians 4:16).

In a refining season, we tend to sort people by how they make us feel. The ones who comfort us are for us. The ones who correct us are against us. That’s almost right, and it can be deadly. Flattery feels like love, but it can be the kiss of someone who doesn’t care where you end up. Correction can feel like rejection, but it can be the wound of someone who refuses to lose you.

So before you write someone off, weigh the wound. Look at their fruit over time, not just their tone today. Ask whether their words are pulling you toward Jesus or away from Him.

Almost right: The people who make me feel good are the ones who are for me.
Right: The people who tell me the truth in love are the ones who are for me.

Not everyone who crushes you is against you, and not everyone who coddles you is for you.

FOR THE ROAD

Is there a "wound from a friend" you've been treating as an attack?

Lord, give me ears to hear correction and the humility to receive it. Surround me with friends who love me too much to flatter me. Amen.

DAY 32

Two Men, One Master

Jesus grew in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and all the people.

Luke 2:52

For three years, Judas walked the same roads as Peter and John. He heard Jesus teach. He watched the blind see and the dead rise. He was trusted with the money bag. He was as close to Jesus as anyone on earth.

And he ended up selling Him for thirty pieces of silver (Matthew 26:14–15).

How does that happen? It doesn't happen in a day. John tells us that Judas "was a thief" who helped himself to what was in the bag (John 12:6). Somewhere along the way, small compromises and unmet expectations started to grow in him. The closer he was to Jesus, the more he was offended by Him.

Set that beside today's verse. Jesus, too, grew. He grew in wisdom, in stature, and in favor with God and with people. Two lives that walked the same roads: one grew in favor, the other in bitterness.

That's the sobering lesson. Being near Jesus isn't the same as growing in Him. You can be in ministry, on the team, in the room, and still be cultivating something poisonous in your heart. Hebrews warns, "Watch out that no poisonous root of bitterness grows up to trouble you, corrupting many" (Hebrews 12:15).

Refining seasons are when the root shows. Disappointment, delay and hurt from people all water something in us. The question is what. If we bring our grievances to God, they can grow humility and favor. If we nurse them in secret, they grow offense.

The good news is that a root can be pulled up before it bears its fruit. Bring it into the light today.

Almost right: I'm close to Jesus, so my heart must be fine.

Right: I let Jesus search my heart, because nearness is not the same as growth.

Everyone is growing something. Make sure it's favor and not bitterness.

FOR THE ROAD

What disappointment have you been quietly watering? What is it growing in you?

Jesus, I don't just want to be near You. I want to become like You. Pull up every bitter root and let me grow in favor with God and people. Amen.

DAY 33

Purpose Without the Gospel

But Peter and the apostles replied, "We must obey God rather than any human authority."

Acts 5:29

During my rookie year in the NFL, the team chaplain took me under his wing and became my mentor. He was a devout believer, and he ran a nonprofit that sent speakers into high schools to talk to students about purpose. But he preferred that the speakers not share the gospel in those sessions.

One day I arrived early for one of those events and spent the extra time reading my Bible. This is the verse that caught my eye: "We must obey God rather than any human authority."

Peter said those words to the same council that had condemned Jesus. They had ordered him to stop teaching in Jesus' name. He couldn't, and he wouldn't.

I'm not telling this to criticize a good man who poured into me. I'm telling it because that verse names a tension every one of us faces. It's possible to talk about purpose all day long and leave out the only One who gives it. It's possible to say true things in a way that keeps everyone comfortable, and to call that wisdom.

Here is how I'd define it: the fear of man is when you are more afraid to disappoint man than you are to offend a holy God.

It rarely looks like cowardice. It looks like being strategic. Being respectful. Not rocking the boat. Sometimes those are real wisdom. But when they become a reason to keep Jesus out of the conversation, the

fear of man has become the master. “Fearing people is a dangerous trap, but trusting the LORD means safety” (Proverbs 29:25).

Refining seasons often expose whose approval we’re really working for. God isn’t asking you to be harsh. He’s asking you to be His.

Almost right: Talking about purpose without Jesus so no one gets uncomfortable.
Right: Honoring people, but obeying God when the two collide.

The fear of man is being more afraid to disappoint people than to offend a holy God.

FOR THE ROAD

Where are you most tempted to leave Jesus out of the conversation to keep people comfortable?

Holy God, deliver me from the fear of man. Let me honor people, but let me fear disappointing You more than disappointing them. In Jesus’ name, amen.

DAY 34

A Filling, Not a Feeling

Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance.

1 Corinthians 13:7

If I could go back and talk to my 24-year-old self before marriage, one of the first things I'd tell him is this: love is not a feeling. It's a choice.

The lie that love is just a feeling has one goal: to get you to make a permanent decision based on a temporary emotion. It tells you that when the feeling fades, the love is gone. So people walk away from covenants and call it "falling out of love."

Kris Vallotton once put it simply: a fall is an accident, not a choice. A great marriage is never an accident. It's a choice two people keep making.

Picture love as a tree. Feelings are the leaves. They're real, and they're beautiful, but they flutter and fall with the seasons. The trunk is the choice, and the trunk stays. Peter Vescovi says it plainly: "You cannot fall in and out of love, but you can fall in and out of lust."

Did Jesus feel like going to the cross? In the garden He said His soul was crushed with grief to the point of death. And then He prayed, "Yet I want your will to be done, not mine" (Matthew 26:39). That is what love looks like when the feelings are screaming the other way. Love chooses.

Today's verse doesn't describe a feeling at all. Never gives up. Never loses faith. Always hopeful. Endures through every circumstance. Those are decisions made over and over.

And here is the refining part. God uses covenant to teach us what love really is. Your feelings will follow your commitments more often than your commitments will follow your feelings.

Almost right: Love is the feeling of being in love.
Right: Love is a covenant choice I keep making, and the feelings follow.

Marriage is less about being fulfilled and more about being refined.

FOR THE ROAD

In which relationship have you been waiting for a feeling before you choose love?

Jesus, You chose the cross when every feeling said no. Teach me to love the way You love, with a choice that doesn't quit. Amen.

DAY 35

Jacob Wanted Rachel but Needed Leah

Then Leah got pregnant again and gave birth to another son. She named him Judah, for she said, "Now I will praise the LORD!" And then she stopped having children.

Genesis 29:35

Jacob worked seven years for Rachel, and on the morning after the wedding he woke up next to Leah. For the rest of his life, he acted as if he'd married the wrong woman. He favored Rachel openly, and he tried to fix his story in his own strength.

But read the end of the story. As Jacob was dying, he gave instructions about his burial: lay me in the family cave, he said, where Abraham and Sarah are buried, and Isaac and Rebekah, "And there I buried Leah" (Genesis 49:31). Rachel was buried on the road to Bethlehem. Jacob chose to rest beside Leah.

While Jacob saw Rachel, God saw Leah. "When the LORD saw that Leah was unloved, he enabled her to have children" (Genesis 29:31). You can trace her heart in the names of her sons. With the first, she hoped her husband would finally love her. By the fourth, she had stopped chasing Jacob's love and said, "Now I will praise the LORD." Through that son, Judah, came King David, and one day the Lion of the tribe of Judah.

Many believers have been sold a Hollywood version of love. We want the one who is our type, who makes us feel cherished, who makes life easy. God's design for marriage is bigger than our happiness. It's one of His primary tools for our holiness.

Jacob wanted Rachel, but Jacob needed Leah. Rachel was Jacob's choice; Leah was God's choice. Rachel might cherish you, but Leah will challenge you into your destiny.

This isn't a word for anyone in an abusive or dangerous marriage. God never asks you to stay in harm's way. It's a word for those tempted to believe that because it's hard, it must be a mistake.

Almost right: Waiting for the one who is my type and makes me happy.

Right: Embracing the one God uses to make me holy.

Rachel can birth earthly happiness, but Leah will birth kingdom holiness.

FOR THE ROAD

Where have you been treating something as God's mistake when it may be God's choice?

Father, You saw Leah when no one else did. Open my eyes to what You are doing through the people and the covenant You've given me, and let my heart learn to say, "Now I will praise the Lord." Amen.

WEEK 7

Together

Meet once after Day 35. Couples and singles alike can answer these; the lessons apply to every covenant and friendship.

1. **Open:** Read Proverbs 27:17 aloud: “As iron sharpens iron, so a friend sharpens a friend.” Ask: who has sharpened you, and did it feel good at the time?
2. **Day 31:** Share a correction you resisted at first but later recognized as love.
3. **Day 32:** What are some small ways bitterness grows in people who are close to Jesus? How can we help each other pull up those roots early?
4. **Day 33:** Where do you feel the most pressure to keep Jesus out of the conversation: work, family, school or friendships?
5. **Day 34:** Do you agree that feelings follow commitments? When have you seen that happen?
6. **Day 35:** What is a “Leah” in your life, something you didn’t choose that God has used to make you holy?

Practice together: Pair up and give each other one honest, loving word of encouragement and, if you have earned the trust, one gentle word of challenge. Receive both without defending yourself. Simply say, “Thank you.”

Pray: Pray Ephesians 4:15 for the group: “Lord, help us speak the truth in love and grow in every way more and more like Christ.”

WEEK 8

When God Becomes the Treasure

Refining ends in holy fear: God tests the heart until He Himself, not our outcomes, is the prize.

DAY 36

God Offends the Mind to Test the Heart

She replied, "That's true, Lord, but even dogs are allowed to eat the scraps that fall beneath their masters' table." "Dear woman," Jesus said to her, "your faith is great. Your request is granted." And her daughter was instantly healed.

Matthew 15:27–28

In 1905, a Black preacher named William J. Seymour, the son of former slaves, wanted to learn about the baptism in the Holy Spirit. The Bible school he attended required segregation, so he wasn't allowed to sit in the classroom. He sat outside and listened through a door left ajar. He went on to face rejection again, from church leaders who locked him out. But he was so hungry for a new Pentecost that he was willing to walk through humiliation to see it. Within months, the revival at Azusa Street in Los Angeles broke out under his leadership.

That kind of hunger reminds me of the Canaanite woman. She came to Jesus crying out for her tormented daughter, and His first answer was silence. Then a refusal. Then words that would offend almost anyone: "It isn't right to take food from the children and throw it to the dogs" (Matthew 15:26).

That doesn't fit our "Sunday school Jesus." This is the same Jesus who went out of His way for the Samaritan woman at the well. But here, she pursued Him, and it seems He was examining her heart. Would rejection make her identify more with her wound than with the God who made her? Would she walk away offended?

She didn't. She answered with humility and hunger. She still recognized the Messiah, and Jesus called her faith great.

Prejudice is a real sin, and the pain it causes is real. God sees it. But our deepest allegiance can't be to our wound. Sometimes God offends the mind to test the heart. "God blesses those who do not fall away because of me" (Matthew 11:6).

A line often attributed to Charles Spurgeon says it well: "I have learned to kiss the wave that throws me against the Rock of Ages."

Almost right: When I'm rejected, I have every right to walk away offended.
Right: When I'm rejected, I stay hungry and keep pressing in to Jesus.

God offends the mind to test the heart.

FOR THE ROAD

Has God's silence or a hard answer tempted you to walk away offended?

Jesus, when You are silent, keep me hungry. Don't let any wound speak louder than my need for You. Amen.

DAY 37

A Connoisseur of New Wine

Job stood up and tore his robe in grief. Then he shaved his head and fell to the ground to worship.

Job 1:20

In a single day, Job lost his livestock, his servants and all ten of his children. The messengers arrived one after another, each one interrupting the last. And when the final report came in, Job tore his robe, shaved his head, fell to the ground and worshiped.

He didn't let his circumstances define God's character. He grieved, and he worshiped. "The LORD gave me what I had, and the LORD has taken it away. Praise the name of the LORD!" (Job 1:21).

We are often offended with God because we believe we have a better plan than He does. We think we know how justice should work, when prayers should be answered and how our story should end. When He doesn't follow our script, something in us pulls back.

I once heard the Lord say: "If you will trust Me, even when you do not fully understand My ways… even when you cannot comprehend why I sometimes allow justice to be delayed, or why it appears that the wicked prosper in their sin, only then will you become a connoisseur of My new wine and of the fear of the Lord."

A connoisseur is someone with deep knowledge and discernment who can recognize what is truly excellent. You don't become one by tasting once. You become one by learning to tell the real from the almost real.

Here is what the refining fire teaches a connoisseur: the true treasure in the field isn't our dreams fulfilled. It's knowing God Himself. When our ambitions become the treasure, we grow entitled. When He is the

treasure, obedience, humility and trust grow in us instead. Like the man in Jesus' parable who found a treasure in a field, we will sell everything for it (Matthew 13:44).

Almost right: My dreams fulfilled are the reward for my faithfulness.
Right: God Himself is the reward, whether my dreams come true or not.

God Himself is the prize.

FOR THE ROAD

What dream have you been treating as the treasure instead of God Himself?

Father, You are the prize. Teach me to worship You when I don't understand, and to trust You more than I trust my own plans. Amen.

DAY 38

Can God Trust Me?

The LORD confides in those who fear him; he makes his covenant known to them.

Psalm 25:14 (NIV)

Noah Webster's 1828 dictionary defines the word *confide* this way: "To entrust; to commit to the charge of, with a belief in the fidelity of the person entrusted… with assurance of safe keeping." We confide a secret to a friend.

Now read today's verse again. The Lord *confides* in those who fear Him. He entrusts His secrets, His plans and His covenant to people He knows will keep them safe.

Jesus said the same thing to His disciples: "I no longer call you slaves, because a master doesn't confide in his slaves. Now you are my friends, since I have told you everything the Father told me" (John 15:15).

Think about your own relationships. "I trust you" is often a weightier compliment than "I love you." You can love someone who is hard to trust. But when you fully trust someone, you know their heart isn't centered on what benefits them most. You know they'll handle what you give them with care.

So many of us spend our lives asking, "Does God love me?" That question has been answered at the cross. His love is not in doubt. The weightier question in a refining season is, "Can God trust me?"

Can He trust me with influence, without my taking the glory? With blessing, without my forgetting Him? With His secrets, without my using them to build my own name? With delay, without my growing bitter?

“The eyes of the LORD search the whole earth in order to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him” (2 Chronicles 16:9). He is looking for hearts He can confide in. Refining is how He makes us trustworthy.

Almost right: The big question is whether God loves me.
Right: God’s love is settled; the question is whether He can trust me.

“I trust you” is often a weightier compliment than “I love you.”

FOR THE ROAD

What has God already entrusted to you, and how are you handling it?

Lord, thank You that Your love for me is settled. Now make me someone You can trust: faithful with little, faithful with much, and faithful with Your heart. Amen.

DAY 39

Standing Far Off or Drawing Near

As the people stood in the distance, Moses approached the dark cloud where God was.

Exodus 20:21

The mountain was smoking. Thunder rolled, lightning flashed and the blast of a ram's horn grew louder and louder. The people of Israel trembled and backed away. "You speak to us, and we will listen," they told Moses. "But don't let God speak directly to us, or we will die!" (Exodus 20:19).

Moses answered with something that sounds like a contradiction: "Don't be afraid… for God has come in this way to test you, and so that your fear of him will keep you from sinning!" (Exodus 20:20). Don't be afraid, so that you will fear Him.

Then came the moment in today's verse. The people stood far off. Moses walked into the darkness where God was.

Both feared God. But their fear took them in opposite directions.

The natural mind sees the fear of the Lord as terror or punishment, so it keeps its distance and sends someone else up the mountain. Scripture redefines it. Holy fear is an awe that protects intimacy instead of sabotaging it. It treasures God's presence so deeply that losing His closeness becomes the thing we fear most. David understood this when he prayed after his sin, "Do not banish me from your presence" (Psalm 51:11).

The world fears losing control. The faithful fear losing closeness to the One who holds all things together.

That kind of fear changes what scares you. The true fear of the Lord is when you find yourself more afraid of compromising your integrity than of facing the purifying flames of the Refiner's fire. You would rather walk into the thick darkness with God than stand safely at a distance without Him.

"Whom have I in heaven but you? I desire you more than anything on earth" (Psalm 73:25).

Almost right: Fearing God means keeping a safe distance.
Right: Fearing God means I can't bear to be far from Him.

The world fears losing control; the faithful fear losing closeness.

FOR THE ROAD

Are you standing far off, waiting for someone else to hear from God for you?

Holy God, I don't want to stand at a distance. Give me a fear of You that draws me closer, and make Your presence the thing I treasure most. Amen.

DAY 40

Take Your Seat in the Orchestra

But our bodies have many parts, and God has put each part just where he wants it.

1 Corinthians 12:18

It's not about you.

Those words echo in my mind as I remember God revealing to me His divine orchestra.

In His wisdom, sitting outside of time, He chose whom He would call into this company. He knew their love would be weak, so He sent His Son to purchase them back and His Spirit to empower them, making them His children, the original plan from the garden.

Every instrument in His orchestra is meant to play in harmony with the Divine Conductor and His score. And the score is the Word of God.

But I also saw that many He longed to include would not submit to His notes. They were content to play their own. Some wanted to solo. They wanted to write their own songs and be the star of the show, rather than follow the Conductor's lead. What they failed to realize is that the sound created under His lead is the only sound that can truly satisfy the soul and bring lasting peace and joy.

That's where this season of refining has been taking us. The fire, the crushing, the waiting and the people who sharpen us are all tuning us. God isn't refining you so you can stand out. He's refining you so you can play in harmony with His score and with the people beside you.

Your part may feel small. A few notes in a long symphony. But God has put each part "just where he wants it." The invitation is still open, and heaven is waiting to hear the score completed.

Will you take your seat in His orchestra, or abandon it for the praise of people? Let history tell how content you were to play even a small part in His melodies.

It's going to be worth it.

Almost right: Finding my moment to shine for God.

Right: Playing my part, however small, in harmony with His score.

It's not about you, and it's going to be worth it.

FOR THE ROAD

Where have you been trying to play a solo instead of following the Conductor?

Father, I take my seat. Tune my heart to Your Word, keep me in step with the people You've placed beside me, and let my small part bring You glory. Amen.

WEEK 8

Together

Meet once after Day 40. This week closes the season of Refinement, so leave time to look back on what God has done since Week 2.

1. **Open:** Read Isaiah 33:6 aloud: “In that day he will be your sure foundation, providing a rich store of salvation, wisdom, and knowledge. The fear of the LORD will be your treasure.” Ask: what would change if the fear of the Lord really were our treasure?
2. **Day 36:** How did the Canaanite woman respond to rejection? Where are you tempted to identify with your wound more than with God?
3. **Day 37:** Have you ever been offended with God because His plan wasn’t yours? What helped you worship anyway?
4. **Day 38:** If God asked you, “Can I trust you?”, what area of your life would be hardest to answer for?
5. **Day 39:** Does the fear of the Lord push you away from God or pull you closer? Why?
6. **Day 40:** What “small part” has God given you? How can this group help each other play it well?

Practice together: Look back over the season of Refinement. Have each person name one fire, crushing or waiting from these weeks and one thing God has refined in them through it. Write them down and keep them; you’ll want to remember them in the seasons ahead.

Pray: Pray Psalm 73:25 together: “Whom have I in heaven but you? I desire you more than anything on earth.”

SEASON TWO

Repentance

Orphans No More

WEEKS 9–14

WEEK 9

Repentance Is a Change of Mind

We start by defining the word: repentance is a changed mind and a torn heart, not regret, remorse or a show of sorrow.

DAY 41

Turned Away but Still in Love

Now repent of your sins and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped away.

Acts 3:19

Years ago I watched the documentary *Super Size Me*, where a man eats nothing but fast food for a month and his body pays for it. When it was over, something had happened to me. I never saw that famous burger the same way again. The documentary didn't just change my diet. It changed my mind.

That is what repentance is. The Greek word in the New Testament is *metanoia*, and at its root it means "a change of mind." In everyday church talk, we usually define repentance as "turning from sin." That isn't wrong, but it's almost right, and the gap matters.

Many people, in their own willpower, have turned away from a sin without ever changing their mind about it. They walked away, but they still love it. They miss it. They look back at it the way Israel looked back at the food in Egypt (Numbers 11:5). I believe this is one reason we see so little difference between believers and unbelievers. We've stopped doing the thing, but we never stopped wanting it, so we stay in a constant wrestling match with something we secretly still treasure.

Jesus said, "You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (John 8:32). Hearing the truth isn't the same as knowing it. When the truth finally lands, you don't just leave the sin. You see it for what it is. What once looked like a treat now looks like poison.

That's why true biblical repentance will always result in a change of behavior. Behavior follows the mind. Change the mind, and the feet

follow.

Almost right: I've turned away from that sin, even if part of me still loves it.
Right: God has changed my mind about that sin, so I no longer want what I left.

You can walk away from a sin and still be in love with it.

FOR THE ROAD

Is there a sin you've stopped doing but never stopped missing?

Holy Spirit, don't just change my habits. Change my mind. Show me sin the way You see it, until I no longer want what You have set me free from. Amen.

DAY 42

Do You Even Want to Change?

Create in me a clean heart, O God. Renew a loyal spirit within me.

Psalm 51:10

Picture a husband standing in his bedroom doorway. For the third time, his wife has been unfaithful. He has forgiven her twice. He has prayed, hoped and believed she would change. Now she sits on the edge of the bed in tears, saying she's sorry and that she doesn't know why she keeps doing this.

He asks her one question: "Do you even want to change?"

That question cuts deeper than any accusation, and I believe it's the question God asks many of us. We come back to Him again and again with the same apology for the same sin. The tears are real. The sorrow is real. But underneath it is something we don't like to admit: we're sorry it hurt, sorry we got caught, sorry for the consequences. We aren't sure we actually want to be different.

Now look at David. He took another man's wife and arranged that man's death. When the prophet Nathan confronted him, David didn't explain or bargain. He said, "I have sinned against the LORD" (2 Samuel 12:13). Then he wrote Psalm 51. Notice what he asks for. Not just a clean record, but a clean heart. Not just relief, but a renewed spirit. David wanted to *be* different, not just to feel better.

That's the line between sorrow and repentance. Sorrow looks back at what happened. Repentance looks up at God and says, "Change me, whatever it costs." Proverbs puts it plainly: "People who conceal their sins will not prosper, but if they confess and turn from them, they will receive mercy" (Proverbs 28:13).

God isn’t tired of your coming back. He’s asking whether you want Him to make you new.

Almost right: I’m truly sorry for what my sin has cost me.

Right: I’m truly sorry, and I want God to change me, whatever it costs.

Are we truly repentant, or are we merely sorry for the consequences?

FOR THE ROAD

If God asked you today, “Do you even want to change?”, how would you honestly answer?

Father, I don’t want to just feel sorry. Create a clean heart in me, and give me the desire to be different, not just to escape the consequences. Amen.

DAY 43

Remorse Is Not Repentance

When Judas, who had betrayed him, realized that Jesus had been condemned to die, he was filled with remorse. So he took the thirty pieces of silver back to the leading priests and the elders.

Matthew 27:3

There's a line people love to say when someone apologizes after the damage is done: "It's too late to apologize." Scripture tells several stories that sound like that line.

Saul disobeyed the Lord's clear command, and he lost the trust of God and of the prophet who anointed him (1 Samuel 15:23). Esau traded his birthright for one bowl of stew, and when he wanted the blessing back, he couldn't undo what he had done, "even though he wept bitter tears" (Hebrews 12:17). Michal despised David as he worshiped before the Lord, and she never had children. And Judas, who walked with Jesus for three years, betrayed Him for thirty pieces of silver.

Here is what stops me about Judas: he felt terrible. Matthew says he "was filled with remorse." He gave the money back. He confessed, "I have sinned." But he took his remorse to the priests, not to Jesus, and he carried it alone until it destroyed him.

Peter denied Jesus the same night. He also wept bitterly. The difference wasn't how bad either man felt. The difference was where each one went with it. Peter came back, and Jesus restored him on a beach (John 21).

Paul explains it: "The kind of sorrow God wants us to experience leads us away from sin and results in salvation… But worldly sorrow, which

lacks repentance, results in spiritual death" (2 Corinthians 7:10). Remorse looks at itself. Repentance looks at Jesus.

All sin separates us from God, but the sin we choose to tolerate hardens the heart a little more each time. Repent while your heart is still soft. And if you are reading this, it isn't too late. The door of grace is still open.

Almost right: I feel terrible about what I did.

Right: I'm bringing what I did to Jesus while my heart is still soft.

Remorse takes your sin to the wrong address. Repentance takes it to the cross.

FOR THE ROAD

When you fail, where do you usually take it: to yourself, to others or to Jesus?

Jesus, keep my heart soft. When I fail, don't let me hide or carry it alone. Draw me back to You every time. Amen.

DAY 44

Tear Your Heart, Not Your Clothes

That is why the LORD says, "Turn to me now, while there is time. Give me your hearts. Come with fasting, weeping, and mourning. Don't tear your clothing in your grief, but tear your hearts instead."

Joel 2:12–13

In the ancient world, when grief hit hard, people tore their clothes. It was a public sign that something inside had broken. Everyone could see it.

But by Joel's day, the sign had become a show. People could rip a robe and leave their hearts untouched. So God said something startling: keep your clothes on, and tear your heart instead.

Joel didn't stop there. He laid out what I call a blueprint for revival. Blow the ram's horn. Call a fast. Gather everyone, from the elders to the nursing babies. Even the bride and groom had to leave their wedding room. Then he gave the priests their place: "Let the priests, who minister in the LORD's presence, stand and weep between the entry room to the Temple and the altar" (Joel 2:17).

Between the porch and the altar. That's right in front of the door to the Holy Place, where God's presence dwelt. The leaders weren't on a stage. They were on their faces, interceding with tears for the people.

Look at the order: call, sanctify, gather, pray, mourn, weep, repent. Revival comes after that, not before. Then reformation, then revolution. We want the outpouring without the tearing. But God's "if" comes before His "then" (2 Chronicles 7:14). And look at the promise: "Then

the LORD will pity his people and jealously guard the honor of his land" (Joel 2:18).

The reason we can tear our hearts and not be destroyed is who God is. Joel says, "He is merciful and compassionate, slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love" (Joel 2:13). He isn't asking us to break so He can crush us. He's asking us to break so He can heal us.

Almost right: Showing how sorry I am so others can see it.

Right: Tearing my heart before God, where only He can see it.

God isn't looking for torn robes. He's looking for torn hearts.

FOR THE ROAD

Is your repentance more visible to others or more real before God?

Lord, I don't want a show of sorrow. Tear my heart open before You, and meet me there with Your mercy and unfailing love. Amen.

DAY 45

Judge Me Now

But if we would examine ourselves, we would not be judged by God in this way.

1 Corinthians 11:31

Jesus had a sense of humor. In Matthew 7, He pictures a man with a wooden beam sticking out of his eye, leaning in close to his friend and offering to take a tiny speck of sawdust out of his eye.

We laugh because we've all been that man. It's easy to see a speck in someone else's life. It's far harder to see the beam in our own. And it's possible to become very skilled at discerning everyone else while avoiding any scrutiny of ourselves.

So here is a short prayer worth praying: "Judge me now, don't judge me later."

That isn't a prayer of fear. It's a prayer of wisdom. One day each of us will stand before God and give an account (Romans 14:10–12). When we sit before Him at the end of our lives, it will be too late to repent. So I would rather He show me the beam today, while there's time to deal with it, than have it exposed on that day.

That's what Paul meant when he urged us to examine ourselves. The safest place to be judged is in the light right now, with the blood of Jesus already covering us. "If we are living in the light, as God is in the light… the blood of Jesus, his Son, cleanses us from all sin" (1 John 1:7).

This isn't a one-time event. Repentance is not just a moment at an altar but a continual posture of the heart. It's the daily habit of inviting

correction from God, from His Word and from people who love you enough to tell you the truth.

And here's the surprise: once the beam is gone, Jesus says, "you will see well enough to deal with the speck in your friend's eye" (Matthew 7:5).

Almost right: I judge others' sin and avoid anyone looking closely at mine.

Right: I invite God to judge me now, and I deal with my own beam first.

Judge me now, don't judge me later.

FOR THE ROAD

Who in your life has permission to point out the beam in your eye?

Father, judge me now. Show me what I can't see in myself while there's still time to change, and keep me humble when I look at others. Amen.

WEEK 9

Together

Meet once after Day 45. Repentance is a hard subject, so lead with honesty and grace, and let no one feel shamed.

1. **Open:** Read Acts 3:19 aloud. Before this week, how would you have defined repentance? Has your definition changed?
2. **Day 41:** Have you ever had your mind changed about something, so that you no longer wanted it? What made the difference?
3. **Day 42:** Why is "Do you even want to change?" such a hard question? What makes us content with being sorry?
4. **Day 43:** Compare Judas and Peter. What helps a person take their failure to Jesus instead of carrying it alone?
5. **Day 44:** What does tearing your heart look like in practice? Why do you think God puts weeping and repentance before revival?
6. **Day 45:** How can we become people who invite correction without becoming harsh judges of each other?

Practice together: Read Psalm 51 aloud slowly, one person per few verses. Then sit in silence for two minutes and let each person ask the Lord privately, "Judge me now. Is there anything You want to change in me?" Anyone who wants to may share what they sensed.

Pray: Pray Psalm 51:10 over one another: "Create in us clean hearts, O God, and renew a loyal spirit within us."

WEEK 10

Seeing Sin the Way God Sees It

You can't turn from what you won't name, so this week takes sin back from the mild labels we give it and the excuses we make for it.

DAY 46

Weep Over What God Weeps Over

> *He said to him, "Walk through the streets of Jerusalem and put a mark on the foreheads of all who weep and sigh because of the detestable sins being committed in their city."*
>
> **Ezekiel 9:4**

Ezekiel saw a vision that is hard to read. Judgment was coming to Jerusalem, and it would begin at the Temple itself. But before it fell, God sent a man dressed in linen, carrying a writer's case, through the streets. His job was to find certain people and mark their foreheads.

Who received the mark? Not the most gifted. Not the most knowledgeable. Not even the people who could explain exactly what was wrong with the city. The mark went to those who *wept and sighed* over it.

That stops me. You can know right from wrong and still not share God's heart about it. You can be correct about sin and completely unmoved by it. You can even talk about the problems in the Church with a kind of energy that looks more like enjoyment than grief.

The true measure of discernment isn't only what you know. It's the ability to weep over the things God weeps over and to rejoice over the things God celebrates. So here's the question I keep asking myself: Am I celebrating something God detests? And am I grieving something God is applauding?

Isaiah warned, "What sorrow for those who say that evil is good and good is evil" (Isaiah 5:20). That kind of reversal rarely happens all at once. It happens a little at a time, as our hearts get used to what used to break them.

Jesus is our pattern. He wept over Jerusalem (Luke 19:41). He didn't stand over the city with folded arms. He grieved over it because He loved it. That's the heart God marks: not cold judgment, but tears that come from love.

Almost right: I know what's wrong with the world around me.
Right: I grieve what God grieves and celebrate what He celebrates.

Are you celebrating something God detests, or grieving something God is applauding?

FOR THE ROAD

When was the last time something that breaks God's heart actually broke yours?

Lord Jesus, give me Your heart for my city. Let me weep over what You weep over and rejoice over what You rejoice in, and keep me from growing cold. Amen.

DAY 47

More Than Breaking Rules

For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard.

Romans 3:23

Picture a man walking through a great art museum. He follows every rule. He doesn't touch the paintings, he doesn't use flash, and he stays behind the rope. But he never once stops to look. He walks past masterpiece after masterpiece checking his phone, then leaves and says he had a perfectly good visit.

He broke no rules. But he missed the glory.

That's a picture of how many of us think about sin. We define it only as breaking a commandment. And if that's all sin is, then a careful person can stay fairly clean. As long as I don't cross the line, I'm doing fine.

But Romans 3:23 doesn't say we've all broken the rules. It says we've all fallen short of God's *glory*. Sin is not just the breaking of God's commandments. It is fundamentally about failing to honor and value God in all His fullness.

Pastor John Piper has described sin as a long list of "nots." Here are a few of them, in my own words: The glory of God not honored. The holiness of God not valued. The greatness of God not admired. The goodness of God not savored. The commandments of God not treasured.

Read that list slowly, and you realize sin is much bigger than a bad act. It's walking past God without wonder. It's taking His goodness for granted. It's treating His Word as a set of rules instead of a treasure.

That sounds heavier, but it's actually good news. If sin is a failure to treasure God, then the cure isn't just trying harder to behave. It's

beholding Him. The psalmist said, “Your unfailing love is better than life itself” (Psalm 63:3). When we see God as He is, obedience stops being a burden and becomes a response to beauty.

Almost right: Sin is breaking God’s rules, and I try hard not to.
Right: Sin is failing to honor and treasure God, and I want to see Him as He is.

You can keep every rule and still walk right past the glory.

FOR THE ROAD

Which part of God’s character have you been walking past without wonder?

Father, forgive me for treating You as a rulebook instead of a treasure. Open my eyes to Your glory and Your goodness, and let my obedience flow from love. Amen.

DAY 48

Right in Our Own Eyes

In those days Israel had no king; all the people did whatever seemed right in their own eyes.

Judges 21:25

Picture an archer at full draw. He breathes, releases, and the arrow flies. It lands in the dirt three feet left of the target.

That's the picture behind the Bible's most common words for sin. The Hebrew *chet* and the Greek *hamartia* both carry the idea of missing the mark, like an archer who fails to hit the target.

Here's what that picture assumes: there is a target, and the archer didn't set it. You can't miss a mark that doesn't exist. And that's exactly the thing our generation wants to erase.

In the garden, the serpent offered Adam and Eve the knowledge of good and evil. One of the deepest results of that choice was this: people would now decide good and evil for themselves. Human judgment would replace God's command and wisdom. Moral confusion followed, and it has never really left.

The book of Judges ends with a sentence that sounds like our culture: "All the people did whatever seemed right in their own eyes." Nobody in that book thought they were evil. Each person had simply moved the target to wherever their arrow landed. Proverbs warns, "There is a path before each person that seems right, but it ends in death" (Proverbs 14:12).

But falling short is more than missing a rule. To fall short is to fail to reflect what it truly means to bear the image of God and to walk in the

identity of His child. The target was never just a code. It was a Person. We were made to look like our Father.

That's why the gospel is such good news. Jesus didn't only take our misses on the cross. He came to show us the target in human form and to make us like Him.

Almost right: I know what's right for me, and I'm living by it.
Right: God sets the target, and I want my life to look like Him.

If you move the target, you'll never know you missed.

FOR THE ROAD

Where have you quietly moved the target to match where your arrow landed?

Lord, You are my King. I don't want to do what's right in my own eyes. Show me where I've missed, and make me more like Jesus. Amen.

DAY 49

“I’m Only Human”

the son of Enosh, the son of Seth, the son of Adam, the son of God.

Luke 3:38 (ESV)

In *The Matrix*, Agent Smith has Morpheus tied to a chair and gives him a cold speech about humanity. He compares us to a virus that spreads, consumes and destroys.

Agent Smith is half right. He sees something real about fallen human nature: our selfishness, our repetition, our habit of destroying what we touch. Genesis says the same thing more soberly: “every inclination of the human heart is evil from childhood” (Genesis 8:21, NIV). What Smith can’t see is the design. He sees the fall but not the Father.

We have our own gentler version of Smith’s speech. When we fail, we shrug and say, “I’m only human.” Sometimes it’s honest humility. But often it’s a way to lower expectations and dodge responsibility, as if weakness were simply how we were made.

God did not create us this way.

Luke’s genealogy of Jesus runs all the way back, name by name, and ends with a stunning line: “Adam, the son of God.” We were made in His image (Genesis 1:27). We were made as sons and daughters. When Adam and Eve ate from the tree, the human race went from sons of God to sons of men, orphaned from the family we were made for.

That’s why Jesus told Nicodemus, “Unless you are born again, you cannot see the Kingdom of God” (John 3:3). We must be born again because we were born wrong the first time.

So “I’m only human” is almost right. Yes, we’re weak. But the answer to our weakness isn’t an excuse. It’s a new birth. Repentance is

humbling ourselves and admitting we need to be saved from the fallen nature we were born with. And the good news is that the fall did not stop God from loving us (Romans 5:8).

Almost right: "I'm only human," so God can't expect much from me.
Right: I was made to be a child of God, and through new birth I can be one again.

We must be born again because we were born wrong the first time.

FOR THE ROAD

Where have you used "I'm only human" to excuse something God wants to change?

Father, thank You that I was made for Your family. Where I have excused my fallen nature, I repent. Make me new, and teach me to live as Your child. Amen.

DAY 50

Boundary Lines or Chains?

“Let us break their chains,” they cry, “and free ourselves from slavery to God.”

Psalm 2:3

When Israel entered the Promised Land, every family received an inheritance. The land was measured out with surveyors’ lines. Those lines marked where your fields began and ended. Inside them was your vineyard, your well and your future.

David used that picture when he sang, “The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; surely I have a delightful inheritance” (Psalm 16:6, NIV). To David, God’s boundaries weren’t a cage. They were the edges of a gift.

Psalm 2 shows the other way to see the same lines. The nations look at God’s ways and say, “Let us break their chains.” What David called an inheritance, they called slavery. Same God. Same commands. Completely different eyes.

Corey Russell has put it well: you will either see God’s Word as loving boundary lines that preserve and protect you, or as cords and constraints that keep you from pleasure. There isn’t really a third option.

A generation is rising that believes truth is whatever “I feel to be true.” Rather than confessing sin and turning from it, the temptation is to embrace it and celebrate it. And here’s the danger: a generation that redefines sin makes it nearly impossible to turn away from it. You can’t repent of something you’ve renamed as freedom.

That’s not just a problem “out there.” It’s a question for each of us. Jesus asked, “So why do you keep calling me ‘Lord, Lord!’ when you don’t

do what I say?" (Luke 6:46). Do you worship the God of the Scriptures, or the God of your personal feelings and preferred logic?

The good news is that God's boundaries are drawn by a Father, not a jailer. Every line He draws is there to protect something He loves: you.

Almost right: I love God, but some of His commands feel like chains.

Right: God's boundaries are lines drawn in pleasant places to guard my joy.

A generation that redefines sin will find it nearly impossible to turn from it.

FOR THE ROAD

Which of God's boundaries have you been treating as a chain instead of a gift?

Father, I trust Your heart behind Your commands. Where I have resented Your boundaries, change my eyes until I see them as lines drawn in pleasant places. Amen.

WEEK 10

Together

Meet once after Day 50. Keep the focus on our own hearts, not on pointing at the culture.

1. **Open:** Read Romans 3:23 aloud. How does “falling short of God’s glory” change the way you think about sin?
2. **Day 46:** Is there something you once grieved that no longer bothers you? What changed?
3. **Day 47:** Which “not” from Day 47 hit you hardest? What would it look like to treasure that part of God this week?
4. **Day 48:** Where do you see people, including Christians, moving the target to fit where their arrow landed?
5. **Day 49:** Why is “I’m only human” so appealing? How does knowing you were made a child of God change the way you face weakness?
6. **Day 50:** Share one boundary in God’s Word that once felt like a chain but has proven to be a gift.

Practice together: Write down one mild label you use for a sin, such as “a struggle,” “a bad habit” or “just how I am.” Then, if you’re willing, share it and say what God calls it. Pray for each other with grace, remembering that naming sin is the first step toward freedom.

Pray: Pray Psalm 16:6 together: “Lord, thank You that the boundary lines have fallen for us in pleasant places.”

WEEK 11

The Lies We Tell Ourselves

Repentance needs honest eyes. This week exposes the planted idea, the self-deceived heart, the coddled ego, the one-sided wound story and envy.

DAY 51

A Planted Idea

The serpent was the shrewdest of all the wild animals the LORD God had made. One day he asked the woman, "Did God really say you must not eat the fruit from any of the trees in the garden?"

Genesis 3:1

In the movie *Inception*, a team of specialists slips into a man's dreams, layer under layer, to plant one idea deep in his mind. The hard part is making the idea feel like his own. If he thinks he came up with it himself, it will grow on its own.

The serpent did the same thing in the garden, without any machines. He didn't argue with Eve. He asked a question: "Did God really say…?"

Notice what that question did. It didn't deny God's word outright. It twisted it a little. God had said they could eat freely from every tree but one. The serpent made it sound as if God had forbidden them all. Then he planted the real seed: "God knows that your eyes will be opened" (Genesis 3:5). In other words, *God is holding out on you.*

That's the idea at the root of so much sin. When we lie, grab, hide or take control, it often comes from a basic doubt about the goodness of God. We start to believe He's withholding something, and that we have to act on our own to secure our future.

Paul was afraid of exactly this: "I fear that somehow your pure and undivided devotion to Christ will be corrupted, just as Eve was deceived by the cunning ways of the serpent" (2 Corinthians 11:3).

So guard the gate of your mind. Pay attention to the questions that whisper about God's heart. And answer them with what is true: "Since he did not spare even his own Son but gave him up for us all, won't he

also give us everything else?" (Romans 8:32). He isn't holding out on you. He already gave you His Son.

Almost right: I'm just asking honest questions about what God really said.

Right: I test every question against the goodness of God and what He really said.

Every lie in the garden starts with a doubt about the Gardener.

FOR THE ROAD

Where has a quiet "Did God really say…?" been growing in your mind?

Father, I believe You are good. Uproot every idea the enemy has planted that says You are holding out on me, and fill my mind with what is true. Amen.

DAY 52

The Con That Needs Your Help

The human heart is the most deceitful of all things, and desperately wicked. Who really knows how bad it is? But I, the LORD, search all hearts and examine secret motives.

Jeremiah 17:9–10

Every con artist needs one thing to succeed: your cooperation. But most cons still meet some resistance. The victim gets suspicious, asks a question or checks the fine print, and sometimes he escapes.

There's one con where the victim doesn't resist at all. In fact, he helps.

A. W. Tozer put it this way: "Of all forms of deception self-deception is the most deadly, and of all deceived persons the self-deceived are the least likely to discover the fraud." When someone else deceives you, you're at least on guard. You expect trickery. But when you deceive yourself, you are both the con artist and the mark. Tozer said the self-deceived person "does not resist the deceit but collaborates with it against himself."

That's sobering. Most of our discernment training is aimed outward: watch for false teachers, watch for manipulators, watch for bad doctrine. All good. But the most dangerous deceiver you'll ever meet looks back at you in the mirror every morning.

Jesus described two fathers. The devil "is a liar and the father of lies" (John 8:44). Our God is "the Father of lights," and with Him there is no shadow of turning (James 1:17, NKJV). Self-deception is choosing, little by little, to live in the shadows because the light would ask too much of us.

So how do you catch a con you're helping run? You can't do it alone. You invite the One who searches hearts to do what you can't. Jeremiah's verse doesn't end in despair. It ends with God: "But I, the LORD, search all hearts." He sees what you can't, and He shows it to you to set you free, not to shame you.

Almost right: I'm careful not to let anyone deceive me.

Right: I ask the Father of lights to expose the lies I've been telling myself.

The most dangerous deceiver you'll ever meet is the one in the mirror.

FOR THE ROAD

What's one thing you've told yourself so often that you've never stopped to test it?

Father of lights, search my heart. Expose every lie I've been helping along, and give me the courage to walk in the light. Amen.

DAY 53

Coddled or Discipled

To learn, you must love discipline; it is stupid to hate correction.

Proverbs 12:1

For centuries, gold was tested with acid. Real gold doesn't react; it can sit in the acid and come out unharmed. Cheap metal with a thin gold coating can't survive it. That's where we get the phrase "the acid test."

Real gold has nothing to fear from the test. Only the fake needs to avoid it.

Truth works the same way. Truth welcomes questions, because questions only lead to discovery and understanding. It isn't afraid of being challenged. A lie resists being confronted, because every honest question peels away another layer of the deception.

So here's a revealing question: how do you respond when someone challenges you? When a friend, a pastor or a spouse questions something in your life, do you get curious, or do you get defensive?

All of us have a part inside that wants to be coddled. It wants affirmation without accountability. It wants admiration without anyone looking too closely. And it can be surprisingly clever. When there is a deep desire to protect our comfort and ambition, a substantial amount of intelligence can be strategically invested into denial to keep the deception alive. We build brilliant arguments for why we don't need to change.

Proverbs doesn't soften it: "It is stupid to hate correction." Strong words, but loving ones. Correction is how God grows us. "No discipline is enjoyable while it is happening… But afterward there will be a

peaceful harvest of right living for those who are trained in this way" (Hebrews 12:11).

Jesus didn't call us to be fans who are coddled. He called us to be disciples who are trained. A disciple is someone who has given another person permission to correct him.

Almost right: I want people around me who encourage and affirm me.
Right: I want people around me who love me enough to challenge and correct me.

Truth welcomes questions. A lie resists being confronted.

FOR THE ROAD

When was the last time you were corrected, and how did you respond?

Lord, I don't want to be coddled; I want to be discipled. Give me a teachable heart, and bring people into my life who will tell me the truth in love. Amen.

DAY 54

Your Part of the Story

Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. Point out anything in me that offends you, and lead me along the path of everlasting life.

Psalm 139:23–24

James describes a strange scene. A man looks at his face in a mirror, sees exactly what's there, then walks away and immediately forgets what he looks like (James 1:23–24). He had the information. He just didn't keep it.

Many of us do that with our own stories. We remember every detail of how others hurt us. We can tell the story of each wound with precision. But when it comes to our own part, the mirror goes blank.

This is one of the marks of the orphan mindset. The orphan heart is acutely aware of how others have hurt it, and often unaware of how its own behavior has contributed to the story. It isn't usually dishonest on purpose. It's just been looking out the window so long that it never looks in the mirror.

Let me be careful here. Some wounds come with no fault of your own. If you were abused, betrayed or abandoned, you are not to blame for what was done to you, and God sees every bit of it. This isn't about blaming the hurt.

It's about the patterns we carry afterward: the walls we build, the reactions we repeat, the ways we push people away and then point to their leaving as proof. Those are the places where we have a part, and that part is exactly where our freedom is.

That's why David's prayer is so brave. He doesn't ask God to search his enemies. He says, "Search *me*." Then he asks God to lead him forward. Healing comes when we can name both the wounds others gave us and our own part, then forgive as we've been forgiven (Colossians 3:13).

Almost right: I know exactly how others have hurt me.
Right: I know how I've been hurt, I'm honest about my part, and I choose to forgive.

The orphan remembers every wound but forgets his own face.

FOR THE ROAD

In the story you tell most often about being hurt, what part have you never looked at?

Search me, O God. Heal the wounds others have given me, and show me gently where I've had a part, so I can forgive and be free. Amen.

DAY 55

When Admiration Turns

For you said to yourself, "I will ascend to heaven and set my throne above God's stars… I will climb to the highest heavens and be like the Most High."

Isaiah 14:13–14

In *Wonder Woman 1984*, Barbara Minerva starts out as a shy, overlooked scientist working beside Diana. She admires Diana's grace and confidence. Then, holding an ancient stone that grants wishes, she wishes to be like her.

The wish comes true, and something shifts. She gets the strength she wanted, but she loses her warmth. Admiration becomes imitation. Imitation becomes rivalry. By the end of the film, her initial admiration for Diana has turned into a destructive desire for power, and she is fighting to destroy the very woman she once wanted to be.

The prophets describe a fall like that. Isaiah's words over the king of Babylon have long been read as a picture of Lucifer's fall: "I will climb to the highest heavens and be like the Most High." Wanting to be *like* God turned into wanting to be *above* Him.

That's how envy works. It rarely starts as hatred. It starts as admiration. You notice someone's gift, anointing, family or platform. Then you start measuring yourself against it. Then their success begins to feel like your loss. And if it isn't dealt with, admiration becomes resentment, and resentment wants them to fail. "Jealousy is like cancer in the bones" (Proverbs 14:30).

The cure is surprisingly simple, though not easy. Gratitude for what God has given you, and celebration of what God has given them. "Be happy

with those who are happy" (Romans 12:15). It's hard to envy someone you're genuinely cheering for.

Repent of envy early, while it still looks like admiration. The earlier you catch it, the easier it is to turn.

Almost right: I admire their gifts, and I'm just measuring myself against them.
Right: I thank God for my portion, and I celebrate theirs.

Admiration that isn't turned into gratitude will eventually turn into envy.

FOR THE ROAD

Whose success is hardest for you to celebrate right now?

Lord, I repent of comparing and envying. Fill me with gratitude for what You've given me, and give me genuine joy over what You've given others. Amen.

WEEK 11

Together

Meet once after Day 55. This week touches tender places, so listen more than you speak and keep what's shared in the room.

1. **Open:** Read Jeremiah 17:9–10 aloud. Why do you think self-deception is so hard to see from the inside?
2. **Day 51:** What are some "Did God really say…?" questions our culture whispers about God's goodness?
3. **Day 52:** What's a lie you once told yourself that someone else had to help you see?
4. **Day 53:** Who has permission to correct you? If no one comes to mind, what would it take to change that?
5. **Day 54:** Without sharing details you're not ready to share, how has looking at your own part in a painful story helped you heal?
6. **Day 55:** Why does envy so often begin as admiration? What helps you celebrate others?

Practice together: Go around the group and have each person name one gift or blessing they see in the person to their right. Celebrate it out loud. Then pray for that person to flourish in it.

Pray: Pray Psalm 139:23 together: "Search us, O God, and know our hearts. Show us the lies we've believed, and lead us into truth."

WEEK 12

Fruit in Keeping with Repentance

Real repentance leaves evidence: rebuilt trust, surrender instead of mere belief, a changed heart, works that flow from grace, and a new address.

DAY 56

Sorry Needs Change

Prove by the way you live that you have repented of your sins and turned to God.

Matthew 3:8

Most of us have heard some version of it, and some of us have said it: “I said I was sorry. Why don’t you trust me?”

It sounds reasonable. It even sounds spiritual. Aren’t Christians supposed to forgive? But look closely at what’s being asked. The one who broke the trust wants the rewards of the relationship back without carrying the responsibility for what happened. That’s the orphan mindset at work: relational rewards without personal responsibility.

Forgiveness and trust are different things. Forgiveness can be given in a moment, because it’s a gift. Trust has to be rebuilt over time. When the religious crowds came to John the Baptist, he didn’t ask them for a better apology. He asked for fruit: “Prove by the way you live” (Matthew 3:8).

Love needs action. “Dear children, let’s not merely say that we love each other; let us show the truth by our actions” (1 John 3:18).

Trust needs proof. Proof looks like answering hard questions without getting defensive, being open where you used to hide, and being faithful in small things for a long time.

Sorry needs change. “People who conceal their sins will not prosper, but if they confess and turn from them, they will receive mercy” (Proverbs 28:13). Notice both verbs: confess *and* turn. An apology without a turn is only a pause.

If you're the one who broke trust, don't demand it back. Rebuild it with patience and humility. Pressure on the other person to "just get over it" usually means you haven't fully owned what you did.

And if you're the one who was hurt, you can forgive completely and still let trust grow slowly. Guarding your heart is wisdom, and it leaves the door open for real restoration.

Almost right: I said I was sorry, so you should trust me again.

Right: I said I was sorry, so I'll show you I've changed, for as long as it takes.

Love needs action. Trust needs proof. Sorry needs change.

FOR THE ROAD

Is there someone whose trust you've asked for back before you've shown them change?

Lord, I don't want to be sorry only with my mouth. Let my life bear the fruit of a turned heart, and give me patience with the people I've hurt. Amen.

DAY 57

Recognition Is Not Surrender

You say you have faith, for you believe that there is one God. Good for you! Even the demons believe this, and they tremble in terror.

James 2:19

Picture the scene. Jesus steps out of a boat on the far side of the lake, and a man possessed by a legion of demons comes running from the tombs. He bows low at Jesus' feet and shrieks His name: "Jesus, Son of the Most High God" (Mark 5:7).

Meanwhile, the men who knew the Scriptures best looked at the same Jesus and missed Him. He told them, "You search the Scriptures because you think they give you eternal life. But the Scriptures point to me! Yet you refuse to come to me to receive this life" (John 5:39–40).

Yet the demons weren't saved by what they knew. They knew exactly who Jesus was. They trembled. And they stayed demons.

A teacher named Ian Simkins put it this way: "Recognition is not trust. Belief is not surrender." There's an old saying that the devil is a better theologian than any of us, and he is a devil still.

That's the danger of an almost-right faith. We can agree with every line of the creed and never bend the knee. We can know about Jesus, sing about Jesus, even argue for Jesus, and still keep the keys to our own life. Belief says, "I know who You are." Surrender says, "Then You decide what I do."

Repentance is where belief turns into trust. It's the moment we stop admiring the Lord from a safe distance and hand Him the rooms we've kept locked.

So Paul says, “Examine yourselves to see if your faith is genuine” (2 Corinthians 13:5). The miracle of salvation should be followed by a changed life, so an unbelieving world never doubts the power of the blood.

Almost right: I believe in Jesus, and I know exactly who He is.
Right: I trust Jesus enough to hand Him the keys.

When you claim a heavenly reality without earthly evidence, you become a liability in the Kingdom of God.

FOR THE ROAD

What part of your life do you believe Jesus could rule, but haven’t actually surrendered to Him?

Jesus, I don’t want to only know about You. I bow my knee and hand You the keys I’ve been holding back. Be Lord of all of it. Amen.

DAY 58

Forgiven and Changed

And I will give you a new heart, and I will put a new spirit in you. I will take out your stony, stubborn heart and give you a tender, responsive heart. And I will put my Spirit in you so that you will follow my decrees and be careful to obey my regulations.

Ezekiel 36:26–27

Jeremiah paints two pictures side by side. One is a stunted shrub in the desert, "with no hope for the future," living "in an uninhabited salty land." The other is a tree "planted along a riverbank, with roots that reach deep into the water." When the heat comes, the tree isn't bothered. "Their leaves stay green, and they never stop producing fruit" (Jeremiah 17:6–8).

The difference isn't how hard each plant tries. It's where the roots are.

Many of us were handed half a gospel. We heard, rightly, that the blood of Jesus cancels our sin. "I will forgive their wickedness, and I will never again remember their sins" (Hebrews 8:12). That is glorious, and we should never get over it.

But the New Covenant doesn't stop at forgiveness. Through Ezekiel, God promised a new heart, a new spirit and His own Spirit living inside us, moving us to walk in His ways. A gospel that preaches the canceling power of the blood but neglects its transforming power presents a distorted view of grace. It leaves forgiven people pardoned but still dry.

Paul says it plainly: "Anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!" (2 Corinthians 5:17).

That is good news if you're tired of confessing the same sin every week. The same blood that cleared your record can change your desires.

Repentance asks God to cancel what you did, and then it asks for more: *Make me someone who doesn't want to do it again.*

So put your roots by the river, and let Him grow what you could never produce by trying harder.

Almost right: The blood of Jesus cancels my sin.

Right: The blood of Jesus cancels my sin and changes my heart.

God doesn't just want us to be forgiven; He wants us to be changed.

FOR THE ROAD

Is there a sin you keep asking God to forgive but have never asked Him to change?

Father, thank You that my record is clean. Now go deeper. Take out every stony place in me and give me a heart that wants what You want. Amen.

DAY 59

Evidence, Not Wages

God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it. For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.

Ephesians 2:8–10

Think about the difference between a paycheck and a fingerprint.

A paycheck is wages. You put in the hours, and you're owed what you earned. A fingerprint is evidence. Nobody gets paid for leaving one. It's simply what's left behind when a hand has touched something.

Our good works belong in the second category.

When we get this backward, some of us start keeping score, assuming our attendance, giving and serving have earned God's favor. That breeds a spiritual arrogance that boasts in our own righteousness instead of thanking Jesus for His. Others decide works don't matter at all. James won't let us off that hook: "Faith by itself isn't enough. Unless it produces good deeds, it is dead and useless" (James 2:17).

Ephesians holds both together. We're saved by grace and not by works, and then we're created anew "so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago." A child doesn't work in the family field to get adopted. She works there because she already belongs.

Our good works are often a byproduct of how we view the goodness of God. If we see Him through a lens of contempt, as a hard boss who's never satisfied, we'll strain to earn His approval or give up. If we see

Him through the fear of the Lord, with awe at who He is and what He's done, our works become worship.

Habakkuk prayed, "I am filled with awe by your amazing works" (Habakkuk 3:2). Awe at His works is what fuels ours.

Almost right: If I do enough good, God will be pleased with me.

Right: God has already shown me grace, so I do good because I'm His.

Works are the evidence of your salvation, not the wages of your salvation.

FOR THE ROAD

Do your good works feel more like a paycheck you're earning or a fingerprint you're leaving?

Lord, I can't earn what You've already given. Let my life leave fingerprints of Your grace everywhere I go, and let all of it be thanks. Amen.

DAY 60

Not Where You Should Be

In the spring of the year, when kings normally go out to war, David sent Joab and the Israelite army to fight the Ammonites. They destroyed the Ammonite army and laid siege to the city of Rabbah. However, David stayed behind in Jerusalem.

2 Samuel 11:1

Notice how the most painful chapter of David's life begins. The writer opens with a king who stayed home.

It was the season "when kings normally go out to war." That was David's job. Instead he stayed behind in Jerusalem. A few verses later David gets up from his afternoon rest, walks out on the palace roof, and the rest is heartbreak: adultery, deception, a loyal soldier killed, and a child lost.

It is often when we are not where we should be, fulfilling our responsibilities, that temptation strikes. David's fall started with drift long before it reached the rooftop.

Proverbs 7 describes a young man strolling near an immoral woman's house at twilight. Nobody drags him there. Then "he followed her at once, like an ox going to the slaughter… like a bird flying into a snare, little knowing it would cost him his life" (Proverbs 7:22–23). The almost-right thought says, *I'm strong enough to stand near it and not fall.* David was a giant-killer, a worshiper, a man after God's own heart. His strength was never the problem. His location was.

The old saying goes that sin will take you farther than you want to go, keep you longer than you want to stay and cost you more than you want

to pay. Sometimes you get what you want, but you don't like what you get.

So real repentance often changes your address as well as your attitude. It deletes the app, drives the other way home and goes back to the battle God assigned. "A prudent person foresees danger and takes precautions" (Proverbs 22:3).

And if you've already fallen, remember how David's story continues. He was confronted, he repented, and mercy met him in the wreckage.

Almost right: I'm strong enough to stand near temptation and not fall.

Right: I'm wise enough to stay where God has called me to be.

Most falls begin by not being where you should be.

FOR THE ROAD

Where are you "staying home" when you should be on the battlefield?

Father, I don't trust my own strength anymore. Put me back where You've called me to be, and give me the wisdom to walk away before temptation reaches me. Amen.

WEEK 12

Together

Meet once after Day 60. Be honest, be gracious, and keep what's shared in the room.

1. **Open:** Read Matthew 3:8 aloud. Ask: what does fruit look like after real repentance, at home, at work and in private?
2. **Day 56:** Love needs action, trust needs proof, sorry needs change. Which of the three is hardest for you, and why?
3. **Day 57:** What's the difference between believing in Jesus and surrendering to Him? Where have you seen that gap in your own life?
4. **Day 58:** Have you known forgiveness without much change? What would it look like to ask God for a new heart in one specific area?
5. **Day 59:** Paycheck or fingerprint: which describes the way you serve right now? How does the way you see God shape your answer?
6. **Day 60:** When are you most likely to be "not where you should be"? What helps you stay at your post?

Practice together: Have each person name one place, habit or time of day where they tend to drift. Then agree on one simple precaution each (Proverbs 22:3) and pair up so someone checks in by the end of the week. Keep it short, kind and confidential.

Pray: Pray Ezekiel 36:26 over one another: "Lord, take out every stony, stubborn heart in us and give us tender, responsive hearts."

WEEK 13

Orphans No More

Under the sins sits an orphan heart, and repentance brings us home as sons and daughters.

DAY 61

Saved From What?

But to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God.

John 1:12

The first question God asks in the Bible is a father's question. Adam and Eve had eaten from the one tree He warned them about. When they heard Him walking in the garden, they hid among the trees. "Then the LORD God called to the man, 'Where are you?'" (Genesis 3:9).

God knew where Adam was. The question was for Adam. For the first time, His children ran from Him instead of to Him.

Ask a room of believers what Jesus saved them from, and most will say "hell." That's true, and it matters. But if that's all we know, we'll settle for a kind of fire insurance: a policy we signed once and hope we never need. Or we'll want the benefits of God without the Lordship of God. If we don't know what we've been saved from, we won't understand what we've been saved into.

Go back to that garden. God had warned that death would come the day Adam and Eve ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 2:17). When they ate, death entered the human race, and with it something else. The entire human race was orphaned. Cut off from the Father, we've searched for identity, provision and belonging everywhere else ever since.

So salvation is more than escape. It's adoption. To all who received Jesus, "he gave the right to become children of God." Repentance is the road home, from the wilderness of "orphanianity" to belonging in the family of God.

And a family has a Father who leads. Fire insurance only asks, “Am I covered?” A son or daughter asks, “Father, what would You like me to do?”

Almost right: I’m saved, so I’m covered.

Right: I’m saved, so I’m adopted, and my Father is Lord of my life.

If you don’t know what you’ve been saved from, you’ll settle for fire insurance instead of a Father.

FOR THE ROAD

If someone asked what Jesus saved you from, and what He saved you into, what would you say?

Father, thank You for not leaving me in the orphanage. I don’t want a policy; I want You. Be my Father and my Lord. Amen.

DAY 62

In the Father's House, Without the Father's Heart

So you have not received a spirit that makes you fearful slaves. Instead, you received God's Spirit when he adopted you as his own children. Now we call him, "Abba, Father." For his Spirit joins with our spirit to affirm that we are God's children.

Romans 8:15–16

When Paul wrote to the church in Corinth, he had to tell saved people a hard thing. He couldn't speak to them as spiritual people. He had to talk to them "as though you were infants in the Christian life" (1 Corinthians 3:1). The proof? "You are jealous of one another and quarrel with each other" (1 Corinthians 3:3).

They were in the family. They just weren't living like it.

You can be legally saved as a child of God but still operate from a paradigm of rejection, an orphan mindset. You can be in the Father's house and lack the Father's heart.

That orphan heart usually takes one of two shapes.

The religious orphan gets his happiness from his performance or his position in the field instead of from the presence of the Father. He works hard, keeps the rules and watches who gets noticed.

The rebellious orphan finds her joy in personal dreams and individual liberties rather than trusting the Father's plan. She wants the inheritance on her own terms.

One works too hard to be seen. The other runs too far to be told no. Both live under the Father's roof and rarely look Him in the eye.

The mature child of God is different. She finds her joy and peace locking eyes with the Father of Lights, knowing that the storms of life and the noise of people's praise all fade when we gaze on His beauty. David wanted exactly that: to live in the house of the Lord, "delighting in the LORD's perfections" (Psalm 27:4).

That's why the Spirit of adoption matters. He changes more than our legal status. He keeps telling our spirit that we belong.

Almost right: I'm saved and in the house, so I must be fine.
Right: I'm in the house, and I'm learning to live from the Father's heart.

You can be in the Father's house and still lack the Father's heart.

FOR THE ROAD

Are you more tempted to be a religious orphan (performance and position) or a rebellious orphan (your own dreams and liberties)?

Abba, I don't want to live under Your roof and miss Your face. Let Your Spirit tell my spirit again that I am Yours. Amen.

DAY 63

The Son Who Never Left

> *His father said to him, "Look, dear son, you have always stayed by me, and everything I have is yours."*
>
> **Luke 15:31**

There's a party going on. You can hear the music from the field. The younger son, the one who took his inheritance and wasted it in a far country, has come home, and his father has put the finest robe on him and killed the fattened calf.

Outside, in the dark, stands the older brother. He "was angry and wouldn't go in" (Luke 15:28).

We usually call this the parable of the prodigal son, but Jesus told it about two lost sons. One was lost in a far country. The other was lost on his father's own land.

Listen to how the older brother talks: "All these years I've slaved for you and never once refused to do a single thing you told me to. And in all that time you never gave me even one young goat for a feast with my friends" (Luke 15:29). He had been a son his whole life, but he talked like a hired hand. He measured the relationship in years of labor and rewards withheld.

Now look at the father. He doesn't scold. He goes out to this son too. "Look, dear son, you have always stayed by me, and everything I have is yours." It was all his already. He had just never received it as a son.

That's a word for faithful church people. It's possible to serve God for years, keep every rule and still feel unseen, resentful when grace lands on someone who "doesn't deserve it." The cure isn't working harder. It's

hearing the Father call you “dear son” or “dear daughter” and walking into the party.

C. S. Lewis wrote, “The Son of God became a man to enable men to become sons of God.” Jesus didn’t come to give us better jobs on the farm. He came to give us our place at the table.

Almost right: I’ve served God faithfully all these years.
Right: I’m His child, and everything He has is already mine.

A son who thinks like a servant will stand outside his own father’s party.

FOR THE ROAD

Is there a place in your heart where you resent grace being given to someone else?

Father, forgive me for keeping score in Your house. I hear You calling me “dear child.” I’m coming in to the celebration. Amen.

DAY 64

Be the Best, or Give Your Best

> *Then I observed that most people are motivated to success because they envy their neighbors. But this, too, is meaningless—like chasing the wind.*
>
> **Ecclesiastes 4:4**

Picture a scoreboard nobody else can see. It hangs in the back of your mind, and you check it every day. Who's ahead of you. Who's behind. How your numbers compare. Whether today's mistake knocked a point off.

Solomon saw that scoreboard thousands of years ago. Most people, he noticed, are driven to succeed because they envy their neighbors. He called it chasing the wind.

Two spirits keep that scoreboard running. The Spirit of Competition says, *You have to be the best.* The Spirit of Performance says, *You can never make a mistake.* They look different, but both come from an orphan heart that has to prove its worth.

Competition shows up as being wise in your own eyes, rejection of criticism, arrogance, and being critical of others. Performance shows up as shame, false blame, codependence, restlessness, perfectionism, and being critical of yourself. One points the finger outward. The other turns it inward. Both leave you exhausted.

The Spirit of Adoption speaks a different word: *Give your best.* You aren't trying to beat anyone or to stay safe from failure. You're a loved child working in your Father's house. "Work willingly at whatever you do, as though you were working for the Lord rather than for people" (Colossians 3:23).

The fruit of that Spirit is peace, joy, empathy, discernment, self-awareness and a heart to serve, the freedom to "be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves" (Philippians 2:3). When you're off the scoreboard, you can celebrate someone else's win without losing anything.

Your Father never asked you to be the best. He asked you to be His, and to give Him your best.

Almost right: God wants me to be the best.
Right: God wants me to give my best, as His child.

Orphans fight to be the best. Sons and daughters are free to give their best.

FOR THE ROAD

Which voice do you hear more often: "be the best" or "never make a mistake"?

Father, take down the scoreboard in my mind. Let me work for You with joy, celebrate others freely and rest in being Yours. Amen.

DAY 65

Picked by Grace

See how very much our Father loves us, for he calls us his children, and that is what we are!

1 John 3:1

In the 1982 film *Annie*, the billionaire Oliver Warbucks decides to host an orphan in his mansion for a week, mostly for the publicity. He sends his secretary to the orphanage to choose one. Her name is Grace.

Grace walks into that crowded, hard place and picks Annie.

I love that detail. Annie was rescued from the orphanage literally by being picked by a woman named Grace. She didn't earn the invitation. She didn't pass an interview. She was chosen before Warbucks had ever met her.

That's the gospel. "God decided in advance to adopt us into his own family by bringing us to himself through Jesus Christ. This is what he wanted to do, and it gave him great pleasure" (Ephesians 1:5). You were picked by grace before you could prove a thing.

But watch what happens once Annie arrives. She doesn't yet know how to live in that house. She assumes she's there to work and expects to start cleaning. Over time, the man who planned to host her for a week grows to love her with a father's love and wants her as his own daughter. A girl from the orphanage finds peace, love and belonging in a home that was never hers by right.

That's the second half of adoption: learning to live as family. Many believers have been picked by grace and are still scrubbing floors in the Father's house, trying to be useful enough to stay. But you didn't get in by being useful, and you won't stay by it either. "Now you are no longer

a slave but God's own child. And since you are his child, God has made you his heir" (Galatians 4:7).

Put the scrub brush down. Grace brought you in. Love is teaching you how to live there.

Almost right: I have to earn my place in God's house.

Right: Grace picked me, and now I'm learning to live as family.

Grace picked you before you could prove anything.

FOR THE ROAD

In what ways are you still "scrubbing floors" to prove you belong?

Father, I didn't earn my way in, and I can't earn my way to stay. Thank You for choosing me. Teach me to live like Your child. Amen.

WEEK 13

Together

Meet once after Day 65. Some of these questions touch old wounds, so listen more than you fix.

1. **Open:** Read John 1:12 aloud. Ask: what's the difference between being forgiven and being adopted?
2. **Day 61:** Before this week, how would you have answered "What did Jesus save you from?" What did He save you into?
3. **Day 62:** Religious orphan or rebellious orphan: which one have you been most like, and when?
4. **Day 63:** When have you felt like the older brother, faithful but outside the party? What helped you go in?
5. **Day 64:** Where does the scoreboard show up for you: work, church, parenting, social media? What would "give your best" look like there this week?
6. **Day 65:** What's your version of scrubbing floors to prove you belong?

Practice together: Go around the circle and have each person finish this sentence out loud: "Because I'm God's child, I don't have to ___." Then have the group respond by reading 1 John 3:1 over that person: "See how very much our Father loves us, for he calls us his children, and that is what we are!"

Pray: Pray Romans 8:15 together, ending with everyone saying it aloud: "Abba, Father."

WEEK 14

From Fear to First Love

Repentance ends where it was always leading: obedience that flows from love, a Bride instead of a hired hand, and consecration over celebrity.

DAY 66

Who You Fear Letting Down

Fearing people is a dangerous trap, but trusting the LORD means safety.

Proverbs 29:25

Close your eyes for a moment and imagine failing. Really failing: a choice that goes public, a mistake everyone hears about.

Now notice whose face you see.

A parent? A pastor? A spouse, a boss, the people who follow you online? Or the Lord?

That face tells you something. The true measure of your worship can be seen in who you fear letting down. If you're most concerned about disappointing others, you're walking in the fear of man. If your greatest fear is disappointing God, you're walking in the fear of the Lord.

Proverbs calls the fear of people a trap, and it is a well-hidden one. It can look like humility, or like being a team player. But it quietly hands control of your choices to whoever you're trying to impress. You start shading the truth, staying quiet when you should speak, saying yes when God said no. John tells us that some leaders in Jesus' day believed in Him but wouldn't say so publicly, "for they loved human praise more than the praise of God" (John 12:43).

The fear of the Lord isn't cowering before an angry God. It's awe before a holy one: deep reverence for who He is and a heart that wants to please Him above anyone else. Paul put it bluntly: "If pleasing people were my goal, I would not be Christ's servant" (Galatians 1:10).

And here's the freedom in it. People's approval rises and falls with their moods. God's love doesn't. When the One you most want to honor is

also the One who has already adopted you, you can stop performing for the crowd and start loving people honestly, because you no longer need anything from them.

Almost right: I care deeply about never letting people down.
Right: I care most about not letting God down, and that frees me to love people honestly.

The true measure of your worship can be seen in who you fear letting down.

FOR THE ROAD

When you picture failing, whose face do you see?

Lord, I confess I've feared people more than I've feared You. Free me from that trap, and let Your approval be the one I live for. Amen.

DAY 67

The Cookie Jar and the Wedding Ring

Those who accept my commandments and obey them are the ones who love me. And because they love me, my Father will love them. And I will love them and reveal myself to each of them.

John 14:21

Picture a young believer sitting with his mentor after Bible study. He's frustrated. "I don't understand why we have to follow all these rules," he says. "It feels like I'm only doing things so I don't get in trouble."

His mentor tells him two short stories.

The first is about a little boy who's tempted to sneak cookies from the jar and skip his chores. He doesn't, mostly because he knows his parents will discipline him, firmly but lovingly.

The second is about a wife who has chances to be unfaithful. She never cheats. But her reason isn't love for her husband. She's afraid of getting caught.

Then the mentor asks, "Which of these stories seems more troubling to you, and why?"

The young man knows right away. The wife. A child who obeys out of fear of discipline is normal; that's where children start. But a wife faithful only out of fear of getting caught? Something is deeply wrong.

That's the road repentance walks us down. When we first come home as adopted children, a healthy fear and clear boundaries teach us right from wrong. But God never meant for us to stay there. He is maturing us from adopted child to consecrated Bride, where obedience flows from love and devotion. Jesus put love first and obedience second: "If you love me, obey my commandments" (John 14:15).

If your faithfulness to God is mostly about not getting caught, you haven't failed. You may simply still be at the cookie jar. Ask Him to grow you toward the wedding ring, where you keep His ways because you can't bear to break His heart. "Perfect love expels all fear" (1 John 4:18).

Almost right: I stay faithful to God because I'm afraid of what happens if I don't.
Right: I stay faithful to God because I love Him and won't break His heart.

Children obey to avoid the discipline. A Bride stays faithful because she's in love.

FOR THE ROAD

Is your obedience to God today more like the cookie jar or the wedding ring?

Jesus, I don't want to be faithful only out of fear. Grow me from a child avoiding punishment into a Bride who loves You. Amen.

DAY 68

Rules Don’t Make a Home

He has enabled us to be ministers of his new covenant. This is a covenant not of written laws, but of the Spirit. The old written covenant ends in death; but under the new covenant, the Spirit gives life.

2 Corinthians 3:6

Here’s a parable about one woman and three marriages, each one teaching her something different.

Her first marriage began with preference. He matched her checklist: same hobbies, same routines. It felt right at first, but small differences grew into big disappointments, and it ended. Liking the same things couldn’t hold a marriage that had no deep, shared promise.

Her second marriage was the opposite. She vowed to stay no matter what. Her husband kept strict rules and judged her constantly, and behind closed doors he betrayed her with cruel words and an affair. When he died years later, she came out of it scarred and swore she’d never marry again.

Then a gentle man came along. He didn’t hand her a checklist or tighten the rules. He loved her patiently and sacrificially. They courted slowly and married. While moving into their new home, she found the old list of tasks her second husband had given her. Fear and memories rushed back. Then she realized she already did every one of those things, not because anyone ordered her to, but because love made her want to.

“Those rules don’t make a home,” she said softly to him one night. He took her hand and answered, “Love does.”

Three marriages, three paths. Lawlessness chooses by preference and impulse, without covenant, and it doesn't last. Legalism keeps strict rules without mercy, and it wounds. Covenant love, the kind Christ showed at the cross, turns duty into delight and heals what preference and law never could.

God's ways didn't get softer in the new covenant. The heart that keeps them got new. "Love fulfills the requirements of God's law" (Romans 13:10). The Spirit doesn't tear up the list. He writes it on a heart that finally wants it.

Almost right: Faith means keeping the rules, or else following your heart.

Right: Faith is a covenant of love that keeps God's ways gladly.

Rules don't make a home. Love does.

FOR THE ROAD

Do you lean more toward legalism (rules without love) or lawlessness (preference without covenant)?

Holy Spirit, write God's ways on my heart until obedience feels like home. Heal whatever rules without love have wounded in me. Amen.

DAY 69

When Ministry Becomes the Idol

But I have this complaint against you. You don't love me or each other as you did at first! Look how far you have fallen! Turn back to me and do the works you did at first.

Revelation 2:4–5

Jesus' letter to the church in Ephesus opens with a list of compliments. They worked hard. They endured. They wouldn't tolerate evil. They tested people who claimed to be apostles and exposed the false ones (Revelation 2:2–3). By most measures, this was a healthy, sound, busy church.

And then: "You don't love me or each other as you did at first!"

Ephesus wasn't drifting into false doctrine. It was faithfully doing the work while losing the One the work was for. Ministry had become an idol.

Here's a question that cuts deep: Are you more afraid to lose your anointing and provision from God, or more afraid to lose your intimacy and the presence of God in your life?

Abraham faced that question on a mountain. God had promised him a son, and after twenty-five years of waiting, Isaac came. Then God said, "Take your son, your only son—yes, Isaac, whom you love so much" (Genesis 22:2), and told him to offer him up. Isaac wasn't a sin. Isaac was the promise. But even the promise can become an idol if we love it more than the One who gave it. Abraham climbed the mountain anyway, and God provided.

For those of us who serve, this is the hardest almost-right to see. The ministry is good. The gift is from God. The platform may even be His

provision. But Jesus won't share first place with any of it.

His remedy for Ephesus was simple: look back at how far you've fallen, turn around, and "do the works you did at first." Go back to the place where it was just you and Him. That first love is still there to be found, and He's the One asking for it.

Almost right: I'm working hard for God, and my doctrine is sound.
Right: I'm loving Jesus first, and the work flows from that.

Even the promise can become an idol when you love it more than the One who gave it.

FOR THE ROAD

Are you more afraid to lose your anointing or to lose His presence?

Jesus, You are my first love. Forgive me for loving the work more than You. I lay my Isaac on the altar and come back to You. Amen.

DAY 70

Celebrated or Consecrated

If you keep yourself pure, you will be a special utensil for honorable use. Your life will be clean, and you will be ready for the Master to use you for every good work.

2 Timothy 2:21

Not long ago I had a dream I haven't been able to shake.

I saw men with prophetic voices locked inside a prison, a kind of dungeon. Every one of them wore an orange jumpsuit. They had lost their strength, courage and spiritual authority. Some had swollen faces and missing teeth. That stood out to me, because prophetic voices are called to speak the word of the Lord with boldness, and their mouths had been damaged.

In the dream I understood why they were there. Their desire to be celebrated had become stronger than their hunger to be consecrated.

Orange is a warning color, and the dream felt like a warning, for prophets and for anyone God has given a voice: parents, pastors, worship leaders, the friend everyone calls when they need the truth.

Wanting to be appreciated isn't wicked. But celebration makes a cruel master. Applause slowly retrains what we're willing to say. Jesus asked the religious leaders, "No wonder you can't believe! For you gladly honor each other, but you don't care about the honor that comes from the one who alone is God" (John 5:44).

Consecration means being set apart, cleansed and kept for the Master's use. It's hidden work, and it rarely gets noticed. But it's what keeps a voice free.

The message of the dream was heavy but clear: we must recover strength, courage, integrity and consecration, and return to the fear of the Lord.

That is where this whole season of repentance has been leading. We turned from sin, came home as sons and daughters, and are being set apart as a Bride. And a consecrated people is exactly the kind of people God loves to revive.

Almost right: I want to be celebrated for what God has given me.
Right: I want to be consecrated for whatever God wants to do through me.

A voice is open to compromise when the desire to be celebrated takes priority over the hunger to be consecrated.

FOR THE ROAD

Where has the desire to be celebrated been quietly shaping your words or choices?

Lord, I would rather be set apart for You than applauded by everyone else. Cleanse me, consecrate me, and make my heart ready for revival. In Jesus' name, amen.

WEEK 14

Together

Meet once after Day 70. This closes the season of Repentance, so leave time at the end to thank God for what He's done in your group.

1. **Open:** Read John 14:21 aloud. Ask: how does love change the way we feel about God's commands?
2. **Day 66:** When you picture failing, whose face do you see? What would change if it were the Lord's?
3. **Day 67:** Cookie jar or wedding ring: where is your obedience right now? Be honest, and be kind to each other's answers.
4. **Day 68:** Which have you seen more in church life, legalism or lawlessness? Which do you drift toward personally?
5. **Day 69:** What good thing in your life (a ministry, a gift, a promise) could quietly take Jesus' place?
6. **Day 70:** Where does the desire to be celebrated show up for you? What would consecration look like this month?

Practice together: Look back over the six weeks of Repentance. Have each person share one thing God has turned around in them, whether a changed mind, a new heart, a habit broken or a step closer to the Father. Write the answers down and keep the list; you'll want to remember them when Revival comes.

Pray: Pray Revelation 2:5 together: "Lord, we turn back to You. Restore our first love and make us ready for whatever You want to do next."

SEASON THREE

Revival

The Cost of Discipleship

WEEKS 15–19

WEEK 15

Revival Starts in the Mirror

Revival isn't a better Sunday or God finally dealing with "the bad guys." It starts with my own sin, my own pursuits and my own confession of who Jesus is.

DAY 71

Don’t Pray for Revival

Then if my people who are called by my name will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sins and restore their land.

2 Chronicles 7:14

I was talking with a local pastor once about being a conduit of revival, and he winced at the word. He didn’t like it. When I asked him why, he gave me three reasons. It gets overused. Most of what we call revival is really spiritual self-gratification. And most revivals become a moment, not a movement.

I couldn’t argue with him. He wasn’t against God moving. He was against us borrowing God’s name for something we really want for ourselves.

In *The Ten Greatest Revivals Ever*, Elmer Towns and Douglas Porter tell about a restaurant sign that read, “Pray for Revival in America.” They said amen, and then they wondered whether the people eating there knew what they were asking for. Most people, they suggest, picture a wonderful service next Sunday at eleven o’clock. Real revival is agonizing. It wrecks your calendar. And when we pray for it, we’re usually thinking about the bad guys and asking God to “sic ’em.” Their warning has stayed with me: the bad guys might be the person we see every time we look in the mirror.

Their advice was startling. Don’t pray for revival. Repent of all known sin, do what you already know to do, and give God all of your time. Not part of it. All of it.

That is the order Scripture gives. “If my people…” God doesn’t start with the culture. He starts with His own house. “The time has come for judgment, and it must begin with God’s household” (1 Peter 4:17).

Revival isn’t something God does to *them*. It’s something He does in *us* first, and then through us.

Almost right: Lord, send revival and deal with the people who need it most.
Right: Lord, start with me.

Most revivals become a moment, not a movement, because they never reached the mirror.

FOR THE ROAD

Who have you been asking God to fix, when He may be asking to start with you?

Father, I don’t want a better Sunday. I want a clean heart. Search me, start with me, and have all of my time, not just part of it. Amen.

DAY 72

The Pursuit of Happiness

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

Matthew 5:6 (NIV)

“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.”

Few sentences in history carry that much weight, and most of it is gloriously right. Every person is created equal. Life and liberty come from the Creator, not from a king, a government or a bloodline. No class or tribe hands out human dignity. That’s deeply biblical: God made every one of us in His image (Genesis 1:27).

But the last three words are almost right.

“The pursuit of happiness” sounds harmless. Who doesn’t want to be happy? But happiness, set up as the goal, becomes whatever delights my heart at the moment. And the heart, left to itself, delights in plenty of things that destroy it.

Jesus offered a different pursuit. He didn’t bless those who chase happiness. He blessed those who *hunger and thirst for righteousness*, and He promised they would be filled. Paul told Timothy the same thing: “Pursue righteousness and a godly life, along with faith, love, perseverance, and gentleness” (1 Timothy 6:11).

This is where revival begins in a heart. Before God revives us, He redirects what we’re chasing. Many of us want God to bless the pursuit of our happiness. Revival asks a harder question: what am I actually running after?

Here is the strange thing. People who chase happiness rarely catch it. People who chase God find a joy they never went looking for. Happiness depends on what happens. Joy depends on Who is with you.

Almost right: God wants me to pursue whatever makes me happy.
Right: God wants me to pursue Him, and He gives a joy happiness never could.

Chase happiness and it runs from you; chase righteousness and joy follows you home.

FOR THE ROAD

If you're honest, what have you been pursuing most this month?

Lord, I don't want to spend my life chasing what can't fill me. Make me hungry for righteousness, and fill me the way only You can. Amen.

DAY 73

The “I” and the “O”

O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Romans 7:24–25 (KJV)

Picture the self-made dream written out in big letters. Right at the center, holding the whole thing up, is a capital “I.” *I* worked hard. *I* earned it. *I* did it my way.

Now write out the word “Gospel.” There’s no “I” in it anywhere. But there is an “O.”

That “O” is the sound Paul made in Romans 7. “O wretched man that I am!” It’s the groan of a man who has finally stopped pretending. He has tried harder, promised better and white-knuckled his way through, and he has come to the end of himself. *Who will rescue me?*

The self-made life has a hard time with the gospel, because the gospel starts with words the self-made heart hates to say: *I can’t.* “Everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God’s glorious standard” (Romans 3:23). The gospel doesn’t build on our strength. It meets us at the end of it.

Ambition and hard work aren’t the problem. God can bless both. The problem comes when the “I” stays at the center and God is invited in as a helper. A helper makes my plans work better. A Savior makes me a new person.

Revival has always come to people who found their “O.” The proud don’t cry out. They improve. The broken cry out, and they’re answered: “I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord.” Paul’s groan didn’t end in despair. It ended in a Person.

Almost right: God helps those who help themselves.

Right: God saves those who know they can't save themselves.

The gospel has no "I" in it, but it has an "O": the cry of a heart that knows it needs a Savior.

FOR THE ROAD

Where is the "I" still sitting at the center of your life, with God as the helper?

Jesus, I can't rescue myself, and I'm done pretending I can. You are not my assistant. You are my Savior. Thank You. Amen.

DAY 74

Grace That Conquers

From then on, Jesus began to preach, "Repent of your sins and turn to God, for the Kingdom of Heaven is near."

Matthew 4:17

Think about the cross for a moment. The eternal, all-powerful God took on human weakness and died a torturous death. If sovereignty were only about power and control, the cross would have been unnecessary. God could have simply overruled us.

He didn't. At the cross, His power bowed to His love. "God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners" (Romans 5:8). Before we cleaned up. Before we even cared.

His love is unconditional. You can't make Him love you more, and you can't make Him love you less.

But notice the first word of Jesus' public ministry. It wasn't "relax." It was "repent." While God's love is unconditional, His salvation isn't. It's received by a faith that turns around.

This is where many of us hide. We take the true sentence "God loves me unconditionally" and quietly add, "so nothing is asked of me." Grace becomes a hiding place from repentance instead of the power to walk in it.

A gospel that teaches the cancelling power of Jesus' blood over sin, but not its conquering power, is a gospel of distorted grace. It forgives us in the bondage and leaves us there. But Paul wrote, "Sin is no longer your master, for you no longer live under the requirements of the law. Instead, you live under the freedom of God's grace" (Romans 6:14). Grace doesn't just pardon the prisoner. It opens the cell.

Revival often becomes necessary precisely because we've drifted here. The way back is the same road Jesus first preached: turn to God, and let His grace do all of its work.

Almost right: God loves me unconditionally, so nothing is required of me.
Right: God loves me unconditionally, so He calls me to repent and gives me the power to change.

The blood that cancels sin also conquers it.

FOR THE ROAD

Where have you used God's grace as a hiding place instead of a way out?

Father, thank You for loving me before I changed. Don't let me use Your love as an excuse to stay the same. Let Your grace finish its work in me. In Jesus' name, amen.

DAY 75

Who Do You Say I Am?

Then he asked them, "But who do you say I am?"

Matthew 16:15

During my years in the NFL, I became close with a teammate who was raised in another religious tradition. He was devoted to his faith, and over two years our friendship grew deep, on the field and off it. We talked about God often.

One day at lunch, I felt an urgency to say something I'd been carrying for a while. I looked at him and said, "Jesus isn't going to ask you who your church says He is, or who your parents say He is. He's going to ask you, 'Who do *you* say that I am?'"

He went quiet. Then his eyes filled up, and he began to cry.

I don't know everything that happened in his heart that day. Only God does. But I've never forgotten how a question Jesus asked two thousand years ago could still cut straight through a lifetime of inherited answers.

Jesus asked His disciples two questions. First: "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" (Matthew 16:13). They had plenty of answers. Then He made it personal: "But who do *you* say I am?"

Many of us live on the first question. We know what our parents believed, what our church teaches and what our favorite preacher says. That is a gift, but it isn't a relationship. Jesus warned that some people would call Him "Lord" and even do great things in His name, and still hear, "I never knew you" (Matthew 7:23).

Revival is personal before it's corporate. It happens when people stop repeating someone else's answer and give their own. Peter answered,

“You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God,” and Jesus said that answer came straight from the Father (Matthew 16:16–17).

Almost right: I believe what my parents and my church say about Jesus.

Right: I know Jesus for myself, and He knows me.

He isn’t going to ask you what anyone else said about Him. He’s going to ask you who *you* say He is.

FOR THE ROAD

If Jesus asked you today, “Who do you say I am?”, what would you honestly answer?

Jesus, I don’t want a borrowed faith. Reveal Yourself to me the way the Father revealed You to Peter, and let my answer be my own. Amen.

WEEK 15

Together

Meet once after Day 75. Be honest about where revival needs to start in you before you talk about anyone else.

1. **Open:** Read 1 Peter 4:17 aloud: “The time has come for judgment, and it must begin with God’s household.” Why does God start with His own people?
2. **Day 71:** When you’ve prayed for revival, who did you picture changing? What would it look like for revival to start with you?
3. **Day 72:** What does our culture tell us to pursue? What would change in your week if you pursued righteousness instead of happiness?
4. **Day 73:** Share a moment when you found your “O,” when you came to the end of yourself. How did God meet you there?
5. **Day 74:** Why is “God loves me unconditionally, so nothing is asked of me” so tempting? Where have you seen grace used as a hiding place?
6. **Day 75:** Whose answer about Jesus did you grow up with? When did it become your own, or has it yet?

Practice together: Take Towns and Porter’s challenge for one week. Each person names one known sin to turn from and one block of time to give fully to God. Check in with each other midweek by text.

Pray: Pray 2 Chronicles 7:14 over the group, then let each person finish this sentence aloud: “Lord, start with me in…”

WEEK 16

Hungry for His Face

Once we're awake, the heart finds the true reward of revival: not what God gives but God Himself, His face, His beauty and the holy awe that holds us.

DAY 76

Not Half a Father

You have said, "Seek my face." My heart says to you, "Your face, LORD, do I seek."

Psalm 27:8 (ESV)

In Pixar's *Onward*, two young brothers find a spell that can bring their late father back for one day. They've never really known him, and they ache for him. But the spell goes wrong halfway through. Only the bottom half of their dad appears: a pair of legs in khakis and socks.

It's funny for a while. But the brothers won't settle for half a father. They spend the whole movie fighting to finish the spell, because they want the one thing the legs can't give them. They want to see his face.

People seek God for all kinds of reasons. Someone who loves learning may seek Him for wisdom. Someone driven to achieve may seek Him for success. Someone afraid may run to Him as a refuge. None of that is wrong. But the person who longs for His presence out of hunger for His beauty will gladly bankrupt everything just for a glimpse of His face.

Moses had already seen the hand of God more than anyone alive. Plagues, the parted sea, bread falling from heaven every morning. And still he prayed, "Then show me your glorious presence" (Exodus 33:18). He'd had the gifts. He wanted the Giver.

Many of us are walking around with half a Father. We have His provision, His protection and His answers, and we're grateful. But we've grown content with His hand and stopped seeking His face.

Revival restores the hunger the brothers had. Not *more from Him*, but *more of Him*. His hand is good. His face is the reward.

Almost right: I seek God for His wisdom, His blessing and His protection.
Right: I seek God for God.

His hand can fill your life, but only His face can fill your heart.

FOR THE ROAD

If God gave you every answer you're asking for but no more of His presence, would you be satisfied?

Father, I don't want half of You. Thank You for every gift, but I want Your face. Draw me past Your hand and into Your presence. Amen.

DAY 77

One Thing

But the Lord said to her, "My dear Martha, you are worried and upset over all these details! There is only one thing worth being concerned about. Mary has discovered it, and it will not be taken away from her."

Luke 10:41–42

Here's a question worth sitting with: what did you do this week that will matter in a hundred years?

In the movie *City Slickers*, a weathered old cowboy named Curly asks a burned-out city guy if he knows the secret of life. Then he holds up one finger. One thing, he says. Just one thing matters. When the man asks what that one thing is, Curly just grins and tells him that's what he has to figure out.

Jesus already told us.

Martha opened her home to Jesus and went to work. She wasn't lazy or rebellious. She was serving the Lord, and serving Him hard. Her sister Mary just sat at His feet and listened. When Martha complained, Jesus didn't scold her for working. He told her she was worried about many things, and only one thing was needed.

Martha's work was *for* Jesus. Mary's attention was *on* Jesus. Both looked spiritual. Only one was the good portion.

David found the same secret centuries earlier: "One thing have I asked of the LORD, that will I seek after… to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD" (Psalm 27:4, ESV). A king with a nation to run, and he reduced his whole life to one thing.

Many things will fight for your affection and attention this year, and most of them will be some form of self-love or self-comfort. Some will even be ministry. Being busy for God is good. Choosing the one thing is better.

Almost right: I'm so busy serving Jesus I hardly have time to sit with Him.
Right: Before I serve Him, I sit with Him.

Either you're wasting your life in the eyes of man or you're wasting your life in the eyes of God.

FOR THE ROAD

Are you more like Martha or Mary this season? What would it take to sit at His feet this week?

Jesus, You are the one thing. Quiet my worry and my busyness, and teach me to choose the good portion that can't be taken from me. Amen.

DAY 78

God Is Not Boring

A person who is full refuses honey, but even bitter food tastes sweet to the hungry.

Proverbs 27:7

We can binge-watch a show for four to six hours, but we can't read our Bibles and pray for fifteen minutes.

Picture a small town where the whole community fills the high school stadium every Friday night. The bands play, the lights blaze, and people talk about the game all week. That passion is real. Football can teach discipline, sacrifice and teamwork. The sport isn't the problem.

The problem is that we have plenty of zeal. We just spend it everywhere except on God. Jesus said, "Wherever your treasure is, there the desires of your heart will also be" (Matthew 6:21). Show me where your passion goes on a Friday night, and I'll show you what your heart treasures.

I believe the greatest cancer and distraction confronting the Church today is boredom with our Divine Creator. Corey Russell put it bluntly: God is not boring. We are.

Proverbs explains why. A full stomach turns down even honey. A starving one finds even bitter food sweet. Our lack of hunger for God says nothing about Him being dull and everything about us being full. We've snacked all day on screens, games and noise, and when He sets His table, we have no appetite.

Sometimes we lack hunger because we've tasted another gospel, a smaller and safer version of God that was never worth craving. But the

invitation still stands: “Taste and see that the LORD is good” (Psalm 34:8).

Revival begins with hunger. And hunger often begins with a fast: pushing back the plate of lesser things long enough to remember what we were made to want.

Almost right: I’m passionate about a lot of good things, and God gets what’s left.

Right: My hunger for God outweighs every other appetite.

We’re not too busy for God. We’re too full.

FOR THE ROAD

What are you “snacking” on that keeps you from being hungry for God?

Lord, forgive me for being bored with You. Take away my appetite for lesser things, and make me hungry again. Amen.

DAY 79

Wonder in the Wrong Place

Look up into the heavens. Who created all the stars? He brings them out like an army, one after another, calling each by its name. Because of his great power and incomparable strength, not a single one is missing.

Isaiah 40:26

Anyone who's spent time around the NFL has heard about Larry Allen's legendary 700-pound bench press. Strong men talk about it with something close to reverence. Fans shake their heads at the thought of it. Raw human strength captures us.

I understand that. I spent my life around strong men. But here's a question that has stuck with me: why do we applaud the weight a man lifts for a moment more than the Hands that made gravity, muscle and light?

Isaiah asks it better: "Who else has held the oceans in his hand? Who has measured off the heavens with his fingers?" (Isaiah 40:12). The God of Genesis 1 spoke galaxies into being, shaped life from dust and wrote the laws of physics that make a bench press possible in the first place. Every muscle fiber in the strongest man alive was His idea.

Human strength is real, and it reflects His artistry. David marveled, "Your workmanship is marvelous" (Psalm 139:14). But it's fleeting, limited by time and age. The Creator's strength holds every star in place and never gets tired.

Our culture has wonder. It just puts it in the wrong place. We stand amazed at the creation and walk right past the Creator. Revival puts our awe back where it belongs.

And here is the beautiful part. When you finally stand in awe of Him, you don't feel crushed. God has an incredible ability to make you feel very small in His presence and, at the same time, completely loved, protected, valuable and secure.

Almost right: I'm amazed at what people can do.
Right: I'm amazed at the God who made them able to do it.

God makes you feel small in His presence and completely loved at the same time.

FOR THE ROAD

Where does your wonder and awe dwell right now?

Creator God, open my eyes to Your greatness. Turn my amazement at what You've made into worship of the One who made it. Amen.

DAY 80

A Beautiful Fear

Fear of the LORD is a life-giving fountain; it offers escape from the snares of death.

Proverbs 14:27

Ask most people what “the fear of the Lord” means, and they’ll describe something like dread: a God with His arms crossed, waiting for you to slip.

Now listen to the words the fear of the Lord actually holds: wonder, delight, esteem, homage, pleasure, reverence, respect. Captivating. Even intoxicating. And yes, terrifying. All of them at once.

The fear of the Lord is a beautiful mystery. It’s what happens to a heart that catches a glimpse of His limitless beauty, His limitless power, wisdom and understanding, and His limitless love. It isn’t the fear of a slave before a cruel master. It’s the trembling delight of a child who sees how great their Father really is. Isaiah even said of the coming Messiah, “his delight shall be in the fear of the LORD” (Isaiah 11:3, ESV). Jesus Himself delighted in it.

Some believe we’ve outgrown this fear. But Proverbs calls it a fountain of life and a way of escape. It protects us.

Jesus warned that in the last days, “Sin will be rampant everywhere, and the love of many will grow cold” (Matthew 24:12). In a shaking world, hearts get offended at God and slide into lawlessness. The fear of the Lord is what guards the heart from both. A heart that stands in awe of Him doesn’t easily put Him on trial.

So here is the real question. Do you have a greater fear of being without the closeness of His Holy Spirit, or a greater fear of losing personal

pleasure and the praise of people? Whatever you fear losing most is what rules your heart.

Almost right: The fear of the Lord is old-covenant dread that we've grown past.
Right: The fear of the Lord is holy wonder that keeps my heart from growing cold.

What you fear losing most reveals what you love most.

FOR THE ROAD

Do you fear losing His closeness more than losing pleasure or people's praise?

Holy God, teach me the beautiful fear of You. Let awe guard my heart from offense, and let Your nearness be the thing I can't bear to lose. Amen.

WEEK 16

Together

Meet once after Day 80. Let this be less about answers and more about appetite: what are you hungry for?

1. **Open:** Read Psalm 42:1–2 aloud: “As the deer longs for streams of water, so I long for you, O God.” When have you felt that kind of thirst?
2. **Day 76:** What gifts of God’s hand are you most grateful for? Have any of them made it easier to stop seeking His face?
3. **Day 77:** Answer the question honestly: what did you do this week that will matter in a hundred years?
4. **Day 78:** What fills you up so much that you have little appetite for God? Be specific.
5. **Day 79:** Where have you seen wonder in the wrong place, in your life or in our culture?
6. **Day 80:** Which word in the list (wonder, delight, homage, terrifying) surprised you most? Why?

Practice together: Agree as a group on one “plate” to push back this week, such as a show, an app or a habit, and give that time to sitting at His feet. Report back next time on what you noticed about your hunger.

Pray: Pray Psalm 27:4 together, slowly, as one voice: “One thing have I asked of the LORD, that will I seek after.”

WEEK 17

The Secret Place

Hunger draws us inward. Revival is sustained in private, where Presence comes before power, God's heart before our list, and listening and smallness before the platform.

DAY 81

Presence or Power?

The eyes of the LORD search the whole earth in order to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him.

2 Chronicles 16:9

Picture two people at the altar on the same night. Same posture. Same tears. Same hands lifted. Both are crying out for more of God. From the back of the room, you couldn't tell them apart.

The pursuit of Presence and the pursuit of Power look almost identical. So what's the difference? Motive.

The pursuit of power is often driven by a need to perform so we can feel like somebody. The pursuit of Presence is driven by a desire to obey so we can be close to Him. One is about what I can become. The other is about Who I get to be with.

Is power wrong? Not at all. Jesus promised it, and the early Church walked in it. But power should be a benefit of intimacy, never the motive for it. Chasing power before Presence is like marrying someone for what you'll get out of it rather than for the relationship itself. Something is off at the root, even if the wedding looks beautiful.

That's why Jesus told us to "go away by yourself, shut the door behind you, and pray to your Father in private" (Matthew 6:6). Nobody claps in there. Nobody sees the anointing. It's just you and the Father, and that's exactly the point. In a world that prizes visibility, it's easy to value our public platform over our private prayer life. But the secret place reveals what we really want.

God's eyes search the whole earth for hearts fully committed to Him. He's looking for hearts, not résumés.

Your identity in Christ can't be fractured. But intimacy can be disrupted, and disobedience is what disrupts it. Guard the closeness, and let the power come however He chooses.

Almost right: Lord, give me Your power and anointing.
Right: Lord, give me Yourself, and let any power flow from that.

Power is a by-product of intimacy, never a substitute for it.

FOR THE ROAD

If no one ever saw God use you, would you still want to be close to Him?

Father, search my motives. I don't want Your power more than I want You. Meet me behind the closed door, and let that be enough. Amen.

DAY 82

It Ain’t About Your List

> *Therefore he is able, once and forever, to save those who come to God through him. He lives forever to intercede with God on their behalf.*
>
> **Hebrews 7:25**

Here is one of the greatest revelations about prayer I’ve ever received. You make your list… and then God tears it up.

It ain’t about your list.

That doesn’t mean your requests don’t matter. Paul told us to “tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done” (Philippians 4:6). God cares about the details. But many of us treat prayer like a drive-through window. We read our order, wait for it to come out, and drive off.

Intercession isn’t manipulating God to move on behalf of your will. It’s getting connected to God’s heart and His desires so that *His* will can be released on earth. Jesus taught us to pray, “May your Kingdom come soon. May your will be done on earth, as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6:10). That’s the heart of every real prayer.

Consider this: Jesus is praying right now. He “lives forever to intercede.” There is already a prayer meeting going on in heaven, and the Son of God is leading it. Intercession is simply joining Him. It’s leaning in close enough to hear what He’s praying and then praying it with Him.

That is why He said, “My Temple will be called a house of prayer” (Matthew 21:13). Not a house of programs or performances. A house where His people pray His heart.

And here is the wonder of it. When your heart connects with God's heart, and He hears your voice and it sounds like His voice, He moves. God once looked for someone to "stand in the gap" for the land (Ezekiel 22:30). He's still looking for people who will pray His burden, not just their preferences.

Almost right: Prayer is how I get God to move on my list.

Right: Prayer is how I join Jesus in what He's already praying.

When God hears your voice and it sounds like His, He moves.

FOR THE ROAD

What might God be praying over your family or city that you haven't yet joined Him in?

Jesus, You're already praying. Let me hear Your heart and pray it with You. Tear up my list if You need to, and give me Yours. Amen.

DAY 83

Father, Friend, Judge

> *So if you sinful people know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him.*
>
> **Luke 11:13**

Anyone who knows me knows this: if something in your house needs fixing, don't call me. I mean well, but you'll end up calling a professional anyway.

Without realizing it, many of us pray to a God like that. We see Him as a dad who means well and loves us, but who doesn't have the time, the power or the resources to really help. So we pray politely and then go fix it ourselves.

In a season of prayer, I sensed the Lord show me something sobering about His people: we have magnified our problems more than we've magnified Him, because we've forgotten His many names.

More than *what* you're asking, the better question is *who* you're talking to.

In Luke, Jesus gave us three pictures of who we're talking to. First, a good Father who won't hand His child a snake when she asks for a fish (Luke 11:11–13). Second, a friend at midnight, who gets out of bed and gives you all you need because you kept knocking (Luke 11:5–8). Third, a judge who finally answers a widow's persistent cry for justice. Jesus said if even an unjust judge will do that, how much more will God "give justice to his chosen people who cry out to him day and night" (Luke 18:7).

So when you need provision, come as a child to a Father. When you need a door opened, come boldly to a Friend. When you've been wronged, bring your case to the Righteous Judge.

Prayer changes when you remember who's listening. Small views of God produce small prayers. A big view of God makes our problems their proper size.

Almost right: God means well, but I'm not sure He can handle this.

Right: I know who I'm talking to, and nothing is too hard for Him.

When you need provision you need a Father. When you need a favor you need a friend. When you need justice you need a Righteous Judge.

FOR THE ROAD

Which of these do you need most right now: a Father, a Friend or a Judge?

Father, forgive me for making my problems bigger than You. Remind me who I'm talking to. You are able, You are near, and You are just. Amen.

DAY 84

The Word and the Voice

My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.

John 10:27

The Word of God defines marriage, but it doesn't tell you whom to marry. It tells you that your work can be offered to God as worship, but it doesn't tell you where to work.

That's why we need to discern not only the Word of God but the voice of God in our everyday lives.

Some believers love the Bible and quietly assume God stopped speaking when the last page was written. Their faith is sincere, but prayer has become a monologue. They talk, they say amen, and they leave. If you follow Christ but believe He doesn't communicate with His children, your connection with God starts to look like watching a documentary about a relationship instead of being in one.

Jesus said His sheep *listen to His voice*. Not just to facts about Him. His voice. The psalmist wrote, "I listen carefully to what God the LORD is saying" (Psalm 85:8). Isaiah promised, "Your own ears will hear him. Right behind you a voice will say, 'This is the way you should go,' whether to the right or to the left" (Isaiah 30:21).

Here is the safeguard. The Word is the boundary, and the voice never steps outside it. God won't tell you to marry someone Scripture forbids or take a job that requires you to lie. His voice gives direction *within* the lines His Word has drawn. The Word without the voice can become dry. The voice without the Word can become dangerous. Together, they lead you home.

So make room to listen. Habakkuk said, “I will climb up to my watchtower and stand at my guardpost. There I will wait to see what the LORD says” (Habakkuk 2:1). Sit in the quiet. Write down what you sense. Test it by Scripture.

Almost right: I have the Bible, so I don’t need to hear God’s voice.
Right: The Bible is my boundary, and His voice leads me within it.

A Christian who can’t hear God’s voice is like a baseball player who can’t hit a baseball.

FOR THE ROAD

When was the last time your prayer was a conversation instead of a monologue?

Lord, speak. I’m listening. Teach me to hear Your voice and to test every word by Your Word. Amen.

DAY 85

Small Enough

He must become greater and greater, and I must become less and less.

John 3:30

In the early days of the Azusa Street revival, a man named Frank Bartleman wrote about a morning when the Spirit of God rested on him and spoke something he never forgot: “If you were only small enough, I could do anything with you.”

Bartleman said a great desire to be little, even to be nothing, came into his heart. And he admitted how hard it was to stay low enough for God to really work through him. Then he wrote these words: “When a man gets to the place where he really loves obscurity… where he would rather sit in the backseat than on the platform, then God can lift him up and use him, and not very much before.”

Many of us pray, *Lord, use me mightily.* Few of us pray, *Lord, make me small.*

John the Baptist knew this secret. He had crowds, disciples and a national reputation. Then Jesus showed up, and the crowds started leaving John to follow Him. John’s friends were worried. John wasn’t. “He must become greater and greater, and I must become less and less.”

That’s the posture revival rests on. God doesn’t need people who are ready for the platform. He needs people who are content without one. The secret place is where we get small. In there, nobody knows our name, and we’re glad.

Peter wrote, “Humble yourselves under the mighty power of God, and at the right time he will lift you up in honor” (1 Peter 5:6). Notice who

does the lifting. It isn't us. Our job is the humbling. His job is the timing.

If you're in a hidden season right now, don't despise it. It may be the very place God is making you small enough to carry what's coming.

Almost right: Lord, use me in a mighty way.

Right: Lord, make me small enough for You to use.

God can do anything with someone small enough to let Him.

FOR THE ROAD

Do you love obscurity, or do you only tolerate it while waiting for the platform?

Jesus, You must become greater, and I must become less. Make me small in my own eyes and content in the hidden place. Lift me only when You choose. Amen.

WEEK 17

Together

Meet once after Day 85. Before you begin, sit together in silence for two full minutes.

1. **Open:** Read Jeremiah 33:3 aloud: “Ask me and I will tell you remarkable secrets you do not know about things to come.” How did those two minutes of silence feel?
2. **Day 81:** How can you tell the difference between pursuing His Presence and pursuing His power? Where has your motive gotten mixed?
3. **Day 82:** If God tore up your prayer list, what do you think He’d write in its place?
4. **Day 83:** Do you pray more naturally to God as Father, Friend or Judge? Which one is hardest for you to believe?
5. **Day 84:** Share a time you sensed God’s voice leading you. How did you test it by Scripture?
6. **Day 85:** What makes obscurity hard for you? What would it look like to love the backseat?

Practice together: Spend ten minutes praying, but only after five minutes of listening first. Ask, “Lord, what are You praying right now?” Then share what each person sensed, and test it together against Scripture.

Pray: Pray Matthew 6:10 over one another: “May your Kingdom come soon. May your will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.”

WEEK 18

Stirred, Not Settled

Revival is the work of a Person. Don't settle for a sealed but unstirred life, a legal salvation or a gospel with compassion but no power. Receive all He paid for, and carry it in love.

DAY 86

Stir the Glass

Don't be drunk with wine, because that will ruin your life. Instead, be filled with the Holy Spirit.

Ephesians 5:18

Picture a few glasses of milk and a bottle of chocolate syrup on a table.

First, pour a little syrup on a spoon and taste it. That's an encounter. Many people have tasted the Holy Spirit in a meeting or a moment. God promised to pour out His Spirit on all people (Acts 2:17), and a taste can wake you up.

Next, pour syrup over the *outside* of a glass. It runs down the sides and makes a mess, but the milk inside doesn't change at all. That's a picture of Samson. "The Spirit of the LORD came powerfully upon Samson" (Judges 15:14), and he did amazing things. But the power was on him, not in him. Inside, he was the same man.

Now pour syrup *into* the second glass and leave it alone. It sinks to the bottom. The syrup is really in there, but the milk still looks like milk. That's a believer who is sealed with the Spirit (Ephesians 1:13). He lives inside as the guarantee of our salvation. It's real and it's settled. But He's sitting at the bottom of the glass, and nothing about the life looks different.

Finally, pour syrup into the third glass and stir. Everything changes color. Every drop is touched. That's what Paul meant by "be filled." The sense is ongoing: keep on being filled. Keep stirring.

Many of us are glass number two. We truly belong to Jesus. The Holy Spirit lives in us. But He's settled at the bottom while our attitudes, our habits and our words look the same as before.

Revival is God stirring the glass. Worship stirs it. The Word stirs it. Obedience stirs it. Surrender stirs it most of all. You don't need a different Spirit. You need the One you have to reach every part of you.

Almost right: I have the Holy Spirit. I was sealed the day I believed.
Right: I have the Holy Spirit, and I want Him stirred through every part of me.

The syrup settles at the bottom, and the milk still looks like milk.

FOR THE ROAD

Which part of your life still "looks like milk"?

Holy Spirit, thank You for living in me. Don't stay settled at the bottom. Stir me until every part of my life is touched by You. Amen.

DAY 87

Just Enough Not to Be Weird

Do not stifle the Holy Spirit.

1 Thessalonians 5:19

I've heard it said that many of us want just enough of the Holy Spirit not to make us weird. Enough to look spiritual, but not enough to change our bad habits. Enough to bless the service, but not enough to take the steering wheel of our lives, or to make us late for the game.

It's a funny line until it describes you.

Paul gave a young church five plain words: "Do not stifle the Holy Spirit." Older translations say "quench," like pouring water on a fire. You don't have to fight the Spirit to quench Him. You only have to manage Him. Keep Him inside the lines. Keep everything predictable. Let Him in, but don't let Him lead.

When a church does that, something else has to fill the space. A line often credited to Reinhard Bonnke says it well: the less Holy Spirit we have, the more cake and coffee we need to keep the church going.

The early Church didn't have much to manage. No buildings, no budgets, no platforms. They had the Holy Spirit, and they didn't try to tame Him. Their critics complained that they had "caused trouble all over the world" (Acts 17:6).

Here is the hard truth. The Holy Spirit is God. He doesn't come to decorate our plans. Jesus said, "When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth" (John 16:13). A guide you refuse to follow is just company on the trail.

Weird isn't the goal. Holiness and love are. But if surrender makes you look a little strange to a world that's asleep, that's a small price for being

awake.

Almost right: I want the Holy Spirit, just enough to bless what I'm already doing.

Right: I want all of Him, even if He disrupts my plans and my comfort.

The House of God without the power of God is entertainment.

FOR THE ROAD

Where have you been managing the Holy Spirit instead of following Him?

Holy Spirit, forgive me for keeping You at a safe distance. Take the steering wheel. Lead me, even where it costs me my comfort. Amen.

DAY 88

Groceries Left in the Basket

Once when he was eating with them, he commanded them, "Do not leave Jerusalem until the Father sends you the gift he promised, as I told you before. John baptized with water, but in just a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit."

Acts 1:4–5

It's the worst feeling. You get home from the grocery store, unload the car and realize you left a bag in the cart. You paid for it. It was yours. You just didn't take it home.

I wonder how many believers are living like that with the gospel.

Think about this: Jesus did not think His incarnation, His life, the cross, His death, His resurrection and His ascension were enough to start first-century Christianity. After all of that, He still told His disciples to wait. Don't go preach yet. Wait until you're "baptized with the Holy Spirit." Wait until you "receive power" (Acts 1:8).

He wanted them more than legally saved. He wanted them powerfully transformed.

What does it mean to be "saved"? The New Testament word *sozo* carries the ideas of being rescued, healed, made whole and preserved. Jesus didn't only save us *from* hell. He saved us from our fallen nature and *into* a new life. God promised, "I will give you a new heart, and I will put a new spirit in you… And I will put my Spirit in you so that you will follow my decrees" (Ezekiel 36:26–27).

If we don't know what we've been saved from, we'll settle for fire insurance and a few perks instead of salvation and Lordship. We'll take

the ticket and leave the rest in the basket: the new heart, the freedom from sin's power, the fullness of the Spirit and the boldness to witness.

Jesus paid for all of it. Every promise of the Father is bought and paid for in His blood. Why would we walk out of the store with half?

Almost right: I'm saved. I've got my ticket to heaven.

Right: I'm saved, and I want everything Jesus paid for.

Jesus paid for far more than fire insurance, so don't leave the store without it.

FOR THE ROAD

What has Jesus paid for that you've left sitting in the basket?

Jesus, I don't want to leave anything You paid for behind. Fill me with Your Spirit, transform me, and make me whole. Amen.

DAY 89

A Defective Gospel

For the Kingdom of God is not just a lot of talk; it is living by God's power.

1 Corinthians 4:20

The dictionary defines *defective* as "having a defect or flaw; imperfect; faulty." Of a person, it means "below the usual standard."

A defective product usually looks fine. The car starts. The lights come on. You don't find the flaw until you really need it, and then it fails you.

The gospel we preach can be like that. It looks right. It sounds kind. But when someone desperate leans their full weight on it, it gives way. Here are three marks of a defective gospel:

A defective gospel empathizes with people's pain but has no power to deliver them from it.

A defective gospel loves the sinner but can't transform them into a saint.

A defective gospel has compassion for the sick but has no gift to heal them.

Notice that each one starts with something good. Empathy, love and compassion are deeply Christlike. That's what makes this so tempting. The danger lies in what's missing.

Jesus never separated the two. "He had compassion on them and healed their sick" (Matthew 14:14). He wept with Mary and Martha, and then He called Lazarus out of the grave. His compassion always moved toward power.

We live in a hurting world, and people need more than someone who understands. They need someone who can set them free. If all we offer

is sympathy, we've handed them a gospel that is below the standard Jesus set.

That doesn't mean we stop caring. It means we care enough to bring people to the One who can actually change their story. And if you don't know the true gospel, you'll be open to a counterfeit one.

Almost right: I can't fix anyone, but I can feel their pain with them.
Right: I feel their pain with them, and I bring them to the One who has power to heal it.

A defective gospel empathizes with people's pain but has no power to deliver them from it.

FOR THE ROAD

When someone shares their pain with you, do you usually stop at sympathy, or do you bring them to Jesus?

Lord, give me Your compassion and Your power together. Don't let me offer people a gospel that's below Your standard. Amen.

DAY 90

The Serum and the Skull

Then he said to the crowd, "If any of you wants to be my follower, you must give up your own way, take up your cross daily, and follow me."

Luke 9:23

In *Captain America: The First Avenger*, Steve Rogers is a frail nobody. He's small, sickly and rejected by the army again and again. But a scientist picks him for an experiment, not because of his strength, but because of his heart. Steve is given a serum he could never earn, and he walks out of the chamber transformed.

That's a picture of grace. "God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God" (Ephesians 2:8). We're not chosen for our strength. We're remade by a gift.

But the movie has a darker side. The villain, Red Skull, took an earlier version of the same serum, and it twisted him into a monster. The film's point is that the serum magnifies whatever is already inside a man. The same power that made Steve a hero made Red Skull a tyrant.

The serum is a gift, but Steve's choices define his legacy. He keeps choosing sacrificial love, and in the end he gives himself up to save others.

The Holy Spirit is not a serum, but the picture holds. God's power poured into a surrendered heart produces Christlikeness. God's gifts operating through an unsurrendered heart can produce pride, manipulation and harm. That's why Jesus didn't only say, "You will receive power." He also said, "Take up your cross daily."

Power without the cross becomes the Skull. Power carried with the cross becomes a servant who lays down his life.

Paul wrote, “For we are God’s masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago” (Ephesians 2:10).

Almost right: If I had more power, I could do great things for God.
Right: Power is only safe in my hands when the cross is on my back.

The gift is free, but what you do with it becomes your legacy.

FOR THE ROAD

What is God’s power magnifying in you right now: love, or something else?

Jesus, I want Your power, but I want Your cross first. Make my heart safe to carry what You give, and let my life be laid down for others. Amen.

WEEK 18

Together

Meet once after Day 90. Bring a glass of milk and some chocolate syrup if you're brave.

1. **Open:** Read Zechariah 4:6 aloud: "It is not by force nor by strength, but by my Spirit, says the LORD of Heaven's Armies." Where are you trying to do by strength what only His Spirit can do?
2. **Day 86:** Which glass describes you right now: a taste, syrup on the outside, settled at the bottom or stirred? Why?
3. **Day 87:** What does "just enough of the Holy Spirit not to make us weird" look like in real life? Where do you see it in yourself?
4. **Day 88:** What do you think most believers leave "in the basket"? What have you left there?
5. **Day 89:** Which mark of a defective gospel do you see most often? Which one do you tend to offer?
6. **Day 90:** Why does power need the cross? Where have you seen a gift without character do harm?

Practice together: Do the chocolate milk demonstration as a group, one glass at a time. Then let each person name one area of life where they want the Holy Spirit to "stir the glass," and pray for each other specifically.

Pray: Pray Ephesians 5:18 over the group: "Lord, fill us with Your Holy Spirit, and keep filling us."

WEEK 19

The Cost of the Outpouring

Real revival costs us. It asks for trust, love and torn hearts, and it can’t stay a pleasure. It has to give birth to reformation.

DAY 91

Boundary Lines, Not Cords

The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; surely I have a delightful inheritance.

Psalm 16:6 (NIV)

Picture a scenic overlook on the edge of a canyon. Along the cliff runs a sturdy iron fence.

Two people walk up to it. One sees a cage. *Why can't I get closer? Who are they to tell me where to stand?* The other sees a guardrail. Because the fence is there, the kids can run and laugh and play without anyone panicking. The fence is the reason they're free.

Same fence. Two completely different ways of seeing it.

Corey Russell said it this way: you will either see God's Word as loving boundary lines to preserve and protect you for pleasure, or you will see His Word as cords and constraints that restrict you from experiencing pleasure.

How you see His commands shapes everything about how you obey. If they're cords, you'll obey with clenched teeth, always testing the edges, always wondering what you're missing. If they're boundary lines, you'll obey with gratitude, because you know Who drew them and why.

David didn't feel caged by God's lines. He said they had fallen "in pleasant places." And he finished the same psalm with this: "You will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand" (Psalm 16:11, NIV).

Earlier we saw that the pursuit of happiness is almost right. Here is the other half of that truth. God isn't against your pleasure. He's the source of it. His commands don't fence you out of joy. They fence you *in* to it.

The psalmist even prayed, “Make me walk along the path of your commands, for that is where my happiness is found” (Psalm 119:35).

Revival changes the way we see the fence. Obedience stops feeling like loss and starts feeling like love.

Almost right: God’s commands keep me from enjoying my life.

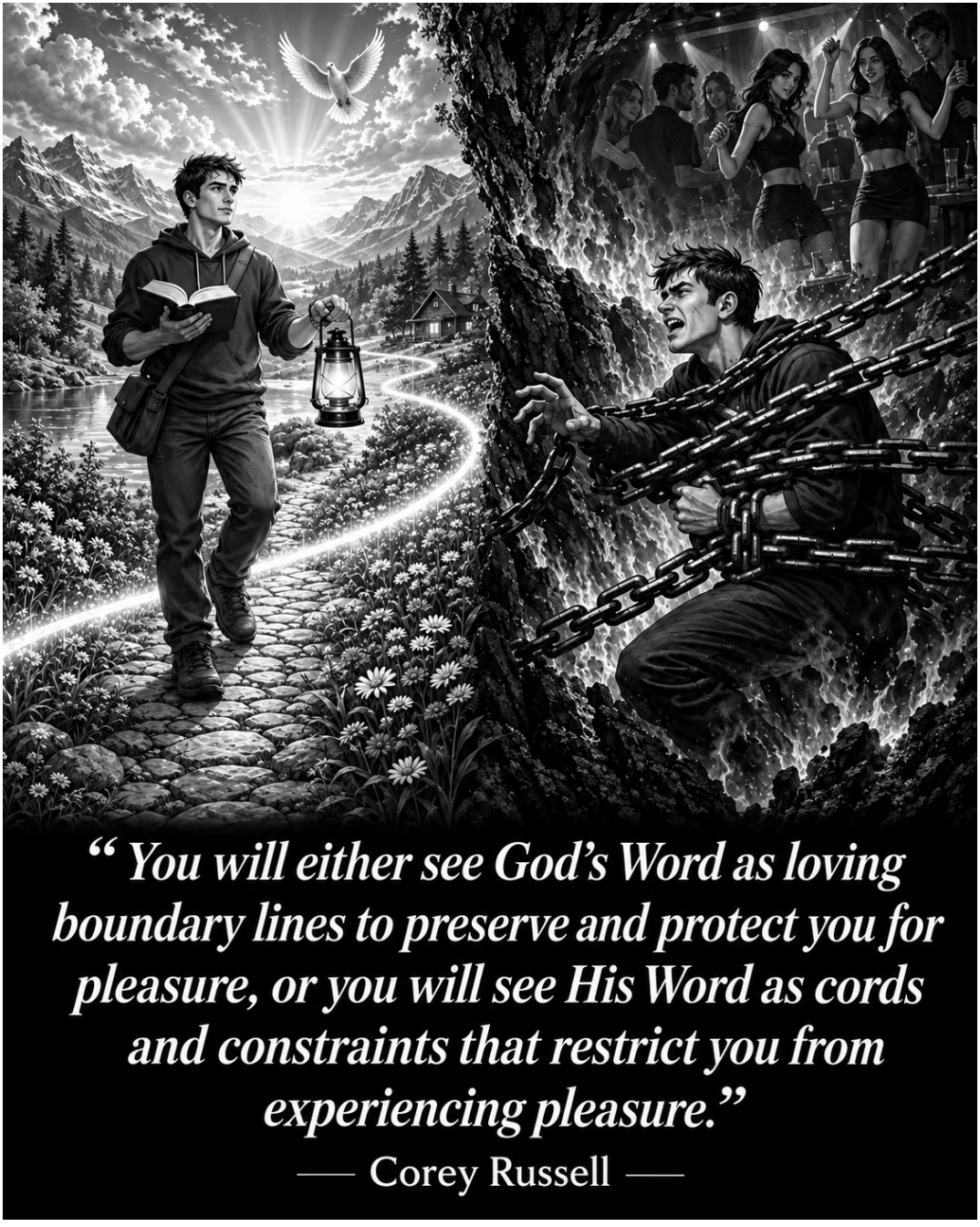
Right: God’s commands keep me safe for the joy He created me to enjoy.

The fence on the cliff is the reason the children can run.

FOR THE ROAD

Which of God’s commands have you been treating as a cord instead of a boundary line?

Father, You drew the lines of my life in pleasant places. Help me trust Your heart behind every command and find my joy inside Your boundaries. Amen.


“ You will either see God’s Word as loving boundary lines to preserve and protect you for pleasure, or you will see His Word as cords and constraints that restrict you from experiencing pleasure.”
— Corey Russell —

DAY 92

Two Kinds of Oil

Trust in the LORD with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding.

Proverbs 3:5

Two stories in the Bible turn on oil, and they teach opposite lessons.

In Jesus' parable of the ten virgins, the foolish ones run low while they wait for the bridegroom. They ask the wise ones to share. The answer sounds harsh: "We don't have enough for all of us. Go to a shop and buy some for yourselves" (Matthew 25:9). That oil couldn't be shared.

But Elisha told a desperate widow to borrow every empty jar she could find and start pouring from her one small flask. The oil kept flowing until "every container was full to the brim!" (2 Kings 4:6). That oil could fill everyone's jar.

I see two different kinds of oil there. The wise virgins carried the oil of trust. The widow poured out the oil of hope.

Hope can be shared. You can encourage someone to place their hope in God. You can pour it into their empty places with a testimony, a verse or a phone call.

But you can't teach someone to fully trust Him. Trust is grown privately, one season at a time, as you lean your weight on God and find that He holds. Nobody can lend it to you.

The difference shows up when things go wrong. A person who hopes in God but lacks trust may find their heart growing cold when life doesn't go their way. Someone who fully trusts Him keeps hoping for the best, and even when the outcome disappoints, they persevere to the end.

So wisdom is knowing which oil a person needs. Some empty jars need hope poured in. Others need to be gently pointed back to the secret place, where they'll learn to trust Jesus for themselves.

Almost right: I hope God comes through for me.
Right: I trust God, even when He doesn't come through the way I hoped.

You can pour hope into someone's jar, but you can't lend them your trust.

FOR THE ROAD

Is your faith right now running more on hope or on trust?

Lord, grow a trust in me that no one else can give or take away. And make me generous with hope for every empty jar You bring my way. Amen.

DAY 93

Common-Union

Three things will last forever—faith, hope, and love—and the greatest of these is love.

1 Corinthians 13:13

I had a dream once that I was taking Communion. I reached for the plate, and there was nothing on it. It was empty. Then the Lord spoke to me: “In My Body there is a lack of Common-union in My people.”

I’ve thought about that word ever since. Communion. *Common union.* The Lord’s Table was never meant only for private moments between me and God. It’s a family meal. We eat from one loaf because we are one body.

History gives us a picture of what happens when God restores that union. In the 1720s, a group of refugees gathered on an estate in Germany called Herrnhut. They came from different backgrounds and church traditions, and the community was full of friction and argument. Then on 13 August 1727, during a Communion service, they experienced a visitation of the Holy Spirit that they compared to the day of Pentecost. The records say they “learned to love one another.”

Out of that love came a prayer meeting that went on around the clock for over a hundred years, and a missionary movement that carried the gospel around the world.

Notice what the Spirit did first. He didn’t give them a better strategy. He taught them to love.

We often picture revival as a powerful experience each of us takes home. But if revival leaves us blessed and still divided, something is missing from the plate. Jesus said, “Your love for one another will prove

to the world that you are my disciples" (John 13:35). Not our gifts. Not our meetings. Our love.

Faith, hope and love will last forever. The greatest is love. Let love be the target, and let love be our Common-Union.

Almost right: Revival is a powerful encounter I take home with me.

Right: Revival is God teaching His people to love one another.

Let love be our Common-Union.

FOR THE ROAD

Is there someone in the Body of Christ you need to make peace with before you come to the Table again?

Lord Jesus, fill the empty plate. Heal the divisions among Your people, starting with me, and teach us to love one another. Amen.

DAY 94

Tear Your Hearts

No, what you see was predicted long ago by the prophet Joel: "In the last days," God says, "I will pour out my Spirit upon all people."

Acts 2:16–17

In the ancient world, when grief or shame hit hard, people tore their clothes. It was a public sign of a broken heart. Everyone could see it.

Through Joel, God asked for something no one could see: "Don't tear your clothing in your grief, but tear your hearts instead" (Joel 2:13).

There is a pattern in Scripture I call "2-2-2."

Psalm 2 is the crisis. "Why are the nations so angry? Why do they waste their time with futile plans?" (Psalm 2:1). It's a world in rebellion against God.

Joel 2 is the response. Not panic. Not outrage. A return. Call the people. Set yourselves apart. Gather everyone, from the elders to the babies. Pray. Weep. Repent.

Acts 2 is the outpouring. When the Spirit fell at Pentecost, Peter stood up and pointed straight back to Joel. The torn hearts of Joel 2 led to the poured-out Spirit of Acts 2.

Revival is more than a series of meetings or a temporary emotional lift. We can't schedule it, and we can't manufacture it with lights and sound. But we can do what Joel told us to do. We can tear our hearts. A line often credited to Leonard Ravenhill puts it well: in revival, God isn't concerned about filling empty churches. He's concerned about filling empty hearts.

And notice why Joel says to return. Because He is "merciful and compassionate, slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love." We return because He's good. The crisis doesn't get the last word. The outpouring does.

Almost right: Let's schedule revival meetings and pray that God shows up.
Right: Let's tear our hearts and return to Him, and He will pour out what He promised.

You can't schedule an outpouring, but you can tear your heart.

FOR THE ROAD

Have you been tearing your clothes, grieving in ways people can see, instead of tearing your heart before God?

Merciful Father, I return to You. Break my heart over what breaks Yours, and pour out Your Spirit on a heart that's open. Amen.

DAY 95

Blessings and Burdens

After this prayer, the meeting place shook, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit. Then they preached the word of God with boldness.

Acts 4:31

People sometimes ask me whether what's coming to the Church is revival or judgment. Glory or crisis? My answer is that it's both. The same fire that warms also refines.

The problem is that we want the blessings of revival without the burdens of the Father's heart.

Look at what happened at Pentecost. About three thousand people were saved in a single day (Acts 2:41). Signs and wonders. Awe. Joy. Meals shared from house to house. It's the chapter every revival prayer points to.

But turn the page. By Acts 4, Peter and John have been arrested, questioned and threatened by the same council that handed Jesus over to be crucified. The outpouring came with pressure attached.

Here's how I'd name our temptation:

We want an Acts 2 presence without an Acts 2 persecution. We want Acts 2 purpose without Acts 2 pain. We want Acts 2 joy without Acts 2 judgment. We want Acts 2 rewards without Acts 2 responsibility.

What did the believers do when the threats came? They didn't pray for the pressure to lift. They prayed, "And now, O Lord, hear their threats, and give us, your servants, great boldness in preaching your word" (Acts 4:29). And the room shook.

That’s the Father’s heart. He doesn’t pour out His Spirit so we can feel good in a meeting. He pours it out because there’s a lost world He loves, and someone has to carry that love into hostile places. The burden is part of the blessing.

Revival was never meant to stay a moment. It’s meant to conceive something that has to be carried, raised and built. That’s where we’re headed next.

Almost right: Lord, give us the power and joy of Acts 2.
Right: Lord, give us all of it, and the boldness to carry Your heart under pressure.

We want the blessings of revival without the burdens of the Father’s heart.

FOR THE ROAD

Which part of Acts 2 have you been asking for, and which part have you been avoiding?

Father, I don’t want the blessing without the burden. Give me Your heart for the lost and the boldness to carry it when the pressure comes. In Jesus’ name, amen.

WEEK 19

Together

Meet once after Day 95. This is the last gathering of the Revival season, so leave time to look back over all five weeks.

1. **Open:** Read Psalm 85:6 aloud: “Won’t you revive us again, so your people can rejoice in you?” What has God revived in you these last five weeks?
2. **Day 91:** Which command of God has felt like a cage to you? What would change if you saw it as a guardrail?
3. **Day 92:** Who in your life needs hope poured into them right now? Who needs to be pointed toward learning trust?
4. **Day 93:** Where do you see a lack of “Common-union” in the Body of Christ? What could your group do about it?
5. **Day 94:** What does it look like to tear your heart instead of your clothes?
6. **Day 95:** When pressure came, the early believers prayed for boldness, not escape. What would that prayer sound like in your life right now?

Practice together: Share Communion as a group if your tradition allows, or share a simple meal. Before you eat, take a moment to make peace with anyone you need to, and name one burden of the Father’s heart your group is willing to carry together.

Pray: Pray Joel 2:13 together: “We return to You, Lord, for You are merciful and compassionate, slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love.”

SEASON FOUR

Reformation

Restoring the House

WEEKS 20–26

WEEK 20

The Baby Called Reformation

Revival is the encounter. Reformation is the long obedience that carries what revival conceives, so the season starts by telling the two apart.

DAY 96

Pleasure Without the Baby

No discipline is enjoyable while it is happening—it's painful! But afterward there will be a peaceful harvest of right living for those who are trained in this way.

Hebrews 12:11

Genesis 38 holds one of the strangest stories in the Bible. When Judah's oldest son died without children, the custom of the day called his brother Onan to marry the widow and give her a son who would carry the dead man's name and inheritance. Onan took the marriage. He refused the child. He wanted the intimacy without the responsibility, and Scripture says what he did was evil in the Lord's sight (Genesis 38:9–10).

It's an uncomfortable story, and I believe God left it in the Book for uncomfortable reasons. Many of us repeat Onan's pattern in our walk with God.

We want the pleasure called Revival without the baby called Reformation.

We love the rush. The worship that lifts us. The fresh anointing. The meeting that runs late because nobody wants to leave. Those are good gifts. But revival was always meant to conceive something. And what it conceives is a baby, and babies are inconvenient. They cost sleep. They rearrange your priorities. They need you tomorrow and the day after that.

The baby called Reformation looks like dying to self. It looks like repentance that reaches past my feelings into my habits, my house and

the structures I've built. It looks like changed priorities and long obedience that leaves an inheritance for the next generation.

Welcome to the season of Reformation. Revival ignites the spark; reformation is the daily work of letting God renew our minds until we are no longer conformed to this world (Romans 12:2). It is slower than revival, and quieter. But it is the only thing that outlives the meeting.

Almost right: Lord, send revival. Give us another encounter.

Right: Lord, whatever revival conceives in me, I'll carry it to term.

We want the pleasure called Revival without the baby called Reformation.

FOR THE ROAD

What has God stirred in you during a powerful moment that you never carried into daily obedience?

Father, forgive me for wanting the fire without the fruit. Whatever You conceive in me, give me the strength to carry it, raise it and pass it on. In Jesus' name, amen.

DAY 97

Revival + Reformation = Revolution

May your Kingdom come soon. May your will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.

Matthew 6:10

Lay three old dictionary definitions side by side.

Revolution comes from a Latin word meaning "a turn around," a fundamental change in power or structures in a short period of time. *Revival* is a return or recovery to life from death or apparent death, an awakening of people to their spiritual concerns. *Reformation* is the correction or amendment of life and manners, of anything corrupt.

Now watch what happens when you put them together.

Revival minus Reformation equals Rebellion. It's self-serving: all the fire, none of the correction.

Reformation minus Revival equals Religion. It's structure without substance: all the correction, none of the life.

Reformation plus Revival equals Revolution. A new wineskin.

When most people say they want a revival, what they are really asking for is a revolution. They want what Jesus taught us to pray: His Kingdom come and His will done here, the way it's done in heaven. That doesn't happen by encounter alone or by structure alone. It takes both.

And here is how you can tell which one you've got. An encounter with God that leaves you loving position, power or being revered has drifted somewhere it shouldn't. That is seeking the praise of men while using

God's name. True revival and reformation produce a love for relationships, not a love for being rewarded.

That's because God's goal was never an empire. He didn't create man so he could build an empire. He created man because He wanted a family. The story started with a family in a garden, and it ends with a wedding (Revelation 19:7). The next move of God will turn the Church away from governing like a business and back to living like a family.

Almost right: God moved powerfully in me, and now people look up to me.
Right: God moved powerfully in me, and now I love people more.

Revival without reformation is rebellion. Reformation without revival is religion. Together they are revolution.

FOR THE ROAD

Which do you tend to have more of right now: fire without correction, or correction without fire?

Lord, I don't want an experience that makes me bigger. Let Your Kingdom come in me until I love Your family the way You do. Amen.

DAY 98

Word, Power, Love

We love each other because he loved us first.

1 John 4:19

Picture a timeline with three stops on it.

The first stop is 1517, Wittenberg. A monk named Martin Luther rediscovers the gospel in the pages of Scripture. I call it the Word Reformation. Its focus was Jesus, and it reformed what the Church believed. Its verse could be John 8:32: “You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”

The second stop is 1906, Azusa Street in Los Angeles. A humble preacher named William Seymour leads a small group into a fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit that spreads around the world. I call it the Power Reformation. Its focus was the Holy Spirit, and it reformed where the Church’s authority came from. Its verse: “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you” (Acts 1:8).

I believe there have been two great reformations since the birth of the Acts 2 Church, and that we are standing on the fringes of a third, the last one.

The third stop is now. I call it the Love Reformation. Its leaders won’t be famous names. They will be faceless men and women. Its focus is the Father. Its theme is the reformation of family. Malachi saw it coming: a day when God would “turn the hearts of fathers to their children, and the hearts of children to their fathers” (Malachi 4:6).

It’s easy to honor the first two reformations as history. We put Luther on a poster and Azusa in a documentary and call them finished. But every reformation was God restoring something His people had lost. Luther

gave back the Word. Azusa gave back the Spirit's power. The Father is now giving back His family, and He is looking for sons and daughters who will carry it without needing their names on it.

Almost right: Thank God for the great reformers of the past.
Right: Thank God for them, and then take my place in what He's doing now.

The last reformation won't have a famous face. It will have a Father.

FOR THE ROAD

Where do you see God turning the hearts of fathers and children toward each other in your world?

Abba, thank You for every reformer who came before me. Make me one of the faceless sons and daughters who carry Your love into this generation. Amen.

DAY 99

Reformer, Not Deconstructionist

You asked, "Who is this that questions my wisdom with such ignorance?" It is I—and I was talking about things I knew nothing about, things far too wonderful for me.

Job 42:3

Job may have been the first "deconstructionist." He lost his children, his wealth and his health, and he didn't pretend it was fine. He questioned. He argued. He demanded an answer from God. And then God answered him out of the whirlwind, and Job's response was worship: he had spoken about things too wonderful for him to know. He basked in the reality that God is God and we are not.

Today many sincere believers say they are "deconstructing." Sometimes that word simply describes an honest season: life gets overwhelming, and we question God's promises or even His character. God is patient with that wrestling. Read the Psalms.

But deconstruction can describe a season without being the prescription for growth. Martin Luther was not known as the Great Deconstructionist. He was known as the Great Reformer. He tore down what was false so that what was true could be rebuilt on the Word. God told Jeremiah he would "uproot and tear down, destroy and overthrow," but also "build up and plant" (Jeremiah 1:10). Tearing down was never meant to be the destination.

Here is the subtle danger. Deconstruction that isn't guided by God's truth can dismantle a faith and build nothing in its place. Worse, it can put human reasoning and self-fulfillment on the throne and still call it Kingdom work. Paul warned about "empty philosophies and high-sounding nonsense that come from human thinking" (Colossians 2:8).

Offense with God is always a sign that we are not seeing our season through divine vision. The answer isn't to quit asking questions. It's to keep asking them on our knees, in the Word, until we end where Job ended.

Almost right: I'm tearing down everything I was taught so I can find what's real.

Right: I'm letting God tear down what isn't Him so He can build what is.

Don't lower your theology to match your pain.

FOR THE ROAD

Is there a question you've been asking God from a posture of offense instead of a posture of worship?

God, You are God and I am not. I bring You my honest questions. Tear down what is false in me, and build me back up on what is true. Amen.

DAY 100

“We Do Church by the Book”

> *When the king heard what was written in the Book of the Law, he tore his clothes in despair.… “For the LORD’s great anger is burning against us because our ancestors have not obeyed the words in this scroll. We have not been doing everything it says we must do.”*
>
> **2 Kings 22:11, 13**

The temple was being repaired. Money was changing hands, workers were busy, supervisors were doing their jobs. And somewhere in the middle of all that religious activity, the high priest Hilkiah found a scroll. It was the Book of the Law.

Think about that. God’s own Word had been lost inside God’s own house.

When the scroll was read to King Josiah, he tore his clothes. He didn’t say, “Good, we’ve been doing this right all along.” He said, in effect, “We haven’t been doing what it says.” That moment of grief became one of the great reformations in Israel’s history. Josiah renewed the covenant and tore down everything that had crept into worship.

Almost every church likes to say, “We do church by the Book.” But is that true? Or is it a slogan we haven’t checked against the Book in years?

When I read Acts 2, I see a simple pattern of what the first believers devoted themselves to. I remember it as five P’s:

- **Pizza.** They broke bread together. Simple meals built relationship and recalled the Lord’s Supper.
- **Participation.** They shared life in fellowship and kept meeting.

- **Preaching.** They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching.
- **Prayer.** They prayed together regularly and stayed dependent on God.
- **Power.** Awe fell on everyone, and signs and wonders followed.

Hold your church, and your own life, up to that list. Not to criticize, but to do what Josiah did: to let the Book read us. Reformation always starts there. It doesn't start with a new strategy. It starts with rediscovering what was in the house all along.

Almost right: We do church by the Book.
Right: We keep opening the Book, and we let it change how we do church.

Revival and reformation disrupt the traditions of men.

FOR THE ROAD

Which of the five P's is most missing from your walk with God right now?

Lord, don't let Your Word get lost in my busyness. Read me the way You read Josiah, and give me a heart that tears instead of hardens. Amen.

WEEK 20

Together

Meet once after Day 100. Let the leader go first, and keep the answers honest rather than impressive.

1. **Open:** Read Hebrews 12:11 aloud. Ask: why do you think most of us would rather have the meeting than the discipline?
2. **Day 96:** What is one "baby" God conceived in you during a powerful moment? Did you carry it, or did it fade?
3. **Day 97:** Revival without reformation is rebellion; reformation without revival is religion. Which one do you see more often in yourself? In the Church?
4. **Day 98:** Who in your life is quietly carrying the Father's heart without needing their name on it? What could you learn from them?
5. **Day 99:** How can we make room for honest questions without letting pain rewrite what we believe about God?
6. **Day 100:** Walk through the five P's of Acts 2 together. Which one is strongest in this group? Which one is weakest?

Practice together: Choose the weakest of the five P's and do something about it before you meet again. If it's Pizza, share a meal. If it's Prayer, set a time to pray together. If it's the Preaching, read Acts 2 aloud together and talk about what you notice.

Pray: Pray Matthew 6:10 over one another, by name: "Your Kingdom come and Your will be done in ___, as it is in heaven."

WEEK 21

No Permission Slip

Reformers don’t wait for the institution to approve. This week tests whose voice rules you and whether you have the courage to say what you see.

DAY 101

Luther Didn’t Ask Permission

But Peter and John replied, “Do you think God wants us to obey you rather than him? We cannot stop telling about everything we have seen and heard.”

Acts 4:19–20

In 1521, Martin Luther was summoned to the city of Worms to answer for his writings before the representatives of the Church and the Holy Roman Emperor. You might expect his biggest fear to be whether he’d make it home alive. It wasn’t. His great concern was whether he would cave. Whether, standing in that room, he would crumble and take it all back.

The 2003 film *Luther* captures that night well. It pictures him alone in his cell before his hearing, tormented by one question: where is your faith now?

Here’s what strikes me. Martin Luther could not go ask the Church of his day for permission to start the Reformation. The very institution that needed correcting was the one that would have had to sign off on it. If he had waited for approval, he would have waited forever.

That wasn’t rebellion for its own sake. He wanted the Church to line up with Scripture again. He understood what Peter told the council: “We must obey God rather than any human authority” (Acts 5:29).

John tells us that many leaders in Jesus’ day believed in Him. They just kept it quiet, for fear of being thrown out of the synagogue. Their faith was real enough to hold privately and not real enough to cost them anything publicly. “They loved human praise more than the praise of God” (John 12:43).

Luther once wrote, “Living, even dying and being damned, make a theologian, not understanding, reading, or speculating.” Truth isn’t only something you understand. It’s something you’re willing to stand in when the room turns against you.

Almost right: I believe it in my heart; I just don’t need to make waves.
Right: I believe it in my heart, so I will obey it in the open.

If you wait for the institution to approve its own reformation, you’ll wait forever.

FOR THE ROAD

Is there something you believe God has shown you that you’ve been keeping quiet to protect your standing?

Lord, I don’t want a secret faith that costs me nothing. Give me the courage to obey You in the open, even when I’m afraid I’ll cave. Amen.

DAY 102

Who Would You Have Been Back Then?

Then you say, "If we had lived in the days of our ancestors, we would never have joined them in killing the prophets." But in saying that, you testify against yourselves that you are indeed the descendants of those who murdered the prophets.

Matthew 23:30–31

A friend of mine once shared something with a group of us that I haven't been able to shake. He had been wondering who he would have been if he had lived two thousand years ago, when Jesus walked the earth.

He said the Lord answered him: *Your character is timeless. Who you are is who you would have been when Jesus walked the earth.*

That's sobering. Most of us assume we would have been on the right side. We read the Gospels and picture ourselves beside Peter and John, never beside the Pharisees. The religious leaders of Jesus' day thought the same way about their ancestors. "If we had been there," they said, "we never would have killed the prophets." And Jesus told them their own words testified against them.

We don't find out who we would have been by imagining the past. We find out by looking at the present. How do I respond today when a true word confronts my comfort? When someone outside the approved circle carries something real? When obedience would cost me my reputation?

Leonard Ravenhill once said, "If Jesus preached the same message ministers preach today, He would never have been crucified." That's worth sitting with. Jesus wasn't crucified for being nice. He was

crucified because His message confronted religious systems, and the people inside them chose their position over His truth.

The good news is that character can be transformed. The Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead can make you, today, the kind of person who would have followed Him then.

Almost right: If I had lived back then, I would have stood with Jesus.
Right: How I respond to Jesus today shows who I would have been back then.

Your character is timeless. Who you are now is who you would have been then.

FOR THE ROAD

Where were you this week: with the crowd, with the religious leaders, or with Jesus?

Jesus, I don't want to flatter myself about the past. Search my heart in the present, and make me today the disciple I hope I would have been then. Amen.

DAY 103

Five Voices, One King

Obviously, I'm not trying to win the approval of people, but of God. If pleasing people were my goal, I would not be Christ's servant.

Galatians 1:10

Picture a throne room with five figures from Israel's history standing around the throne. Each one is whispering to you. Each one represents a voice that wants to rule your decisions.

Saul is consumed with what people will say. When the battle loomed and Samuel was late, Saul offered the sacrifice himself because, as he put it, "I saw my men scattering from me" (1 Samuel 13:11). His throne was built on his image.

Ahab is consumed with what the pressure in his ear will say. Ahab knew better, but he let the strongest influence closest to him make his decisions, and it led him away from God.

Jezebel is consumed with what feelings will say. She was driven by her own desires, and when she didn't get her way, she manipulated until she did.

Absalom is consumed with what ego will say. He stole the hearts of the people at the city gate and turned against his own father to take a throne that wasn't his.

David is consumed with what God will say. He wasn't perfect. He failed badly. But when the prophet confronted him, he repented, and God called him a man after His own heart (1 Samuel 13:14).

Here's the hard part. Those first four voices don't sound wicked when they speak to you. They sound reasonable. *Don't upset people. Listen to*

the people closest to you. Trust your gut. You deserve this. Each one is almost right.

Notice I haven't asked which of these characters you are. The real question is which of these voices is talking loudest in your life this week. Most of us hear all five. Reformation begins when one voice gets the throne and the others lose their vote.

Almost right: I listen to my people, my gut and my own sense of what's best.
Right: I listen to God first, and every other voice has to bow to His.

Saul asks what people will say. David asks what God will say.

FOR THE ROAD

Which of the five voices has been the loudest in your decisions this week?

Father, I want to be a man or woman after Your own heart. Silence every voice that's competing for Your throne in me, and let Yours be the one I obey. Amen.

DAY 104

The Discomfort of Truth

Then Saul admitted to Samuel, "Yes, I have sinned. I have disobeyed your instructions and the LORD's command, for I was afraid of the people and did what they demanded."

1 Samuel 15:24

God told Saul exactly what to do. Saul did most of it. He won the battle. He spared the enemy king and the best of the livestock, and when Samuel arrived, Saul greeted him cheerfully: "I have carried out the LORD's command!" (1 Samuel 15:13). It was almost right.

When Samuel pressed him, the real reason finally came out. *I was afraid of the people.* Saul didn't lack information. He lacked courage. He knew the truth, and he chose the approval of the crowd.

That same fear still shapes how we talk to each other. We have learned, rightly, that truth without love can wound people. "Speak the truth in love," Paul wrote (Ephesians 4:15). But many of us have swung so far that we now speak love without truth. We empathize. We encourage. We affirm. And we never say the one thing that might set someone free, because it might make them uncomfortable, or make them think less of us.

Here's how I've come to say it. Love without empathy is offensive, but love without truth is a lie.

If my doctor sees something on my scan and keeps quiet because he doesn't want to ruin my day, he isn't being kind. He's being cowardly in a kind voice. Real love tells the truth gently, at the right time, with tears if necessary, but it tells the truth.

This is what the Church needs in this season: not more personalities who know how to manage a crowd, but people of courage who fear God more than man.

Almost right: I love them too much to say something that might hurt.
Right: I love them too much to leave the truth unsaid.

I choose the discomfort of truth over the convenience of deception.

FOR THE ROAD

Is there a truth you've been withholding from someone you love because you're afraid of their reaction?

Lord, deliver me from the fear of people. Give me a heart full of compassion and a mouth that tells the truth, so my love is never a lie. Amen.

DAY 105

“That’s God’s Bride”

Look beneath the surface so you can judge correctly.

John 7:24

I remember the words like it happened yesterday: “Be careful how you talk about the Church. That’s God’s Bride.”

I had been sharing a concern about the condition of the church culture around us. The person who said this seemed shocked that I didn’t respond with immediate conviction. But honestly, my first reaction was confusion. I went home and thought about it for a long time.

Here’s where I landed. If my wife were flirting with other men and being unfaithful, and my friends knew but never told me because “we didn’t want to talk badly about your wife,” those people wouldn’t be my friends. Real friends would tell me, because they love me and they love her.

The Church is God’s Bride. That is exactly why we can’t stay silent when she is being led astray. Jesus loves her too much to leave her compromised, and so should we.

Somewhere along the way, many believers became convinced that all judging is wrong. “Don’t judge” became the most quoted verse in the room. But Jesus said to judge correctly, not to stop judging. And Paul said it plainly: “It isn’t my responsibility to judge outsiders, but it certainly is your responsibility to judge those inside the church who are sinning” (1 Corinthians 5:12). We’re even told to take no part in the deeds of darkness, “instead, expose them” (Ephesians 5:11).

If I were the devil, I would want Christians to shy away from making righteous judgments. If I could convince believers that discernment is

unloving, I could blur right and wrong, silence correction and weaken their witness.

Righteous judgment isn't gossip and it isn't cynicism. It looks beneath the surface, it starts with the mirror, and its goal is always a pure and restored Bride.

Almost right: Never say anything critical about the Church. She's God's Bride.

Right: Because she's God's Bride, love her enough to tell the truth.

Silence about the Bride's unfaithfulness is not loyalty to the Bridegroom.

FOR THE ROAD

Have you confused staying quiet with being loving? What would righteous judgment look like for you this week?

Jesus, You love Your Bride and You are making her ready. Give me eyes to see beneath the surface and a heart that judges only to restore. Amen.

WEEK 21

Together

Meet once after Day 105. This week is about courage, so give each person room to say something risky without being corrected right away.

1. **Open:** Read Galatians 1:10 aloud. Ask: when was the last time pleasing people and pleasing God pulled you in different directions?
2. **Day 101:** Luther feared caving more than dying. What would it look like for you to obey God “in the open” this month?
3. **Day 102:** Based on how you respond to Jesus today, who honestly would you have been two thousand years ago?
4. **Day 103:** Saul, Ahab, Jezebel, Absalom, David. Which voice is the hardest for you to silence?
5. **Day 104:** “Love without truth is a lie.” Share a time someone loved you enough to tell you a hard truth.
6. **Day 105:** How can we tell the difference between righteous judgment and a critical spirit?

Practice together: Each person names one area where they’ve been staying quiet out of fear. Then talk as a group about what speaking the truth in love would sound like there. Agree to check in with each other before you meet again.

Pray: Pray over one another for courage: “Lord, make us people who obey You rather than any human authority, with courage and with love.”

WEEK 22

Audience or Army

Once we have the courage to see, the first thing we see is what the church produces: crowds or disciples.

DAY 106

Entertain an Audience, Equip an Army

> *Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age.*
>
> **Matthew 28:19–20**

Picture two scenes side by side.

The first is a concert. The lights are perfect and thousands of people are on their feet. Everyone leaves with a great memory. Nobody leaves with a job to do.

The second is a training camp. It's hot, it's repetitive, and it hurts. The coaches know every name. Nobody is there to be entertained. They're there to be made into something they weren't when they arrived.

Now ask an honest question: which one did Jesus build?

Many leaders in our church culture know how to entertain an audience, but few know the ancient paths of how to equip an army. That isn't a criticism of excellence, music or creativity. Engaging services and dynamic gifting can draw people in. But they were never meant to replace the mission. Jesus didn't tell us to gather crowds. He told us to make disciples and to teach them to obey.

The trouble with entertainment is that it trains people to be comforted rather than challenged. People come for the experience instead of the transformation. When the focus shifts to keeping the crowd happy, the deeper work of the Holy Spirit gets quietly pushed aside. The result is complacent converts instead of disciples.

Discipleship is slower and less impressive. It requires spiritual disciplines, consistency, biblical teaching, prayer and a relationship with Jesus that goes far beyond a weekly meeting.

Many believers find themselves in this hour of shaking, caught between two options: the crucible of community and accountability, or the circus of celebrity Christianity. Only one of them produces soldiers.

Almost right: Our services are packed and the presence is powerful.

Right: Our people are being trained, and they're learning to obey.

Caught between the crucible of community and the circus of celebrity Christianity, which will you choose?

FOR THE ROAD

If someone looked at your faith for a month, would they say you're in the audience or in the army?

Lord Jesus, I don't want to be a spectator in Your Kingdom. Put me in the crucible of real community, and train me to obey everything You've commanded. Amen.

DAY 107

Programs vs. Power

And my message and my preaching were very plain. Rather than using clever and persuasive speeches, I relied only on the power of the Holy Spirit. I did this so you would trust not in human wisdom but in the power of God.

1 Corinthians 2:4–5

In 2007, one of the most influential churches in America published a study of its own people. For decades it had modeled a way of doing church that thousands of other churches copied: excellent programs, events and small groups designed to draw people in and help them grow.

The study found something the leaders didn't expect. More participation in church activities did not reliably produce people who loved God and others more deeply. Many of the most mature believers felt stalled and under-challenged. The senior pastor admitted it publicly: "We made a mistake." They had never taught people to feed themselves from the Word between Sundays.

Programs are not evil. They can organize and mobilize God's people. But I've come to believe that church programs are often the byproduct of a church's failure to operate in the power and demonstration of the Holy Spirit. When the Spirit isn't moving, we build something to fill the space. Paul warned about people who "act religious, but they will reject the power that could make them godly" (2 Timothy 3:5).

Here is how I'd put the temptation of our generation:

We want an Acts 2 Revival without an Acts 2 Repentance. We want Acts 2 Power without Acts 2 Pressure. We want Acts 2 Outpouring without

Acts 2 Obedience. We want Acts 2 Community without Acts 2 Character.

Programs can change behavior for a season. Only the power of God changes hearts.

Almost right: If we build the right programs, people will grow.

Right: If God's power is present, people will be transformed, and they'll learn to feed themselves.

We want an Acts 2 Revival without an Acts 2 Repentance.

FOR THE ROAD

Where are you relying on a program, routine or event to do what only the Holy Spirit can do?

Holy Spirit, I don't want a form of godliness without Your power. Move in me in a way no program could explain, and teach me to feed on Your Word for myself. Amen.

DAY 108

Jumped Into a Family

All the believers devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, and to fellowship, and to sharing in meals (including the Lord's Supper), and to prayer.

Acts 2:42

Francis Chan tells a story from about a year before he left the large church he had pastored. He baptized a young man fresh out of gang life. It was a powerful moment. This young man had risked everything to leave his old world behind.

A few weeks later Chan saw him again and expected excitement. Instead, the young man was discouraged. He said, "I thought when I got baptized it was like getting jumped into a gang—instant family…not a membership to a health club." In the gang, they had his back around the clock. At church, he found a weekly meeting and polite conversation. Eventually he stopped coming.

Chan said it broke his heart that a gang could look more like family than the church.

That story should break ours too. We have become very good at producing Christians who attend, serve on teams and even lead ministries. We are much less good at producing disciples who can obey Jesus, multiply their faith and stand on their own without a program holding their hand.

One pastor, James Curry, named the problem well: many churches don't have a discipleship strategy; they have a leadership pipeline dressed up as discipleship. Developing leaders is not the same as making disciples.

Someone can run a team and still not know how to walk another person into the life of the Kingdom.

The church in Acts 2 wasn't a club that met once a week. They ate together, prayed together and shared life. They were family. That is what that young man was looking for. It's what the world is still looking for.

As Curry put it, "Don't ask if your church is growing; ask if your people are multiplying."

Almost right: We have a strong leadership pipeline, so we're making disciples.
Right: We have people who have your back all week, and who are making disciples who make disciples.

A crowd will come for the meeting. A family will come for you.

FOR THE ROAD

Who has your back seven days a week, and whose back do you have?

Father, make Your Church a family again, starting with me. Show me one person I can walk with, not just sit near. Amen.

DAY 109

Movies or CrossFit

Dear friends, you always followed my instructions when I was with you. And now that I am away, it is even more important. Work hard to show the results of your salvation, obeying God with deep reverence and fear. For God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases him.

Philippians 2:12–13

Anyone can go to the movies. The threshold for entry is zero. You buy a ticket, sit down, and someone else does all the work while you watch.

A CrossFit workout is different. It's hard to finish, and you wake up sore.

Which one does your faith look like? And which one does your church communicate?

When I look at the ministry of Jesus, I see someone looking for a few faithful people and building a family, not someone building a system that attracts consumers. When He taught hard things, many said, "This is very hard to understand" (John 6:60), and some walked away.

Philippians 2:12 makes many of us nervous. "Work hard to show the results of your salvation" sounds like legalism to ears trained in a grace-only culture. But Paul isn't saying we earn salvation. He's saying God works powerfully in the person who trusts Christ, so we must work out what He worked in. It's like training a body you already have. You don't train to get a body. You train because you've been given one. The "deep reverence and fear" Paul mentions isn't terror. It's awe at the value of the gift and soberness about how we'll steward it.

That exposes the cheap grace so common in the West: salvation at minimal cost, occasional attendance and good feelings. Paul won't let us tame the gospel into a "have it my way" faith. The gift is free, but it costs us everything.

Almost right: Salvation is a free gift, so there's nothing more for me to do.
Right: Salvation is a free gift, so I'll work out with reverence what God has worked in.

The choice is ours: McChurch or "die daily."

FOR THE ROAD

Where has your faith become a seat in the theater instead of a workout?

Lord, thank You for a gift I could never earn. Now train me. Work in me the desire and the power to do what pleases You, and let me never treat Your grace as cheap. Amen.

DAY 110

Peanut Butter and Jelly Fellowship

I know all the things you do, that you are neither hot nor cold. I wish that you were one or the other! But since you are like lukewarm water, neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth!

Revelation 3:15–16

Picture a spectrum with three kinds of meals on it.

On one end is *farm-to-table Christianity*. It's slow and costly. Everything is fresh, and you know where it came from. This is the church of Acts 2: believers devoted to the Word, to fellowship and to genuine discipleship, rooted in relationship and anchored in truth. "A deep sense of awe came over them all" (Acts 2:43).

On the other end is *drive-thru Christianity*. It's fast, cheap and built for convenience. You never get out of the car. Nobody knows your name, and nobody expects anything from you.

In the middle is *peanut butter and jelly fellowship*.

There's nothing wrong with a PB&J. It's sincere. It's familiar. It fills you up for a while. Most of us grew up on it. And that's exactly why it's the most dangerous spot on the spectrum. It isn't obviously compromised. We gather. We keep the letter of "let us not neglect our meeting together" (Hebrews 10:25). But the depth and sacrifice aren't there. Our conversations stay on the surface. We show up, we're kind, and we go home unchanged.

The drive-thru is easy to spot and easy to criticize. The PB&J is harder, because it's almost right. It looks like fellowship. It even feels like fellowship. But Jesus' words to the church in Laodicea weren't aimed at

people who had stopped gathering. They were aimed at people who had grown comfortable.

So where would you honestly put yourself on that spectrum? Not your church. You. And what would it take to move one step toward the table where the food is real?

Almost right: I never miss church, and I have good friends there.
Right: I'm known, I'm challenged and I'm devoted, not just present.

Lukewarm is the temperature of a meal nobody's hungry for.

FOR THE ROAD

Where on the spectrum would you put yourself right now? What is one step toward the table?

Lord, I don't want to settle for a faith that's sincere but shallow. Set my heart on fire again, and lead me into fellowship that is real, costly and deep. Amen.

WEEK 22

Together

Meet once after Day 110. Consider sharing a real meal together this week, not a snack. It fits the theme.

1. **Open:** Read Matthew 28:19–20 aloud. Ask: if Jesus measured our group by this verse alone, how would we do?
2. **Day 106:** Have you spent more of your Christian life in the audience or in the army? What moved you from one to the other?
3. **Day 107:** Which line of the Acts 2 litany hit you hardest? Why?
4. **Day 108:** Who walked with you when you were new in the faith? Who are you walking with now?
5. **Day 109:** Where does "work out what He worked in" feel like freedom to you? Where does it feel like pressure?
6. **Day 110:** Place yourselves honestly on the spectrum: farm-to-table, PB&J, drive-thru. What would one step toward the table look like for this group?

Practice together: Before you meet again, each person reaches out to one person in the group outside of the meeting, for a meal, a call or a walk. Next time, share what it was like to be family between Sundays.

Pray: Pray Acts 2:42 over the group: "Lord, make us devoted to Your Word, to one another, to the table and to prayer."

WEEK 23

A Family, Not an Empire

The structures we build show whose house it is: a family run by a Father, or a business run for revenue.

DAY 111

“Please, Sir, I Want Some More”

And because we are his children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, prompting us to call out, “Abba, Father.” Now you are no longer a slave but God’s own child. And since you are his child, God has made you his heir.

Galatians 4:6–7

There’s a scene in the musical film *Oliver!* that I can’t get out of my head.

In a grim workhouse, a long table of hungry orphans eats thin gruel, while up above them the governors sit down to a lavish feast. Painted on the wall over it all are three words: GOD IS LOVE. The boys draw lots to decide who will ask for more food. Oliver loses. He walks up with his empty bowl and says the famous line from Dickens: “Please, sir, I want some more.” For his trouble he’s punished and paraded through the streets to be sold.

When I watched that scene, the Lord revealed to me that it’s a picture of the current state of much of the Church.

We proclaim GOD IS LOVE on the wall. But underneath the sign, many of His children live like orphans. They are cared for by caregivers, but they still feel a constant sense of rejection. They never experience the Spirit of Adoption that Paul describes, the Spirit who makes us cry “Abba, Father” and calls us heirs.

That is an adoption claim with an orphan experience.

But notice what happens to Oliver. His hunger got him in trouble. It also set him on the road that eventually led him out of the workhouse and into a home. Asking for more was the beginning of his adoption.

Jesus said, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied” (Matthew 5:6, ESV). Heaven isn’t offended by your hunger. Religious systems sometimes are. The Father isn’t. He responds to it.

Almost right: We preach that God is love, so we must be a family.
Right: We live as sons and daughters, so people can see that God is love.

Spiritual hunger and thirst for righteousness is the currency of Heaven.

FOR THE ROAD

Do you relate to God more like an orphan with a caregiver or a child with a Father?

Abba, I’m hungry for more of You. Deliver me from an orphan’s life under a sign that says You love me. Make me know, deep down, that I’m Your child and Your heir. Amen.

DAY 112

A Revenue Model or a Discipleship Model

You can identify them by their fruit, that is, by the way they act.
Can you pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles?

Matthew 7:16

A brother I'll call Thatcher once told me a story I've never forgotten. I can only tell it as he told it to me.

He helped oversee his church's finances. He told me he discovered money being misused at the top and sounded the alarm. The board, he said, quietly arranged his removal. What stunned him most was how quickly people he had served beside turned on him.

As he grieved it, he described a system where steady income had become the priority over spiritual maturity. His words have stayed with me: "What happens is you start choosing a revenue model over a discipleship model."

I don't share that to point at one church. There is nothing new under the sun (Ecclesiastes 1:9). I share it because the temptation lives in every house, including mine. When a ministry depends on a certain income, it becomes very hard to say anything that might cost it. Hard truths get softened. And slowly, without anyone deciding it, keeping the system running matters more than forming people in Christ.

Jesus gave us a simple test. Look at the fruit. Not the size of the building or the budget, but what is growing in the people. Are they becoming disciples who love Him, obey Him and make other disciples? Or are they becoming consumers who keep the lights on?

Revival tarries when we exchange biblical accountability for carnal networking. But revival comes near when a church would rather lose

money than lose its soul.

If you've been hurt by a system like that, you are not crazy and you are not alone. God sees. And He still builds His Church.

Almost right: God must be pleased. Look how well-funded and thriving we are.

Right: God is pleased when His people are becoming disciples, even when it costs us revenue.

When revenue becomes the model, disciples become the cost.

FOR THE ROAD

In your own life or ministry, what would you be afraid to say if it might cost you financially?

Lord, search the places where money has more say in my life than You do. Let my fruit be people who look like Jesus. And heal everyone who was wounded for telling the truth. Amen.

DAY 113

The Synagogue Problem

But beware! For you will be handed over to the courts and will be flogged with whips in the synagogues.

Matthew 10:17

Here's a Bible trivia question. How many times does the word *synagogue* appear in the Old Testament?

Almost never. Most translations don't use it at all; the King James Version uses it once, in Psalm 74:8. The synagogue as Jesus knew it grew up later, in the long silent years after the exile, when the people had lost the Temple and needed a way to preserve their community and God's law.

The intentions were good. Jesus Himself taught in the synagogues (Luke 4:16). But a structure built by people, without a clear mandate from God, is vulnerable to drift. Formalism slowly replaces intimacy. Tradition replaces obedience. Human approval replaces God's mandate. By Jesus' day, many of those systems protected themselves more than the people they served. And the leaders who governed them conspired against the very Messiah they claimed to be waiting for.

The synagogue, born of good intentions, became an unchecked human system that resisted the God it was meant to serve.

Please hear me: this is not a story about one people. It's a story about every people, ours included. Every generation of believers builds structures to protect what God gave them, and every generation has to ask whether those structures still serve His presence or now compete with it.

Maybe that's your story. Maybe you were misunderstood, rejected and asked to quietly leave, not because you were in rebellion or dishonoring leadership, but because you ran into a man-made system instead of the Church Jesus promised to build. Take heart. Jesus said "all the powers of hell will not conquer" His Church (Matthew 16:18). You still belong to it.

Almost right: Our structures exist to protect the things of God, so they must be of God.

Right: Our structures must stay humble enough for the living Word to question them.

What we build to protect God's presence can end up resisting it.

FOR THE ROAD

Is there a tradition you hold that you've never let the Word question?

Lord Jesus, keep me from building systems that resist You. Give me the humility to let Your living Word reform my traditions, and heal any wounds I carry from religious systems. Amen.

DAY 114

Tables Jesus Would Flip

> *He said to them, "The Scriptures declare, 'My Temple will be called a house of prayer,' but you have turned it into a den of thieves!"*
>
> **Matthew 21:13**

Picture it. Jesus walks into the Temple courts and finds them full of merchants and money changers. He overturns the tables. Coins scatter across the stone floor. The people who were making money off worshipers scramble to get out of the way.

It's one of the few times in the Gospels we see Jesus this angry. Why?

It wasn't just that there was buying and selling. It was that God's house of worship had been turned into a place of business, and people's desire to get right with God had become a way to make money off them. Jeremiah had said it centuries before: the people went on doing evil and then came to stand in God's house saying, "We are safe!" God's answer was that His house had become "a den of thieves" (Jeremiah 7:10–11).

Do we really think history isn't repeating itself?

But before I look at anyone else's table, I have to look at my own. Too many of us want to sit at tables Jesus would have flipped over. We want a seat at the table without asking who's being exploited to keep it set.

James warned the church not to give the best seat to the man in gold rings and fine clothes while telling the poor man to sit on the floor (James 2:2–4). The Kingdom doesn't run on that kind of math. Kingdom builders should be people who walk in integrity, not just people who have a high net worth.

Jesus flipped tables so the house could be a house of prayer again. That's still His goal, for His Church and for my heart.

Almost right: God is blessing this ministry. Look at how it's prospering.

Right: God is honored in this ministry. Look at how it's praying and how it treats people.

Too many of us want to sit at tables Jesus would have flipped over.

FOR THE ROAD

Is there a table in your life, a deal, a circle or a comfort, that Jesus might want to overturn?

Jesus, You are zealous for Your house. Overturn anything in me that profits from what should be holy. Make my heart, my home and Your Church a house of prayer again. Amen.

DAY 115

Networking or Covenant Friendship

Dear brothers and sisters, if another believer is overcome by some sin, you who are godly should gently and humbly help that person back onto the right path. And be careful not to fall into the same temptation yourself.

Galatians 6:1

Think about an all-access pass. It gets you backstage, into the green room, into the circle where the real conversations happen. And it can be taken away.

In many ministry circles, there's an unspoken rule about that pass. Whoever names the sin inside the camp loses it first. When someone on the outside tries to hold a leader accountable, the circle closes ranks. But when someone on the inside dares to speak up for the voiceless, they're the one who gets shut out. They lose their pass, their relational equity and eventually their ministry footprint.

That's what happens when networking replaces covenant friendship. The church starts endorsing leaders based on their influence and what they can provide, instead of building a body united by genuine friendship, mutual encouragement, accountability and loving correction. Loyalty in a network flows from what you can do for each other. Loyalty in a family flows from character, not merely gifting.

A family handles sin differently. It doesn't tolerate it, and it doesn't throw people away. It confronts sin directly, with grace and mercy, always holding restoration as the goal. That's what Paul meant by helping a fallen believer "back onto the right path," gently and humbly. The aim is restoration with God, not the preservation of a public image. Sometimes real love even means a leader has to step away from the

platform for good, to protect the sheep. Restoration to God and restoration to a stage are not the same thing.

"Wounds from a sincere friend are better than many kisses from an enemy" (Proverbs 27:6). A network will flatter you. A covenant friend will tell you the truth, and still be there afterward.

Almost right: I'm loyal to the people who opened doors for me.
Right: I'm loyal to people who tell me the truth, and I'll be that kind of friend too.

Loyalty flows from character, not merely gifting.

FOR THE ROAD

Do you have a friend who would risk your relationship to tell you the truth? Are you that friend to anyone?

Father, deliver me from relationships built on what people can do for me. Give me covenant friends, make me one, and let our goal always be restoration. Amen.

WEEK 23

Together

Meet once after Day 115. This week touches places where some people have been hurt by churches. Listen first, and keep the focus on healing and on our own hearts.

1. **Open:** Read Galatians 4:6–7 aloud. Ask: what's the difference between living in God's house as a child and living there as an orphan?
2. **Day 111:** When has spiritual hunger gotten you into trouble? Where did it eventually lead you?
3. **Day 112:** What fruit should we look for to know whether a ministry, or a life, is following a discipleship model?
4. **Day 113:** Which of our own traditions would we struggle to let the Word question?
5. **Day 114:** What tables in our culture, or in our own lives, do you think Jesus would overturn?
6. **Day 115:** Who has been a "faithful wound" friend to you? What did it cost them?

Practice together: Pair up for the coming week as covenant friends. Ask each other one honest question: "Is there anything you've seen in me that you've been afraid to say?" Receive the answer without defending yourself, and pray for each other.

Pray: Pray Matthew 21:13 over your church and your homes: "Lord, make this a house of prayer."

WEEK 24

Another Gospel

Underneath every structure is a message. Reformation asks whether the gospel we preach is the one Heaven recognizes.

DAY 116

A Gospel Heaven Doesn't Recognize

I am shocked that you are turning away so soon from God, who called you to himself through the loving mercy of Christ. You are following a different way that pretends to be the Good News but is not the Good News at all. You are being fooled by those who deliberately twist the truth concerning Christ.

Galatians 1:6–7

Go back to the garden for a moment. The serpent never told Eve, "There is no God." He never asked her to stop believing. He simply asked, "Did God really say…?" (Genesis 3:1). Then he made a small adjustment: "You won't die!" (Genesis 3:4).

The first deception in history wasn't a denial of God. It was a small change to what He had said.

Paul saw the same thing happening to the churches he loved. "I fear that somehow your pure and undivided devotion to Christ will be corrupted, just as Eve was deceived by the cunning ways of the serpent" (2 Corinthians 11:3). The Galatians hadn't walked away from church. They were still singing, still gathering, still saying the name of Jesus. But they were following "a different way that pretends to be the Good News." That word *pretends* should sober us. Another gospel doesn't announce itself. It uses our vocabulary. It quotes our verses. It fills our buildings. It just quietly moves the center, from Christ to comfort, from the cross to success, from surrender to self.

Paul doesn't call it a different flavor or a matter of style. He says that even if an angel from heaven preached it, it should be rejected (Galatians 1:8). Heaven has one gospel, and it doesn't negotiate.

“There is a path before each person that seems right, but it ends in death” (Proverbs 14:12).

So the question this week isn’t whether we believe in a gospel. It’s sharper than that: are you tolerating a gospel that Heaven doesn’t recognize?

Almost right: If it mentions Jesus and fills the room, it must be the gospel.
Right: The gospel is the one Paul preached, and it keeps Christ at the center.

The first lie in history wasn’t a denial of God. It was an edit.

FOR THE ROAD

Is there any part of the gospel you’ve quietly edited to make it easier to live with?

Lord Jesus, guard my pure and undivided devotion to You. Expose every edit I’ve made to Your Word, and bring me back to the gospel Heaven recognizes. Amen.

DAY 117

Sprite and Water

> *You are the salt of the earth. But what good is salt if it has lost its flavor? Can you make it salty again? It will be thrown out and trampled underfoot as worthless.*
>
> **Matthew 5:13**

Picture a clear plastic cup filled with Sprite. You can see the bubbles. You can smell the lemon-lime. Now pick up a pitcher of water and start pouring.

A little water, and it's still Sprite. A little more, and it's still clear, still fizzing a bit, still looks the part. Keep pouring. At some point you have to ask the question: how much water do I have to pour into this cup until the Sprite is no longer Sprite?

That is the question facing much of the Church. Nobody set out to water down the gospel. We just added a little here to make it easier to hear, a little there to make it less offensive. Each pour felt reasonable. But the cup still looks the same from across the room, and that's what makes it dangerous.

A. W. Tozer is credited with saying it this way: "Christianity has been watered down until the solution is so weak that if it were poison it would not hurt anyone, and if it were medicine it would not cure anyone."

The real gospel does both. It wounds and it heals. It tells me I'm a sinner, and then it tells me I'm loved. "He has torn us to pieces; now he will heal us. He has injured us; now he will bandage our wounds" (Hosea 6:1). A gospel that can't hurt anyone can't heal anyone either.

Jesus said salt that loses its flavor is good for nothing. Salt isn't meant to be pleasant. It's meant to preserve and to sting where things are going bad. When we dilute the gospel to keep people comfortable, we don't make it kinder. We make it powerless.

Almost right: A gentler, lighter gospel will reach more people.
Right: Only the undiluted gospel has the power to wound and to heal.

A message that never cuts can never cure.

FOR THE ROAD

Where have you added water to the gospel so it would go down easier?

Father, I don't want a faith that looks right and has no power. Restore the salt in me. Let Your Word cut what needs cutting and heal what needs healing. Amen.

DAY 118

The Elevator Gospel

Jesus traveled throughout the region of Galilee, teaching in the synagogues and announcing the Good News about the Kingdom. And he healed every kind of disease and illness.

Matthew 4:23

You step into an elevator. The doors close. The person next to you sees the cross around your neck and asks, “So what is the gospel, anyway?” You have about thirty seconds before the doors open again. What do you say?

Most of us would talk about the cross, and we should. Without the cross there is no good news at all. But here is a question that stopped me in my tracks: if the gospel is only the cross, then why did Jesus preach the gospel before He went to the cross?

Matthew tells us He went through Galilee “announcing the Good News about the Kingdom.” He sent out the seventy-two to do the same (Luke 10:1). His first sermon was “The Kingdom of God is near! Repent of your sins and believe the Good News!” (Mark 1:15). The disciples understood that God was restoring His Kingdom. Even after the resurrection they asked, “Lord, has the time come for you to free Israel and restore our kingdom?” (Acts 1:6). What they didn’t understand was *how* He would do it.

The cross is how. Jesus paid the price so that rebels could be brought home and made children of the King. “My thoughts are nothing like your thoughts,” says the Lord (Isaiah 55:8). No one would have guessed the King would win His Kingdom by dying.

At the center of it all is who He is. “But who do you say I am?” Jesus asked. Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God” (Matthew 16:15–16). The gospel isn’t just a transaction that gets me out of trouble. It’s an announcement that a King has come, and He is worth everything.

Almost right: The gospel is a ticket out of hell, and nothing more.

Right: The gospel is the Kingdom restored through the cross, with Jesus as King.

The cross is the means. The Kingdom restored is the end.

FOR THE ROAD

If you had thirty seconds in an elevator, what would you say the gospel is?

Jesus, You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God. Thank You for the cross that brought me home. Teach me to live as a citizen of Your Kingdom, not just a survivor of my sin. Amen.

DAY 119

Seven Pillars, Lopsided Gospels

This is what the LORD says: "Stop at the crossroads and look around. Ask for the old, godly way, and walk in it. Travel its path, and you will find rest for your souls."

Jeremiah 6:16

Picture a building held up by seven pillars. From the street it looks solid. Now pull one pillar out. The roof doesn't fall right away. But one wall begins to lean, and over time the cracks spread.

I believe the gospel of the ancient paths stands on seven pillars:

Repentance: turning from sin toward God's will (Acts 3:19). **Reverence:** the fear of the Lord, deep awe at His holiness. **Responsibility:** faithful stewardship of what He's entrusted to you. **Relationship:** sonship, and the Church as His bride. **Redemption:** salvation by grace through faith, through His blood alone. **Regeneration:** a new heart, the new birth. **Renewing:** the daily transformation of our minds (Romans 12:2).

Most "other gospels" aren't missing everything. They're missing one or two. And the wall that leans is predictable.

Responsibility without Reverence will birth spiritual Pride. We work hard for God, but we stop being in awe of Him.

Relationship without Redemption will birth spiritual Entitlement. We want closeness with God without the blood that made it possible.

Redemption without Relationship will birth religious Orphans. We're forgiven but never feel at home in the Father's house.

Relationship without Repentance will birth rebellious Orphans. We call Him Abba while refusing to let Him change us. Paul answered that one plainly: “Should we keep on sinning so that God can show us more and more of his wonderful grace? Of course not!” (Romans 6:1–2).

The old, godly way isn’t a new program. It’s all seven pillars standing together.

Almost right: I have the parts of the gospel I’m most comfortable with.

Right: I want the whole gospel, every pillar standing.

Pull out one pillar and you’ll soon find out which wall it was holding up.

FOR THE ROAD

Which of the seven pillars is weakest in your life right now?

Father, lead me back to the old, godly way. Where my faith is leaning, rebuild what’s missing, and let me find rest for my soul in the whole truth. Amen.

DAY 120

Fraud Marriage, Fraud Gospel

They will act religious, but they will reject the power that could make them godly. Stay away from people like that!

2 Timothy 3:5

The Lord once told me to look up “fraud marriage.” I didn’t know why. So I did.

A fraud marriage is a marriage of convenience. Two people sign the papers and say the vows, but neither one intends a real relationship. They do it for an advantage, usually money or citizenship. From the outside it looks like a marriage. There’s a certificate and a ring. But there’s no covenant, only a contract.

Then I understood what He was showing me. There is a fraud gospel too.

A fraud gospel is a contract of convenience with God. We want the benefits of the covenant without the relationship. We want heavenly citizenship without surrender. We want His blessing, His provision and His protection, while avoiding the one thing a true covenant requires: His Lordship. It is “a form of godliness” without the power to turn a sinner into a saint.

You can see it in the version of the gospel that promises the good life and never mentions the cross we carry. And you can see it in the version that offers forgiveness but never expects change. Both get the green card. Neither wants the marriage.

Here is what Jesus actually came to do. He didn’t come to earth to rescue you from the fear of living modestly, from working a nine-to-

five, or from the fear of pain, disease and disappointment. He came to rescue you from your sinful nature, your orphan mindset, and hell.

That's not a smaller gospel. It's the real one. And the good news is that the Bridegroom is still inviting us out of the contract and into the covenant. "I will make you my wife forever, showing you righteousness and justice, unfailing love and compassion" (Hosea 2:19).

Almost right: I've signed up for Jesus' benefits.

Right: I've surrendered to Jesus as Lord, and He has my whole heart.

A contract wants the benefits. A covenant wants the Bridegroom.

FOR THE ROAD

Are you in a covenant with Jesus, or a contract for His benefits?

Lord Jesus, I don't want a marriage of convenience with You. Take my whole heart, rule my whole life, and make me Yours in truth. In Jesus' name, amen.

WEEK 24

Together

Meet once after Day 5. Read the verses aloud, give everyone a chance to answer, and be honest about your own edits first.

1. **Open:** Read Galatians 1:6–8 aloud. Why do you think Paul spoke so strongly about "a different kind of Good News"?
2. **Day 1:** The serpent didn't deny God; he edited Him. What are some small edits to God's Word you hear today?
3. **Day 2:** Where do you see the gospel being watered down, in the Church or in your own life? What does the undiluted gospel wound, and what does it heal?
4. **Day 3:** Try the elevator test. Give each person thirty seconds to answer, "What is the gospel?" What did you notice about how the Kingdom showed up, or didn't?
5. **Day 4:** Look at the seven pillars. Which one does our culture most often leave out? Which one do you?
6. **Day 5:** What's the difference between a contract and a covenant in your relationship with Jesus? What would full surrender look like this week?

Practice together: Write the seven pillars on a sheet of paper. Together, choose one popular Christian saying or message you've heard recently and check it against all seven. Which pillars does it hold up, and which ones are missing?

Pray: Pray Jeremiah 6:16 over one another: "Lord, lead us back to the old, godly way, and let us walk in it."

WEEK 25

Discernment Famine

A counterfeit gospel survives only where nobody can tell the difference. This week trains the eye.

DAY 121

Flawed Messenger or False Message?

But that doesn't matter. Whether their motives are false or genuine, the message about Christ is being preached either way, so I rejoice. And I will continue to rejoice.

Philippians 1:18

We talk a lot about short attention spans. But notice what's happened in church. Many believers can't sit through a service longer than an hour, yet the same people can binge a series for three hours or sit through a three-hour movie without blinking.

That tells us something. We've been trained by entertainment, and entertainment has a way of dulling discernment. Gifted singers, talented speakers and magnetic personalities can sometimes mimic the anointing of the Holy Spirit, and the average churchgoer struggles to tell the difference.

There is a discernment famine in the Church, and one of its clearest symptoms is this: many in the Body of Christ cannot distinguish between a flawed messenger and a false message.

Paul knew the difference. From prison, he heard that some were preaching Christ out of selfish ambition. His response? "The message about Christ is being preached either way, so I rejoice." The motive was corrupt, but the message was still the true gospel.

Yet the same Paul wrote with alarm to the Corinthians, because they "happily put up with whatever anyone tells you, even if they preach a different Jesus than the one we preach, or a different kind of Spirit than the one you received, or a different kind of gospel than the one you

believed" (2 Corinthians 11:4). That wasn't a problem of bad motives. It was false doctrine.

We tend to get these exactly backward. We write off true preaching because the preacher is imperfect, and we swallow a different Jesus because the preacher is charming. But the most dangerous error is not obvious heresy. It is truth that is slightly distorted, because it deceives more deeply.

Almost right: If the preacher is gifted and moving, the message must be true.
Right: I can rejoice in the true gospel from an imperfect messenger, and I refuse another Jesus from a charming one.

A flawed messenger can carry a true message. A gifted one can carry a false one.

FOR THE ROAD

Have you ever rejected a true word because you didn't like the messenger, or accepted a false one because you did?

Holy Spirit, heal my appetite for entertainment and give me a hunger for Your presence. Teach me to weigh the message, not just the messenger. Amen.

DAY 122

God’s Patience Is Not God’s Approval

When a crime is not punished quickly, people feel it is safe to do wrong.

Ecclesiastes 8:11

Samson had gotten away with it so many times. He broke his vows, chased what his eyes wanted, and played games with the secret of his strength. Every time, he woke up and walked away. So when Delilah cried out one more time that the Philistines had come, he thought, “I will do as before and shake myself free.” But the next line is one of the saddest in Scripture: “He didn’t realize the LORD had left him” (Judges 16:20).

Samson mistook God’s patience for God’s approval.

We do the same thing, especially when things are going well. If the crowds keep coming, the money keeps flowing and the platform keeps growing, we assume God must be pleased. Success becomes our proof.

But success is a terrible witness. The builders of Babel had great success, right up until God scattered them (Genesis 11). Saul kept his crown for years after he disobeyed, but the kingdom had already been torn from him.

Worship leader Rita Springer asked a piercing question: “If you can build the most successful church in America on the back of a lie, then how much more fuel does that success give to the lie?” Success built on deceit doesn’t just keep the lie alive. It feeds it. Every milestone makes the lie harder to expose and harder to repent of.

God’s patience is real, and it is beautiful. “He is being patient for your sake. He does not want anyone to be destroyed, but wants everyone to

repent" (2 Peter 3:9). His patience isn't a sign that He's fine with what we're doing. It's a door He's holding open so we can come home.

So if He has been patient with you, don't read it as permission. Read it as an invitation.

Almost right: It's growing and nothing has gone wrong, so God must be blessing it.
Right: God's patience is an invitation to repent, not proof that He approves.

God's patience is not God's approval.

FOR THE ROAD

Is there anything in your life you've assumed God approves of simply because nothing bad has happened yet?

Father, thank You for Your patience with me. Don't let me mistake it for permission. Where I've built on anything false, give me the courage to come home while the door is open. Amen.

DAY 123

Cracks in the Wall

The foundations of law and order have collapsed. What can the righteous do?

Psalm 11:3

The story is told of a man who noticed cracks in his living room wall. He called a painter, who filled them with putty and painted over them. It looked perfect. A few weeks later, the cracks were back. He called the painter again, and again the cracks were covered. Weeks later, they returned, more of them this time.

On the third visit the painter studied the wall and said, “Sir, I can’t help you, because you don’t have a problem with cracks.”

The homeowner was frustrated. “Can’t you see my wall? Of course I have a problem with cracks!”

“The cracks are the symptom,” the painter said. “Your problem is that you have a shifting foundation.”

That picture explains a lot of what we see in the Church. A leader falls, and we patch it. A congregation splits, and we paint over it. People burn out, wander off, or quietly stop believing, and we launch a new program to fill the gap. We keep managing the symptoms because the symptoms are what we can see.

But Jesus pointed us to the foundation. “By their fruit you will recognize them” (Matthew 7:16). Rotten fruit is a root problem, not a fruit problem. And one of the deepest foundation problems is this: leaders who don’t love relationships with the sheep, but love the resources of the sheep, aren’t shepherds.

The same is true in our own lives. The temper, the habit, the anxiety that keeps coming back may be cracks in the wall. You can keep patching them, or you can let God go down to the foundation and deal with what's shifting underneath.

It's harder work. It costs more. But it's the only repair that lasts.

Almost right: Fix what people can see, and keep things looking good.
Right: Let God go down to the foundation and fix what's shifting.

If you want to fix the cracks, you have to fix your foundation. Otherwise you'll forever be doing patchwork.

FOR THE ROAD

What crack keeps coming back in your life, and what might it be telling you about your foundation?

Lord, I'm tired of patching the same cracks. Go down to the foundation of my life and make it solid on You. I give You permission to dig. Amen.

DAY 124

The Counterfeit Bag

Getting wisdom is the wisest thing you can do! And whatever else you do, develop good judgment.

Proverbs 4:7

Picture a street vendor with a table of designer handbags. A woman stops to look. He tells her his bags are genuine, just sold at a discount. Then he goes further. He tells her the bags in the boutique down the street are the fakes. By the time he's done, she believes the counterfeit is real and the real thing is counterfeit.

That is exactly how imposters work in the Kingdom. They don't just pass off something false. They work to make the genuine look suspicious. The faithful pastor is "controlling." The honest prophet is "negative." The one who asks hard questions is "divisive." And the one selling the knock-off seems warm, generous and anointed.

Imposters, like counterfeiters, thrive in environments where there is a lack of discernment and courage to confront wrongdoing. They need both. They need people who can't tell the difference, and people who can tell but won't say anything.

That's why competence and integrity are threats to imposters. Someone who knows the real thing can spot the fake. Someone with integrity will speak up. "Solid food is for those who are mature, who through training have the skill to recognize the difference between right and wrong" (Hebrews 5:14). Discernment isn't a mystical feeling. It's a skill trained by time in the Word, time in prayer and time around the genuine article.

And when we do see the counterfeit, we speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15). The goal isn't to win an argument or expose someone

for sport. It's to protect the flock and, if possible, to restore the one who has gone astray.

Almost right: It's not my place to say anything. Who am I to judge?

Right: I'll train my eyes on the real thing and have the courage to say what I see.

Competence and integrity are threats to imposters.

FOR THE ROAD

Is there something you've seen clearly but have been afraid to say?

Father, train my senses by Your Word until I know the real thing on sight. Give me courage to speak, and love in how I speak. Amen.

DAY 125

Test It, Don’t Toss It

Do not scoff at prophecies, but test everything that is said. Hold on to what is good.

1 Thessalonians 5:20–21

There’s an old saying: don’t throw the baby out with the bathwater. It’s easy to do. When something gets dirty, the quickest fix is to dump everything.

Some believers have done that with prophecy. They’ve seen it abused. They’ve heard “words” that turned out to be manipulation, people using spiritual language to control or condemn. That kind of thing deserves a name. Some call it charismatic witchcraft: the misuse of spiritual gifts to manipulate or control others. It’s real, and it does real damage.

So the natural reaction is to toss the whole thing. No more prophecy. Too risky.

But notice what Paul actually said. He didn’t say, “Since some prophecies are false, avoid them.” He said, “Do not scoff at prophecies, but test everything.” The very Bible that warns us about false prophets is also the one that tells us to “desire the special abilities the Spirit gives —especially the ability to prophesy” (1 Corinthians 14:1).

So how do we test? True prophecy “strengthens others, encourages them, and comforts them” (1 Corinthians 14:3). It agrees with Scripture. It carries the fruit of the Spirit. If a word condemns without offering redemption, or pushes you to obey a person instead of God, set it aside. If it builds you up and draws you closer to Jesus, hold on to it.

Remember the servant in Jesus’ parable who buried his talent: “I was afraid I would lose your money, so I hid it in the earth” (Matthew

25:25). His master didn't praise him for playing it safe. Misusing God's gifts should never become our reason to neglect the gifts God has given us.

Test it. Don't toss it.

Almost right: Prophecy gets abused, so it's safer to stay away from it.

Right: I test every word by Scripture, and hold on to what strengthens, encourages and comforts.

Fear of the counterfeit is no excuse to bury the genuine.

FOR THE ROAD

Have you buried a gift of the Spirit because you saw someone else misuse it?

Holy Spirit, I don't want to be naïve, and I don't want to be afraid. Teach me to test every word and to treasure what comes from You. Amen.

WEEK 25

Together

Meet once after Day 5. Keep the conversation about patterns and about yourselves. This is not the week to name names.

1. **Open:** Read Hebrews 5:14 aloud. What kind of "training" sharpens discernment, and what kind dulls it?
2. **Day 1:** Why do you think we so often reject a true message from a flawed messenger, and accept a false one from a gifted one?
3. **Day 2:** Have you ever mistaken God's patience for His approval? What helped you see it?
4. **Day 3:** What "cracks" do you see the Church patching instead of fixing? What cracks keep returning in your own life?
5. **Day 4:** In the counterfeit bag picture, the real thing was made to look fake. Where have you seen that happen to something good?
6. **Day 5:** Has your experience with prophecy made you more open or more guarded? How can you test without tossing?

Practice together: Choose one message, post or teaching someone in the group has encountered recently. Weigh it together: Is the message true, even if the messenger is flawed? Does it agree with Scripture? Does it strengthen, encourage and comfort? Practice saying what you see, in love.

Pray: Pray Proverbs 4:7 over one another: "Lord, make us wise, and develop good judgment in us."

WEEK 26

Truth That Sounds Like Jesus

Discernment isn't suspicion. It is knowing Truth as a Person, full of grace and truth, and yielding more of ourselves to His Spirit. That is where reformation hands off to revolution.

DAY 126

Truth Sounds Like Jesus

Pilate said, "So you are a king?" Jesus responded, "You say I am a king. Actually, I was born and came into the world to testify to the truth. All who love the truth recognize that what I say is true." "What is truth?" Pilate asked.

John 18:37–38

Picture the scene. A Roman governor sits in judgment. In front of him stands a carpenter from Galilee, hands bound. Pilate thinks he is the one asking the questions. He has no idea that Truth Himself is standing an arm's length away.

"What is truth?" Pilate asks. And then, without waiting for an answer, he walks out of the room.

That's our culture in one sentence. We ask the question, but we don't stay for the answer.

Here's something worth thinking through. If truth were subjective, then nothing could be proven false. But if truth is objective, then it needs an author, someone uncreated, sovereign, and outside of time, who knows the end from the beginning. Only that kind of Author would know where every idea leads before we follow it.

That rules us out. We aren't uncreated. We aren't sovereign. We don't live outside of time. We are disqualified from being the author and the judge of truth. God alone can say, "I am the LORD, and I do not change" (Malachi 3:6).

When people set themselves up as their own authors, Scripture describes what follows: "In those days Israel had no king; all the people did whatever seemed right in their own eyes" (Judges 21:25).

But Jesus didn't leave truth as an argument. He gave it a voice: "All who love the truth recognize that what I say is true." Truth isn't just a set of facts. It is a Person, and you can learn the sound of Him.

So when you're weighing an idea, a teaching or a decision, ask a simple question: does this sound like Jesus, or does it sound like me?

Almost right: Truth is whatever rings true to me.
Right: Truth sounds like Jesus, and I learn His voice in His Word.

The truth sounds like Jesus, not my personal preference.

FOR THE ROAD

Is there a place in your life where you've asked "What is truth?" and walked out before He answered?

Jesus, You are the Truth, and I want to know Your voice. When my preferences speak louder than You, quiet them. Let me love the truth enough to stay for the answer. Amen.

DAY 127

Happy Meal Jesus

Then I saw heaven opened, and a white horse was standing there. Its rider was named Faithful and True, for he judges fairly and wages a righteous war. His eyes were like flames of fire, and on his head were many crowns…. On his robe at his thigh was written this title: King of all kings and Lord of all lords.

Revelation 19:11–12, 16

Picture two images side by side. The first is a kid's meal Jesus. Small, smiling, made to order. He fits in a cardboard box with a toy. He's sweet, safe and predictable. He never asks for anything. You can pick Him up at the drive-thru on your way somewhere else.

The second is the Jesus John saw when heaven opened. He rides a white horse. His name is Faithful and True. His eyes are flames of fire, His robe is dipped in blood, and His title is King of all kings and Lord of all lords.

Which one does the Church preach?

Much of modern culture has quietly swapped the second for the first. We've created a more marketable Jesus, one who comforts but never confronts, forgives but never judges, loves but never calls anyone to repentance. He's been stripped of holiness, of judgment, and of the fear of the Lord. That version may be easier to sell. But it is not the Jesus of Scripture.

The real Jesus is not less loving than the marketed one. He is more. His love is strong enough to rescue and holy enough to refuse to leave us as we are. "Our God is a devouring fire" (Hebrews 12:29), and He is also the Shepherd who carries the lambs in His arms (Isaiah 40:11).

The biblical Jesus is full of mercy, but also full of majesty. He is gentle with the repentant, but terrifying to rebellion. He is Savior, Shepherd, Judge, Warrior and King. We don't get to choose which parts of Him we want. We get to bow to all of Him.

Almost right: Jesus is my friend, and He just wants me to feel loved.
Right: Jesus is my Savior and my King, and He is worthy of my fear and my love.

He is gentle with the repentant, but terrifying to rebellion.

FOR THE ROAD

Which picture of Jesus have you been living with: the one in the box, or the one on the white horse?

Faithful and True, forgive me for shrinking You down to fit my comfort. I bow to You as Savior, Shepherd, Judge and King. Amen.

DAY 128

Not the Prodigal, Not the Pharisee

> *And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.*
>
> **John 1:14 (NKJV)**

The religious leaders brought a woman into the temple courts and made her stand before the crowd in front of Jesus. She had been caught in adultery. The law was clear, they said. What would He do?

Jesus knelt and wrote in the dust. One by one, her accusers walked away. Then He stood and asked her, “Where are your accusers? Didn’t even one of them condemn you?” She said, “No, Lord.” And Jesus said, “Neither do I. Go and sin no more” (John 8:10–11).

In two short sentences, He did what almost no one else can do. *Neither do I* is grace. *Go and sin no more* is truth. He didn’t choose between them.

Most of us lean one way or the other. Some of us take the prodigal’s path. We want to be a friend of sinners, but without consecration we end up adopting their ways rather than leading them to Christ. Our compassion slowly becomes compromise.

Others fall into the Pharisee’s pitfall. We hold the truth tightly but lose our compassion. Jesus told the Pharisees they had tithed their spices while neglecting “the more important aspects of the law—justice, mercy, and faith” (Matthew 23:23). Truth without love becomes a clanging cymbal (1 Corinthians 13:1).

Jesus walked the narrow road between. He ate with tax collectors and was called “a friend of tax collectors and other sinners” (Matthew

11:19). Yet He never once sinned. His compassion did not compromise His holiness, and His truth did not diminish His love.

That's the road He invites us onto. Not halfway between grace and truth, as if each one cancels out part of the other, but full of both, the way He is.

Almost right: I'll love people by not saying anything about their sin.
Right: I'll love people the way Jesus did: no condemnation, and an invitation to go and sin no more.

His compassion did not compromise His holiness, and His truth did not diminish His love.

FOR THE ROAD

Do you lean more toward the prodigal's path or the Pharisee's pitfall?

Jesus, You are full of grace and truth. Make me a friend of sinners who stays consecrated, and a lover of truth who stays tender. Amen.

DAY 129

Commandment, Conviction, Wisdom, Preference

Work hard so you can present yourself to God and receive his approval. Be a good worker, one who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly explains the word of truth.

2 Timothy 2:15

Picture a dresser with four drawers. They're labeled Commandment, Conviction, Wisdom and Preference. Every belief and practice in your Christian life belongs in one of them.

Commandment is the top drawer. These are God's clear, non-negotiable instructions for everyone. "You must not murder" (Exodus 20:13). No debate.

Conviction is the second drawer. These are things the Spirit has laid on your heart, but they aren't binding on every believer. Paul says, "Accept other believers who are weak in faith, and don't argue with them about what they think is right or wrong" (Romans 14:1).

Wisdom is the third drawer. These are principles that are generally true and worth following, but they require discernment. "Just as the rich rule the poor, so the borrower is servant to the lender" (Proverbs 22:7). Debt is unwise. It isn't the same as murder.

Preference is the bottom drawer. These are personal expressions that are neither right nor wrong. The woman who poured her alabaster jar of expensive perfume over Jesus' head (Matthew 26:7) expressed her love in her own way. The disciples complained. Jesus defended her.

Here's the problem. A religious spirit takes everything out of the bottom three drawers and stuffs it into the top one. My conviction about media

becomes your commandment. My wisdom about money becomes your sin. My preference in worship becomes the test of your spirituality. Jesus confronted that very thing: “You ignore God’s law and substitute your own tradition” (Mark 7:8).

The heart of a religious spirit lies in control and condemnation. The Holy Spirit works the other way, through wisdom, revelation and love.

Correctly handling the Word of truth means putting each thing in its proper drawer, holding commandments firmly and everything else with humility.

Almost right: If it’s right for me, it must be right for everyone.
Right: I hold God’s commands firmly, and my convictions and preferences humbly.

The heart of a religious spirit lies in control and condemnation.

FOR THE ROAD

Is there a conviction or preference you’ve been treating as a commandment for others?

Holy Spirit, teach me to rightly handle Your Word. Free me from control and condemnation, and help me honor others where You have given us freedom. Amen.

DAY 130

How Can He Have More of Me?

Don't you realize that all of you together are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God lives in you?

1 Corinthians 3:16

Picture two prayers written side by side.

The first says, "Lord, give me more of You."

The second says, "Lord, take more of me."

They sound almost the same. Both are sincere. Both are hungry. But they come from two very different places, and the difference between them is the difference between using God and belonging to Him.

R. A. Torrey put it this way: "If we think of the Holy Spirit as so many do as merely a power or influence, our constant thought will be, 'How can I get more of the Holy Spirit,' but if we think of Him in the Biblical way as a Divine Person, our thought will rather be, 'How can the Holy Spirit have more of me?'"

A power is something you use. A Person is someone you yield to. When we treat the Spirit as fuel for our plans, we stay in charge. We want more anointing, more gifting, more breakthrough, so that we can do what we've already decided to do. But Paul reminds us that we are His temple. The Spirit of God lives in us. A temple doesn't use its God. It houses Him, and it belongs to Him.

For weeks now we've been looking at reformation: rediscovering the Book, rebuilding the foundations, returning to the true gospel, learning to discern. But reformation was never meant to end in a better strategy. It ends in surrender. "The power of the life-giving Spirit has freed you

from the power of sin that leads to death" (Romans 8:2). The freedom is His work, not ours.

And when a people stop asking for more of His power and start giving Him more of themselves, something new is about to break out. Reformation is about to become revolution.

Almost right: "Lord, give me more of Your power."
Right: "Holy Spirit, take more of me."

A power is something you use. A Person is someone you yield to.

FOR THE ROAD

What part of your life has the Holy Spirit not yet been given?

Holy Spirit, I don't want to use You. I want to belong to You. Take more of me, every room of this temple, until there is nothing I hold back. In Jesus' name, amen.

WEEK 26

Together

Meet once after Day 5. This week closes the season of Reformation, so leave extra time to pray.

1. **Open:** Read John 1:14 aloud. What does it look like to be full of grace and truth at the same time?
2. **Day 1:** Pilate asked “What is truth?” and walked away. Where do people today ask the question but not stay for the answer?
3. **Day 2:** Which “edited” versions of Jesus have you seen in our culture? Which one have you been tempted by?
4. **Day 3:** Do you naturally lean toward the prodigal’s path or the Pharisee’s pitfall? How can this group help you stay balanced?
5. **Day 4:** Name an example of a conviction or preference that often gets treated as a commandment. How should we handle it?
6. **Day 5:** What’s the difference between praying “give me more of You” and “take more of me”? Which one is your usual prayer?

Practice together: Draw the four drawers on a sheet of paper. As a group, list ten common Christian beliefs or practices and decide which drawer each belongs in. Notice where you disagree, and practice disagreeing with grace.

Pray: Lay hands on one another and pray Torrey’s question as a prayer: “Holy Spirit, have more of us.”

SEASON FIVE

Recalculate

Why Revival Tarries

WEEKS 27–33

WEEK 27

The Eleven-Day Trip That Took Forty Years

Revival tarries when human wisdom overrides divine direction. God reroutes us, but the detour was never necessary.

DAY 131

You Can Skip This Season

Normally it takes only eleven days to travel from Mount Sinai to Kadesh-barnea, going by way of Mount Seir. But forty years after the Israelites left Egypt, on the first day of the eleventh month, Moses addressed the people of Israel, telling them everything the LORD had commanded him to say.

Deuteronomy 1:2–3

Read that verse again slowly. Eleven days. Forty years.

Moses tucks it in almost like a travel note, but it is one of the saddest sentences in the Bible. A trip of less than two weeks took a whole generation, and most who started it never finished.

We have now come to the fifth season, Recalculate. It is the season of why revival tarries. When human will trumps divine destiny, God's navigation system gets us back on course. That is mercy. But it is also a delay that never had to happen.

Here is what I want you to see. The wilderness itself was not the problem. Israel was always going to pass through the desert. The problem was what they did there. When we refuse the process of repentance, the wilderness of obedience becomes the wilderness of disobedience. The same sand, the same heat, the same manna. One road is a passage. The other is a circle.

Hebrews gives the reason plainly: "because of their unbelief they were not able to enter his rest" (Hebrews 3:19). They did not lack a promise. They lacked trust in the One who made it, and their own wisdom kept walking them in loops.

The good news is that you can skip this season. Recalculation is the one season on the map you do not have to stay in. But the bad news is that the promises of God are not automatic. They are available to those who trust His ways and pick up their cross daily.

Almost right: I'm in the wilderness, but at least I'm still moving.
Right: I want my obedience to turn this wilderness into a passage, not a circle.

The good news is you can skip this unnecessary season. The bad news is that the promises of God are not automatic.

FOR THE ROAD

Is there a lap you keep walking because you haven't yet obeyed what God already told you?

Father, I don't want to spend forty years on an eleven-day trip. Soften my heart today, and give me the courage to obey quickly and completely. Amen.

DAY 132

Divine Recalculation

“How foolish!” Samuel exclaimed. “You have not kept the command the LORD your God gave you. Had you kept it, the LORD would have established your kingdom over Israel forever.”

1 Samuel 13:13

Most of us know the voice. You miss the exit, and a calm voice from the dashboard says, “Recalculating.” No yelling. No shame. Just a new route.

The destination does not move when you miss a turn. The road does. Sometimes the new road costs you five minutes. Sometimes it costs you an hour. Sometimes the bridge you passed was the only way across, and the new route is a long one.

That is a picture of what happened to Saul. Samuel told him to wait seven days at Gilgal. The Philistines were gathering, his men were slipping away, and Samuel was late. So Saul offered the sacrifice himself. It looked responsible. It looked spiritual. It was close enough. And Samuel’s answer still stings: “Had you kept it, the LORD would have established your kingdom over Israel forever.”

God’s purposes did not fail that day. He still had a king in mind, a man after His own heart. What changed was Saul’s road. His impatience did not rewrite God’s plan. It removed him from his place in it.

This is why striving is so dangerous. Saul’s problem was not a lack of effort. He was busy, decisive and religious. His problem was that he trusted his own reading of the situation more than the word he had been given. “Trust in the LORD with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding” (Proverbs 3:5).

Trust waits when waiting feels like losing. Striving acts, and then calls it faith. One leads to rest: “only we who believe can enter his rest” (Hebrews 4:3). The other leads to a kingdom that slips through your fingers while you are holding the offering.

Almost right: I did most of what God said, and the circumstances forced the rest.

Right: I’ll trust God’s word over my reading of the circumstances, even when waiting feels like losing.

Trust produces rest. Striving produces disorder.

FOR THE ROAD

Where are you tempted to “offer the sacrifice yourself” because God seems late?

Lord, You are never late. Quiet my striving and teach me to trust Your word more than my panic. Keep me on Your road. Amen.

DAY 133

Can You Drink the Cup?

But Jesus answered by saying to them, "You don't know what you are asking! Are you able to drink from the bitter cup of suffering I am about to drink?"

Matthew 20:22

The mother of James and John came to Jesus with a request most parents would understand. She knelt and asked that her two sons sit in places of honor, one at His right hand and one at His left, when He came into His Kingdom (Matthew 20:20–21). It sounded like faith. They believed He was King, and they wanted to be near Him when He took the throne.

Jesus told them they didn't know what they were asking. Then He asked a question of His own: could they drink from His cup? They told Him they could.

They had no idea. The cup was the cross. Within days, the throne they pictured would turn out to be a hill outside the city, and the places at His right and left would go to two revolutionaries crucified beside Him (Matthew 27:38).

And yet Jesus told them they would drink from it (Matthew 20:23). James became the first of the twelve to die for Him (Acts 12:2). John was exiled to the island of Patmos for preaching the word of God and for his testimony about Jesus (Revelation 1:9).

We ask for glory often. We pray for His power in our churches, His fire in our meetings and His favor on our plans. Those are good prayers. But in the Kingdom, the glory and the cup come together. Francis Chan put

the problem plainly: “We want to experience biblical awe without biblical devotion.”

Recalculating means asking honestly what we are asking for. Jesus didn’t shame James and John for wanting to be close to Him. He invited them into the whole of it: the cup before the crown, the cross before the throne.

Almost right: Lord, give me a place close to You in Your glory.

Right: Lord, give me a share in Your cup, and I’ll trust You with the glory.

You can’t ask for His throne and refuse His cup.

FOR THE ROAD

What have you been asking God for that may come with a cup you haven’t counted?

Jesus, I want to be near You, not just near Your glory. Give me grace to drink the cup You hand me, and keep my eyes on You. Amen.

FOR THE ROAD

When you pray for revival, whose sin are you usually thinking about?

Jesus, I don’t want a good Sunday. I want You. Search me, show me every known sin, and have all of me, not part. In Jesus’ name, amen.

DAY 134

The Comforting Illusion of a Lie

They tell the seers, "Stop seeing visions!" They tell the prophets, "Don't tell us what is right. Tell us nice things. Tell us lies."

Isaiah 30:10

In the movie *The Truman Show*, Truman Burbank has lived his whole life on a television set without knowing it. His town, his job, his friends and even his wife are part of the show. A team of very smart people spends enormous effort and money keeping one man from finding out the truth.

Slowly he notices the cracks. At the end, he sails to the edge of his world until the bow of his boat strikes the painted sky. There is a staircase, and a door. Behind him is everything he has ever known. In front of him is the unknown. He has to choose.

Most of us live inside some version of that set. Not a television show, but a story we prefer: about ourselves, our church, our family, our faith. And we can be very clever about defending it. We can use our intelligence, our theology and even our Bible knowledge to keep the painted sky from cracking.

Isaiah's generation did it openly. They told the prophets, "Tell us nice things." Paul warned that it would happen again, when people would gather teachers who say what itching ears want to hear. A comforting lie has a powerful pull. It asks nothing of you.

But Jesus did not promise that the truth would comfort you. He promised that it would free you (John 8:32). Freedom usually starts at a door in the sky that you would rather not walk through. And the One

who waits on the other side is not a producer who wants to keep you on the set. He is the Truth Himself, and He is kind.

Almost right: I'd rather keep my peace than ask questions that might shake it.

Right: I'd rather face a painful truth with Jesus than keep a comfortable lie without Him.

The painful reality of the truth should never seduce us into believing the comforting illusion of a lie.

FOR THE ROAD

Where might you be using your intelligence to protect a comfortable illusion?

Lord, I don't want nice things. I want true things. Give me courage to walk through the door You open, even when it costs me the world I know. Amen.

DAY 135

Familiar Dysfunction

That is why the Holy Spirit says, "Today when you hear his voice, don't harden your hearts as Israel did when they rebelled, when they tested me in the wilderness."

Hebrews 3:7–8

They had watched the sea split. They were eating bread from heaven every morning. And still they cried, "We remember the fish we used to eat for free in Egypt. And we had all the cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions, and garlic we wanted" (Numbers 11:5).

Free? They were slaves. The fish cost them everything. But memory edits pain. The bondage they knew began to look safer than the promise they had not seen yet.

We all do this. A toxic relationship. A habit we keep promising to break. A way of thinking about ourselves that has never once told us the truth. It hurts, but it is a hurt we know. Change is a hurt we don't know. So we stay.

That explains a lot of wilderness. It is not that we cannot hear God. It is that hearing Him would mean leaving Egypt in our heads. Often we find refuge in a deception that lets us excuse our lack of self-control, rather than letting the truth that sets us free get all the way into our hearts.

Paul says, "let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think" (Romans 12:2). That is not a single decision. It is training, and training hurts. But it is pain that leads somewhere.

Notice the word in today's verse: *today*. The Holy Spirit doesn't ask you to fix everything by tomorrow. He asks you not to harden your heart the

next time He speaks. That is a small door, and you can walk through it right now.

Almost right: I know it isn't healthy, but at least I know what to expect.

Right: I'll trade the pain I know for the training God is offering, because it leads somewhere.

As long as your familiar dysfunction feels less painful than the pain of facing change, you will resist the divine training of transformation that comes from renewing your mind.

FOR THE ROAD

What "leeks and onions" from your old life still look better than they really were?

Holy Spirit, I hear Your voice today, and I don't want to harden my heart. Break my attachment to what is familiar, and train me for the freedom You promised. Amen.

WEEK 27

Together

Meet once after Day 5. These questions are for small groups, families or two friends over coffee. Go first if you're leading, and keep it honest.

1. **Open:** Read Deuteronomy 1:2–3 aloud. Ask: what does an "eleven-day trip that takes forty years" look like in a modern life?
2. **Day 131:** Where have you seen a wilderness become a circle instead of a passage? What turned it back into a road?
3. **Day 132:** Share a time you "offered the sacrifice yourself" because God seemed late. What did it cost?
4. **Day 133:** James and John asked for the seats before they knew the cup. What have you asked God for without counting what it might cost?
5. **Day 134:** What comforting illusions are easiest for churches to protect? Which ones are easiest for you?
6. **Day 135:** Name one familiar dysfunction you've defended because change felt worse. What would the first step out look like?

Practice together: Each person names one area where God has already spoken and they have not yet obeyed. Don't fix each other. Just agree on one step of obedience each person will take before you meet again, and ask about it next time.

Pray: Pray Hebrews 3:7–8 over one another: "Lord, today when we hear Your voice, keep our hearts soft."

WEEK 28

When the Present Doesn’t Match the Promise

Disappointment tempts us to shrink God to the size of our pain. Recalculating means letting His nature, not our circumstances, set our theology.

DAY 136

The Oldest Lie

Did I keep my heart pure for nothing? Did I keep myself innocent for no reason? I get nothing but trouble all day long; every morning brings me pain.

Psalm 73:13–14

The first lie ever told to a human being was not "God doesn't exist." It was subtler than that. The serpent told Eve, "God knows that your eyes will be opened as soon as you eat it, and you will be like God" (Genesis 3:5). In other words: He is holding out on you.

That lie has never left the earth. Psalm 2 asks why the nations rage against the Lord, and underneath the rage is the same whisper from the garden. God is keeping something good from you. Throw off His rule and take it.

But the lie doesn't only work on rebels. It works on worshipers. Listen to Asaph, a worship leader in the house of God: "Did I keep my heart pure for nothing?" He watched arrogant people prosper while he got "nothing but trouble all day long." The promise said one thing. His life said another.

That gap is one of the most dangerous places a believer can stand. When the present doesn't match the promise, we will be tempted to lower our theology to match our pain. We start quietly editing God. *Maybe He doesn't heal anymore. Maybe He doesn't really provide. Maybe faithfulness doesn't matter.* It feels like honesty. It is really Eden again.

Malachi heard the same thing from Israel: "What's the use of serving God?" (Malachi 3:14). People who had stopped expecting anything from God had started speaking against Him without even noticing.

Asaph almost went there. But then he did something wise. He went into the sanctuary of God, and there he finally understood (Psalm 73:17). His circumstances didn't change first. His view did. Pain is real, but it is a terrible theologian.

Almost right: I've adjusted what I believe about God so it fits what I've been through.

Right: I'll hold on to what God promised, even while my life doesn't look like it yet.

When the present doesn't match the promise, we will be tempted to lower our theology to match our pain.

FOR THE ROAD

Where has disappointment quietly edited what you believe God is willing to do?

Father, You are not holding out on me. When my life and Your promise don't match, bring me into Your presence until I see clearly again. Amen.

DAY 137

The Airport Bar

Yet I am confident I will see the LORD's goodness while I am here in the land of the living.

Psalm 27:13

Here is a parable. Picture an airport bar during a long delay. A traveling minister sits down between two strangers, and before long the talk turns from flight delays to faith. He tells stories of healings and changed lives he has seen around the world. One of the men grows quieter and quieter. Finally, when the minister mentions a heartbreak in his own family that God has not yet healed, the man pushes back: "Why would a loving God allow that?"

The minister doesn't get defensive. He answers with a question. Is there enough wealth on this planet to feed everyone? Yes. Then whose fault is it that people go hungry? "It's our fault." The minister presses: "No, that's not personal enough." What are *you* doing for the people in need?

Then he says the line that breaks the man open. "God is the source of hope, and the devil is the source of hurt. Because of your disappointment, you have lowered your theology to match your pain."

In the parable, the skeptic weeps. He had been angry at a God built in the image of his disappointment.

Many believers carry the same hidden image. Something didn't happen the way we prayed, and slowly God shrank to fit it. We still go to church. We still sing. But somewhere inside, we have decided God is distant, or stingy, or not quite good.

David had every reason to think that way. Enemies surrounded him. And still he wrote, "I am confident I will see the LORD's goodness while I

am here in the land of the living."

God's goodness is not defined by my circumstances. It is bigger than them. He can even use pain and lack to bring us closer to His love, though He is not their author.

Almost right: My view of God has to be shaped by what's happened to me.

Right: God's goodness is not defined by my circumstances. It's bigger than they are.

God is the source of hope, and the devil is the source of hurt.

FOR THE ROAD

What image of God have you built out of an unanswered prayer?

Lord, I believe I will see Your goodness in the land of the living. Tear down every image of You that my disappointment has built. Amen.

DAY 138

The Orphan's False Humility

I am the LORD, and I do not change. That is why you descendants of Jacob are not already destroyed.

Malachi 3:6

Twelve men came back from scouting the Promised Land. Ten of them gave a report that sounded humble and realistic: "Next to them we felt like grasshoppers, and that's what they thought, too!" (Numbers 13:33). The other two sounded almost arrogant. Caleb said, "Let's go at once to take the land. We can certainly conquer it!" (Numbers 13:30).

If you had been in the crowd, which report would have sounded more humble? The grasshoppers. And which would have sounded proud? Caleb. The people agreed. They talked about stoning Joshua and Caleb.

But God called the grasshopper report unbelief, and He called Caleb a man with "a different attitude" (Numbers 14:24).

This is how the orphan mindset works. An orphan has learned not to expect much. It protects itself by lowering its hopes before anyone else can disappoint it. So when a son or daughter stands on God's promise with confidence, the orphan heart calls it pride. *Who do you think you are? Be realistic. Don't get your hopes up.*

But that is upside down. The orphan mindset cannot discern the true heart of pride, which is not confidence in God's unchanging word, but lowering our theology to match our pain. Real pride trusts my experience over His promise. Real humility bows to what God said, even when my experience argues back.

"God is not a man, so he does not lie" (Numbers 23:19). He does not change. That is why Caleb could be so sure. He was not confident in

Caleb. He was confident in the God who had spoken.

Biblical courage is not arrogance. It is a child who believes his Father.

Almost right: I don't want to presume, so I keep my expectations low.
Right: I'm not confident in me. I'm confident in a God who does not change.

True pride is not confidence in God's unchanging word. It is lowering our theology to match our pain.

FOR THE ROAD

Have you ever called your unbelief "being realistic" or "staying humble"?

Father, You do not change, and You do not lie. Give me a different spirit, like Caleb's, and let my confidence rest on Your word. Amen.

DAY 139

The Blue-Collar Dad

After that generation died, another generation grew up who did not acknowledge the LORD or remember the mighty things he had done for Israel.

Judges 2:10

Anyone who knows me knows that if you need something fixed in your home, don't call me. I can do a lot of things. Fixing the sink is not one of them.

I'm afraid a lot of us pray to God as if He were a lot like me with a toolbox. We picture a well-meaning, blue-collar dad: good intentions, a kind heart, but not enough time, power, resources or provision to actually help. So we pray politely and expect little. We tell Him our problems as if we were informing Him of something He can't handle.

One of the devil's most efficient tactics is to keep us ignorant of who God really is. Judges describes a generation that grew up not knowing the Lord or the mighty things He had done. Amos warned of a famine, "not a famine of bread or water but of hearing the words of the LORD" (Amos 8:11). When we stop hearing, we start forgetting. And when we forget who He is, our problems grow and He shrinks.

I believe the Lord spoke this to my heart about His church: we have magnified our problems more than we have magnified God, because we have forgotten His many names.

He is the LORD who provides. He is the LORD who heals. He is the Most High. And Jesus taught us to come to Him in more than one way. When you need provision, you need a Father (Luke 11:11–13). When

you need a favor, you need a Friend (Luke 11:5–10). When you need justice, you need a righteous Judge (Luke 18:1–8).

You are not praying to someone who means well but can't help. You are praying to the One who holds the oceans in His hand.

Almost right: God loves me, but I don't expect Him to actually fix much.

Right: God loves me, and He has all the power, time and provision to help.

One of the devil's most efficient tactics is to keep us ignorant of who God really is.

FOR THE ROAD

Which name of God do you most need to remember this week?

Father, forgive me for making You small. Teach me Your names again, and let me magnify You more than my problems. Amen.

DAY 140

Nine Healed, One Made Whole

One of them, when he saw that he was healed, came back to Jesus, shouting, "Praise God!" He fell to the ground at Jesus' feet, thanking him for what he had done. This man was a Samaritan.

Luke 17:15–16

Ten men with leprosy stood at a distance and shouted together, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!" Pain had made them a community. Jews and a Samaritan who would never have shared a meal now shared a sickness and a single cry.

Jesus told them to go show themselves to the priests. As they went, they were cleansed.

Picture that road. Ten men look down and see clean skin. Nine of them keep walking. They were obedient. They were doing exactly what Jesus told them to do. But they were done with Him. They had their miracle, and now they had their lives back.

One turned around. He came back shouting, fell at Jesus' feet and thanked Him. And Jesus asked, "Where are the other nine?" Then He told the one, "Stand up and go. Your faith has healed you" (Luke 17:19). All ten were cleansed. One was made whole.

Here is something uncomfortable. When we were desperate, we cried out. Our pain kept us close. Then the answer came, the bills got paid, the diagnosis cleared, the marriage stabilized. And somewhere along the way we stopped coming back.

Sometimes the blessings we receive from God can unintentionally become obstacles. They take away the brokenness that kept us leaning

on Him. Paul learned to boast in weakness for this very reason, “so that the power of Christ can work through me” (2 Corinthians 12:9).

God is not against your healing. He gave it. But He wants more than a healed person walking away. He wants a whole person walking with Him. Gratitude is how the nine become the one.

Almost right: I got my answer, I obeyed, and now I’m moving on.
Right: I got my answer, so I’m going back to the One who gave it.

Sometimes the blessings we receive from God can unintentionally serve as obstacles, preventing our hearts from embracing the brokenness necessary to fully trust and follow Him.

FOR THE ROAD

What answered prayer have you never gone back to thank Him for?

Jesus, You have healed me in more ways than I remember. I’m coming back to Your feet today to say thank You. Make me whole. Amen.

WEEK 28

Together

Meet once after Day 5. These questions are for small groups, families or two friends over coffee. Go first if you're leading, and keep it honest.

1. **Open:** Read Psalm 73:13–17 aloud. Ask: what changed for Asaph between verse 14 and verse 17?
2. **Day 136:** Where have you heard the oldest lie, "God is holding out on you," in your own thoughts?
3. **Day 137:** What disappointment has most shaped the way you picture God? Is that picture true?
4. **Day 138:** When have you called unbelief "humility"? When has someone's confidence in God looked like pride to you?
5. **Day 139:** Do you tend to pray to God as Father, Friend or Judge? Which one do you forget?
6. **Day 140:** Share one answered prayer you never fully thanked God for.

Practice together: Take ten minutes as a group to "come back like the one." Go around the room and let each person thank God out loud for one specific thing He has done, especially something from a long time ago. Then read Numbers 23:19 together.

Pray: Pray Psalm 27:13 over one another: "Lord, let us see Your goodness in the land of the living."

WEEK 29

The Stable, Not the Stage

Revival tarries when we want God's glory but crave our own recognition. This week asks what we are building, and whose name goes on it.

DAY 141

The Glory of the Stable

Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up in honor.

James 4:10

The King of Kings was born in a stable and laid in a feed trough. No stage. No spotlight. No press release. A few shepherds came in from the fields, and later wise men arrived from the east. Angels filled the sky, but almost nobody on earth saw it.

Think about that. The most important birth in history, and no one recorded it. No one posted it. No one could share the moment with people who weren't there. The glory of God came into the world in a hidden place, and the few who witnessed it simply worshiped.

We seem to have lost that ancient practice of privacy with God. So many of our sacred moments are now measured by who saw them. We want to witness the glory of the stable, but we crave the self-recognition of the stage.

That tension is one reason revival tarries. Revival and reformation thrive in hiddenness, humility, brokenness and selfless devotion. The spotlight doesn't feed them. It starves them.

Here is a question worth asking honestly. Where do your most powerful moments with God happen? If all of them are in big rooms, with a great band and a crowd around you, maybe, just maybe, you are living off other people's oil.

There is nothing wrong with big gatherings. God moves in them. But the wise bridesmaids in Jesus' parable could not lend their oil when the bridegroom came (Matthew 25:8–9). Oil is bought in private. It is gathered in the quiet place where no one claps, where you sit with the

Word and pour out your heart to the Father who “sees everything” (Matthew 6:6).

Humble yourself there, in the stable. He will do the lifting. You don’t have to.

Almost right: My most powerful times with God happen in big, anointed gatherings.
Right: My most powerful times with God happen where no one else is watching.

If all your most powerful moments with the Lord are in big groups, maybe you are living off other people’s oil.

FOR THE ROAD

When was the last time you met with God somewhere no one else could see?

Jesus, You came to a stable, not a stage. Teach me to love the hidden place, and fill my own lamp with oil that no one can lend me. Amen.

DAY 142

A Letter God Might Write

Away with your noisy hymns of praise! I will not listen to the music of your harps. Instead, I want to see a mighty flood of justice, an endless river of righteous living.

Amos 5:23–24

Some time ago I tried to imagine how Amos 5 might sound if it were written to us today. This is what came out:

Your weekly church gatherings are unbearable to me. I am tired of your conferences, personal performances, and religious exploitation. Your exaggerated sermons and self-serving schemes are unappealing. Your focus on public relations and creating a fake reputation is draining. Your self-centered worship and music do not resonate with me. When was the last time you truly worshiped me? Do you understand my desires? I long for righteous living in abundance. I crave holiness and humility in limitless supply. That is what I seek. That is all I desire.

That is hard to read. But it is no harder than what Amos actually said.

Israel's gatherings were impressive. The festivals were full, the offerings generous, the music loud. And God said He would not even notice their offerings (Amos 5:22).

The rituals were never the problem. God Himself had commanded feasts and offerings and songs. The problem was the heart behind them. When worship becomes more about appearance than devotion, it stops reaching heaven. You can fool people. You cannot fool God.

Before we point this letter at someone else's church, let's let it land on our own hearts. Do I come to worship to meet God, or to be seen

meeting Him? Do I care more about how the service went than how my life is going?

Jesus said the Father is looking for those who worship "in spirit and in truth" (John 4:23). He isn't looking for a better production. He is looking for righteous living in abundance, and holiness and humility in limitless supply. That is a gathering He would never call unbearable.

Almost right: If the service is excellent, God must be pleased.

Right: God is pleased when the people in the service are living righteously.

You can fool man, but you cannot fool God.

FOR THE ROAD

If God wrote a letter about your worship this month, what would He praise, and what would He question?

Father, I don't want to give You a show. I want to give You my life. Let righteousness flow from me like an endless river. Amen.

DAY 143

Babel or a Resting Place

I will not give sleep to my eyes or slumber to my eyelids, until I find a place for the LORD, a dwelling place for the Mighty One of Jacob.

Psalm 132:4–5 (NKJV)

When I was sixteen years old, I made a personal promise to God that I would build a resting place for Him on the earth.

He has equipped me with divine tools and earthly resources ever since. And I have to be honest: I have not always stewarded them well. I don't want to make that mistake again. Not by might, not by strength, but by His Spirit.

David made a promise like that. He would not rest until he found a place for God to dwell. He wanted the Lord to have a home among His people.

Contrast that with the oldest building project in the Bible. On the plain of Shinar, people said, "Come, let's build a great city for ourselves with a tower that reaches into the sky. This will make us famous" (Genesis 11:4). Same bricks, same effort. But the whole point was their own name. God scattered them, and they had to stop building.

I keep asking myself: have some of our failures and disappointments come because our projects and dreams were meant to make our name famous and not the name of Jesus?

There are two kinds of houses. One points to the glory of His name and protects His people. God preserves that house. The other points people to trust in our name and treats people made in His image like pawns.

Sooner or later, God has to pull that house down, out of love for the people it is using.

Whether you are building a business, a ministry or a family, the question isn't how big it is. It is whose name is on the door, and whether God can rest there.

Almost right: I'm building something great for God.
Right: I'm building something where God can rest and His people are safe.

Are we looking for someone to help us build our tower of Babel, or are we looking for God to teach us how to make ourselves a resting place for Him?

FOR THE ROAD

Whose name is really on the thing you are building?

Lord, I don't want to build a tower. I want to build a home for You. Forgive me where I've built for my own name, and teach me to steward what You've given me. Amen.

DAY 144

Clocking In at Sardis

I know all the things you do, and that you have a reputation for being alive—but you are dead. Wake up! Strengthen what little remains, for even what is left is almost dead.

Revelation 3:1–2

Picture a time clock on the wall. You walk in, punch your card, do your shift, punch out and go home. The work gets done. The hours get logged. But your heart was never really there.

That is the church in Sardis. Of all seven churches in Revelation, Sardis may be the most unsettling, because nothing about it looked wrong. It had a reputation. People spoke of it as alive. And Jesus looked past the reputation and said, “you are dead.”

Sardis is what happens when Christianity becomes a career instead of a calling. A career can run on reputation for a long time. You learn the language. You know how to show up, serve, lead and even preach. The systems keep working. But a calling cannot run on yesterday. A calling has to stay connected to the One who called you.

Jesus put it simply: “I am the vine; you are the branches… apart from me you can do nothing” (John 15:5). A branch doesn’t clock in. It abides. It stays attached all the time, and fruit is the natural result.

The Pharisees were the Sardis of their day. They had a reputation for zeal and spiritual seriousness. But Jesus saw tombs painted white on the outside (Matthew 23:27). Their works were busy. They were not complete.

Notice that Jesus does not say, “It’s over.” He says, “Wake up! Strengthen what little remains.” Even a sleeping church still has

something left worth strengthening. Even a tired believer still has embers that can be fanned into flame.

The question for today is not whether people think you are alive. The question is whether you are still connected.

Almost right: People know me as a faithful, active believer.

Right: Jesus knows me as a branch that stays connected to Him.

Are you abiding in the Vine or just clocking in?

FOR THE ROAD

Which part of your faith has become more of a job than a relationship?

Jesus, wake me up. Strengthen what remains in me, and draw me back from clocking in to abiding in You. Amen.

DAY 145

Maturity Over Multiplication

Then we will no longer be immature like children. We won't be tossed and blown about by every wind of new teaching. We will not be influenced when people try to trick us with lies so clever they sound like the truth. Instead, we will speak the truth in love, growing in every way more and more like Christ.

Ephesians 4:14–15

Cancer grows fast. So does bacteria. So does mold. Each of them multiplies with impressive speed, and none of them is a sign of health.

That is a strange picture to bring to church. We tend to measure spiritual health by growth. How many came? How many responded? How many joined? Those numbers matter, because every number is a person. But numbers alone cannot tell you whether something is healthy. Fast growth is not proof of life.

Paul measured differently. He said the goal of every gift in the church is maturity, "until we all come to such unity in our faith and knowledge of God's Son that we will be mature in the Lord" (Ephesians 4:13). The mark of a healthy church is not only that it gets bigger. It is that its people grow up.

Immature believers get tossed around by every new teaching. They are easy to impress and easy to trick. Mature believers can tell the difference between what is true and what only sounds true. They speak the truth in love. They look more like Jesus every year.

Jesus never told us to make converts. He told us to "go and make disciples of all the nations," and then to teach them "to obey all the

commands I have given you" (Matthew 28:19–20). A convert can be counted in a moment. A disciple takes years to form.

That applies to your own life, not only to churches. Are you growing wider or growing deeper? Do you know more Christian content than you did five years ago, or do you look more like Christ?

God loves a harvest. But He wants a harvest that lasts.

Almost right: We're growing fast, so God must be blessing it.
Right: We're growing deep, so whatever God adds will last.

Growth without depth can be unhealthy.

FOR THE ROAD

If someone measured your faith by maturity instead of activity, what would they find?

Father, I want to grow up, not just grow bigger. Make me steady, make me true, and make me more like Jesus every year. Amen.

WEEK 29

Together

Meet once after Day 5. These questions are for small groups, families or two friends over coffee. Go first if you're leading, and keep it honest.

1. **Open:** Read James 4:10 aloud. Ask: what's the difference between humbling ourselves and being humiliated?
2. **Day 141:** Where have your most powerful moments with God happened? In a crowd, or alone?
3. **Day 142:** Read the modern Amos letter aloud. Which line stings most? Why?
4. **Day 143:** What are you building right now? Whose name is on the door?
5. **Day 144:** What part of your faith has started to feel like clocking in? What would waking up look like?
6. **Day 145:** How would your church change if it measured maturity instead of numbers?

Practice together: Before the next meeting, each person spends at least one hour alone with God with no phone, no music and no audience. Read one chapter of a Gospel slowly and pray. When you meet again, share one thing God showed you in the stable that you would not have heard on the stage.

Pray: Pray Psalm 132:5 together: "Lord, make our lives a dwelling place for You."

WEEK 30

Did We Learn to Love?

A church can look perfect and still be missing its one essential ingredient: love that stays, serves and lays down its life.

DAY 146

Pie That's Not Sweet

If I could speak all the languages of earth and of angels, but didn't love others, I would only be a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.

1 Corinthians 13:1

Let me tell you about the time my grandmother made peach cobbler for our family and forgot to put in the sugar.

It looked perfect. It smelled delicious. And then we took that first bite.

Something was missing. It was tasteless. Everything else was there, but the one ingredient that makes a cobbler delightful was not.

A church that lacks love is like a pie that lacks sugar. It can look good on the outside. The building is beautiful. The music is excellent. The teaching is sound. The programs run on time. It even smells right from the parking lot. But when you actually take a bite, when you need someone in a crisis, when you fall, when you are new and don't know anyone, something essential is missing.

Paul says the same thing about individual believers. You can speak in tongues, prophesy, understand mysteries, have mountain-moving faith and give everything away. Without love, it is noise. It is nothing. That is a long list of good ingredients, and Paul says none of them can replace the one that matters most.

We spend a lot of energy on how church looks and sounds. That isn't wrong. My grandmother's cobbler really did look perfect. But nobody remembers how a cobbler looked if it had no sugar.

"Anyone who does not love does not know God, for God is love" (1 John 4:8). Love is not one ingredient among many in the Christian life. It is the one that tells you what you are eating.

The good news is that the sugar is not hard to find. It is God Himself, and He gives it freely to anyone who asks.

Almost right: Our church has great teaching, great worship and great programs.
Right: Our church is known for the way we love people.

A church that lacks love is like a pie that lacks sugar: it looks good on the outside but is missing the essential ingredient.

FOR THE ROAD

If someone "took a bite" of your life this week, would they taste love?

Father, I don't want to be a beautiful crust with nothing sweet inside. Fill me with Your love until it is the first thing people taste. Amen.

DAY 147

Results or Fruit

On judgment day many will say to me, "Lord! Lord! We prophesied in your name and cast out demons in your name and performed many miracles in your name." But I will reply, "I never knew you. Get away from me, you who break God's laws."

Matthew 7:22–23

When I look back over twenty years of ministry, I see a pattern I can't ignore.

The closer I was to the gospel of repentance, the more it was about the awe of God and a love for His people made in His image. But the more I saw "another gospel," the more it was about the love of power and position.

That shift doesn't happen all at once. You can work hard in the pursuit of power and position as a child of God and forget that His presence and His people are the true prize.

Jesus said the church in Ephesus had done almost everything right. They worked hard. They endured. They tested false apostles. "But I have this complaint against you. You don't love me or each other as you did at first!" (Revelation 2:4).

An old story tells of two theologians looking back over decades of study, filled with remorse because the more they had grown in knowledge, the less they had valued love. Paul warned about this: "while knowledge makes us feel important, it is love that strengthens the church" (1 Corinthians 8:1).

The question I keep asking is this: are we appraising our church culture like a successful business, or like a healthy family? A business measures

results. A family measures whether people are loved and growing.

We confuse results with fruit. Results are what God does through you. Fruit is what God does in you. The people in today's verse had results: prophecy, deliverance, miracles. What they didn't have was relationship. Being used by God is not the same as being known by God.

Almost right: God is using me, so I must be close to Him.
Right: God is changing me, and that is how I know I'm close to Him.

Results are proof God can use a man. Fruit is proof God can change a man.

FOR THE ROAD

Is your love for God and people stronger or weaker than it was when you first believed?

Jesus, I don't want to be used by You and not known by You. Bring me back to the love I had at first, and grow real fruit in me. Amen.

DAY 148

When the Gang Was More Family

So now I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other. Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples.

John 13:34–35

In his book *Letters to the Church*, Francis Chan tells about a young man who came to faith out of gang life. His baptism was a celebration. He had risked a lot to leave his old life behind.

A few weeks later, Chan saw him in the church hallway and asked how he was doing. The young man was discouraged. He explained that when he joined the gang, they became his family immediately. They had his back around the clock. If he was sleeping on the street, they were there with him. He thought the church would be like that. It wasn't.

It is painful to admit, but in that young man's experience, the gang looked more like family than the body of Christ did.

When people leave the church disappointed, it is easy to explain them away. *They were just wounded. They had unrealistic expectations. They have a critical spirit.* And sometimes that is true. There is a critical spirit that tears down everything and builds nothing.

But discernment asks a harder question. Is this a critical spirit, or is there a legitimate concern we are missing?

Read the early church. "They worshiped together at the Temple each day, met in homes for the Lord's Supper, and shared their meals with great joy and generosity" (Acts 2:46). That young man's expectation was not unrealistic. It was biblical. He was looking for what Acts describes.

Jesus said love would be the proof. Not our buildings or our services, but whether we have each other's backs.

The answer isn't to tear down the church. It is to become the family He designed it to be, starting with the person sitting next to you.

Almost right: People who leave the church disappointed are usually just wounded.
Right: Some people who leave are showing us what we are missing.

A critical spirit or a legit concern? Discernment asks before it dismisses.

FOR THE ROAD

Who has drifted away from your church family that you could reach out to this week?

Jesus, make us a family again. Show me where I've dismissed someone's legitimate hurt, and teach me to have my brothers' and sisters' backs. Amen.

DAY 149

When John 3:16 Leads to James 3:16

Then those who feared the LORD spoke with each other, and the LORD listened to what they said. In his presence, a scroll of remembrance was written to record the names of those who feared him and always thought about the honor of his name.

Malachi 3:16

Almost everyone knows John 3:16. Fewer people notice that three other books of the Bible also have a 3:16, and read together, they tell a story.

John 3:16 is where it begins. “For this is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son.” God’s love comes first, before we have done anything.

Malachi 3:16 is what that love produces when it is truly received. People who fear the Lord speak with each other, and God writes their names in a scroll of remembrance. Love, received, grows into reverence.

1 John 3:16 is where reverence flowers. “We know what real love is because Jesus gave up his life for us. So we also ought to give up our lives for our brothers and sisters.” Love received becomes love laid down.

But there is a fourth 3:16, and it is a warning. James 3:16 says, “For wherever there is jealousy and selfish ambition, there you will find disorder and evil of every kind.”

Here is the path. If you believe John 3:16, it will give birth to Malachi 3:16, which will flourish into 1 John 3:16. But if you embrace John 3:16 and reject Malachi 3:16, it will birth James 3:16.

That is what happens when we want God’s love without the fear of God. Love without reverence becomes about me: my blessing, my platform,

my comparison with you. Before long, a community that started with John 3:16 is full of envy, competition and disorder.

The fear of the Lord is not the opposite of His love. It keeps love from curdling into selfishness. Receive His love, honor His name, and you will find yourself laying down your life for others.

Almost right: God loves me, so I don't need to fear Him.
Right: God loves me, so I honor Him, and that teaches me to lay down my life for others.

If you embrace John 3:16 but reject Malachi 3:16, it will birth James 3:16.

FOR THE ROAD

Which of the four 3:16s best describes your life right now?

Father, thank You for loving me first. Teach me to fear You, honor Your name and love others the way Jesus loved me. Guard my heart from envy. Amen.

DAY 150

Happily Ever After Is a True Lie

I have told you all this so that you may have peace in me. Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart, because I have overcome the world.

John 16:33

Picture a young man, newly married, ready to quit at the first real struggle. “If it’s not easy, it can’t be love,” he tells his mentor.

His mentor answers with questions. Was becoming an athlete easy? An entrepreneur? A parent? You worked through pain for everything that mattered.

The young man begins to see it. Hardship doesn’t always prove something is wrong with God or with the relationship. Sometimes it proves it is worth fighting for.

We grew up on “happily ever after,” a time imagined never to end, when a loving couple live untroubled lives together. It’s a lovely ending to a story. But as a promise for real life, it is a true lie. It has placed our hope in a circumstance rather than in the person of Jesus Christ.

That lie doesn’t only hurt marriages. It shows up in church when people leave the first time they are offended. It shows up in callings abandoned at the first closed door. *If this were God, it wouldn’t be this hard.*

But Jesus never promised easy. He told His followers, “You will be hated all over the world because you are my followers” (Matthew 24:9). The American gospel promises the pursuit of happiness. The gospel of Scripture promises rejection, and with it, a love that will never leave.

Paul describes that love: it “never gives up” and “endures through every circumstance” (1 Corinthians 13:7). That is the way Jesus has loved

you, and the way He empowers you to love others.

If you are in a hard place with someone you love, hard does not automatically mean wrong. It may be the very place God is teaching you to love like Him.

Almost right: If it's this hard, it must not be God.

Right: Hardship may be proving that this is worth fighting for.

The American gospel promises the pursuit of happiness, but the gospel of Scripture promises rejection.

FOR THE ROAD

Where are you tempted to quit because love got hard?

Jesus, You never gave up on me. Give me a love that endures, in my home, my church and my calling, and anchor my hope in You, not in easy circumstances. Amen.

WEEK 30

Together

Meet once after Day 5. These questions are for small groups, families or two friends over coffee. Go first if you're leading, and keep it honest.

1. **Open:** Read 1 Corinthians 13:1–3 aloud. Ask: what "good ingredients" does Paul say can't replace love?
2. **Day 146:** When have you experienced a church that looked perfect but lacked love? When have you experienced the opposite?
3. **Day 147:** What is the difference between results and fruit in your own life?
4. **Day 148:** Has anyone you know left the church disappointed? Was there a legitimate concern in what they said?
5. **Day 149:** Why do you think we want God's love without the fear of God?
6. **Day 150:** Where have you believed that "hard" automatically means "wrong"?

Practice together: Choose one person who has drifted away from your church or group. Decide together how to reach out this week with a meal, a call or a visit, with no agenda except to say, "We miss you, and we have your back."

Pray: Pray John 13:35 over the group: "Lord, let our love for one another prove to the world that we are Yours."

WEEK 31

Grace With a Spine

Revival tarries when we call enabling “grace” and silence “love.” Real grace trains, confronts and protects.

DAY 151

The House of Eli and the House of Nehemiah

I have warned him that judgment is coming upon his family forever, because his sons are blaspheming God and he hasn't disciplined them.

1 Samuel 3:13

Picture two leaders standing at two doors.

The first is an old priest at the door of the tabernacle in Shiloh. His sons are priests too, and everyone knows what they are doing. They take the best of the offerings for themselves. They abuse the people who come to worship. Eli hears the reports, calls his boys in, and scolds them. "Why do you keep sinning?" Then he sends them right back to the altar.

The second is a governor standing at the gates of Jerusalem. Nehemiah finds merchants turning the Sabbath into a market day. He confronts the leaders, and then he does something Eli never did. He orders the gates shut at sundown and posts his own men to guard them (Nehemiah 13:19). He goes into the Temple, throws out what doesn't belong, and cleanses the rooms.

Both men said the right words. Only one of them acted on them.

Eli wasn't silent. He rebuked his sons. But his rebuke had no weight because it had no consequence. He never removed them from the altar. So God asked him a piercing question: "Why do you honor your sons more than me?" (1 Samuel 2:29). Eli thought he was being merciful. Heaven called it honoring sin.

Many of us live in the house of Eli. We name the problem, sigh about it, maybe even preach about it, and then leave it standing in the holy place.

In our homes, our ministries and our own hearts, we confront with our mouths and tolerate with our hands. And what we tolerate doesn't stay small. It grows until it runs the house.

The house of Nehemiah is harder. It costs something to shut a gate. But a closed gate at sundown is what kept the city holy.

Almost right: I've told them it's wrong, so I've done my part.
Right: I love them enough to follow my words with action.

What you tolerate will dominate.

FOR THE ROAD

Where have you rebuked something with your words while leaving it at the altar with your actions?

Father, forgive me for the places where I've honored comfort, people or my own peace more than You. Give me the courage of Nehemiah to shut the gates that need shutting. In Jesus' name, amen.

DAY 152

Grace That Trains

> *For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age.*
>
> **Titus 2:11–12 (ESV)**

Picture two kinds of coaches.

The first one never says no. You miss practice, he shrugs. You skip the weight room, he smiles. You give half effort on game day, he pats you on the back and says, "You're still my guy." He feels kind. And nobody on his team ever gets better.

The second coach loves you just as much, but he loves you too much to leave you the way he found you. He pushes you. He corrects your footwork. You don't always enjoy him, but one day you look up and realize you've become someone you couldn't have been without him.

Many of us have been taught that grace is the first coach. Grace, we think, is a hall pass. It's God looking the other way. But Paul says grace does something we don't expect. It *trains* us. The same grace that saves us teaches us to say no to ungodliness and to live upright lives right now, in this present age.

This matters, because a distorted grace becomes an excuse to avoid ever confronting sin, in ourselves or in anyone else. "Should we keep on sinning so that God can show us more and more of his wonderful grace? Of course not! Since we have died to sin, how can we continue to live in it?" (Romans 6:1–2).

Grace is unearned. You will never deserve it. But grace is never powerless. It forgives you and then it gets to work on you. “No discipline is enjoyable while it is happening—it’s painful! But afterward there will be a peaceful harvest of right living for those who are trained in this way” (Hebrews 12:11).

The grace of God isn’t soft on sin. It’s strong enough to set you free from it.

Almost right: Grace means God overlooks my sin.
Right: Grace forgives my sin and then trains me out of it.

Grace is free, but it was never meant to leave you the same.

FOR THE ROAD

Have you been treating grace like a hall pass or like a coach?

Lord, thank You for grace I could never earn. Don’t let me use it as an excuse. Train me, correct me and make me more like Jesus. Amen.

DAY 153

When Enabling Is Mislabeled as Grace

To flatter friends is to lay a trap for their feet.

Proverbs 29:5

Here is a parable. Once upon a time there was a loving mother whose name, fittingly, was Grace. She had a son who had wandered far from the way he was raised, and a daughter who was married to a godly man. Grace kept pouring love and support on her son no matter how he lived. She believed her unconditional acceptance was the same as the grace of God.

One afternoon her daughter and son-in-law came over and took her hand. They loved her son too. That was the point. “Grace is important, Mom,” her son-in-law said, “but so is truth. Real love sometimes means setting boundaries.”

She wept. She had never wanted to push her boy away. But over the following weeks she kept loving him deeply while also speaking honestly about his choices and their consequences. In the parable, her son finally felt the difference. Their words were love trying to protect his heart.

That’s the line many of us can’t see. Enabling feels like grace. It’s warm. It avoids the fight. It keeps everyone at the table for one more holiday. But it quietly agrees with the very thing that is destroying the person we love.

Real love “does not rejoice about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out” (1 Corinthians 13:6). Real love has a backbone. Jesus never once confused acceptance with approval. He welcomed sinners to His table, and He told them the truth while they sat there.

Sometimes a boundary is the only form of love a person can still feel. The goal is never to win an argument. The goal is to help someone find their way back to the Father's house.

Almost right: If I really love them, I'll accept whatever they choose.
Right: If I really love them, I'll tell them the truth and hold a boundary.

Enabling feels like grace today and works like a trap tomorrow.

FOR THE ROAD

Is there someone you've been "loving" in a way that actually keeps them stuck?

Father, give me Your kind of love, tender and honest at the same time. Show me where I need to speak, where I need to hold a line, and how to do both with a broken heart for the one I love. Amen.

DAY 154

“Do Not Judge” Is a Judgment

Hypocrite! First get rid of the log in your own eye; then you will see well enough to deal with the speck in your friend’s eye.

Matthew 7:5

They drag her into the Temple courts and throw her down in front of everyone. The religious leaders have stones in their hands and a law on their lips. Jesus doesn’t argue. He stoops and writes in the dust. Then He stands and says that whoever is without sin may throw the first stone. One by one, from the oldest to the youngest, they walk away.

Then Jesus turns to her. “Where are your accusers? Didn’t even one of them condemn you?” She says no one has. “Neither do I,” He says. “Go and sin no more” (John 8:10–11).

Both halves matter. If we only hear “neither do I condemn you,” we turn Jesus into a man who never names sin. If we only hear “sin no more,” we pick the stones back up.

“Do not judge” has become one of the most quoted verses in our culture, usually by people who have never read the next four verses. But notice: the statement “Do not judge” is a judgment within itself. Everyone judges. The question is how.

Jesus didn’t tell us to stop seeing the speck. He told us to deal with the log first, so that we can see clearly enough to help. Elsewhere He says, “Look beneath the surface so you can judge correctly” (John 7:24). Paul tells the spiritually mature to “gently and humbly help that person back onto the right path” (Galatians 6:1).

That’s righteous judgment: humble, honest about my own sin, and aimed at restoration rather than condemnation.

And it isn’t optional. If you refuse to judge anything, you have no way to recognize what is harming you. What we can’t discern, we can’t protect ourselves or anyone else from.

Almost right: Who am I to judge?

Right: Let me deal with my own log, and then help you with your speck.

That which we cannot judge is that which we cannot protect ourselves from.

FOR THE ROAD

Do you lean more toward the Pharisee who picks up stones or the friend who never says anything?

Jesus, You are full of grace and truth. Take the log out of my eye first. Then give me clear eyes and a gentle heart to help others back onto the right path. Amen.

DAY 155

When Wolves Are Safer Than Sheep

Give justice to the poor and the orphan; uphold the rights of the oppressed and the destitute. Rescue the poor and helpless; deliver them from the grip of evil people.

Psalm 82:3–4

Jesus painted a picture every shepherd understood. A wolf comes over the hill. The real shepherd steps between the wolf and the flock, even if it costs him his life. But "a hired hand will run when he sees a wolf coming. He will abandon the sheep because they don't belong to him" (John 10:12).

The hired hand doesn't hate the sheep. He just loves something else more: his safety, his paycheck, his reputation.

Revival tarries in the Church because, too often, in the house of God, predators and wolves in sheep's clothing are safer than the victims and the sheep who need care and protection.

Usually it happens through good people protecting the wrong thing. We protect a gifted leader because so many lives have been touched through him. We protect the church's image. We protect our own past decision to trust someone, because admitting we were wrong feels unbearable. When protecting our wrong decision about a leader is more important than protecting the sheep, we can be sure that a spirit of control is being valued more than the Spirit of Truth.

Jesus warned us plainly: "Beware of false prophets who come disguised as harmless sheep but are really vicious wolves" (Matthew 7:15).

Protecting the vulnerable has to be more than words. It means believing the wounded when they speak, bringing hidden things into the light, and

putting the safety of the sheep above the comfort of the shepherd.

If you have been harmed by someone in the church, hear this: it was not your fault, and God has not looked away. Tell someone safe. Where a crime has been committed, it belongs with the authorities. The Good Shepherd is still the One who steps between you and the wolf.

Almost right: We need to protect the leader and the ministry.
Right: We need to protect the sheep, whatever it costs the ministry.

A church that guards its image more than its sheep has hired hands, not shepherds.

FOR THE ROAD

Is there anything you've been protecting more carefully than the people God has called you to care for?

Good Shepherd, make Your house a safe place for the wounded. Give us courage to stand between the wolf and the sheep, and heal those who were hurt where they should have been protected. Amen.

WEEK 31

Together

Meet once after Day 155. This week touches tender places, so go gently and let no one feel pressed to share.

1. **Open:** Read Titus 2:11–12 aloud. Ask: what's the difference between grace that excuses and grace that trains?
2. **Day 151:** Eli spoke the right words but never shut the gate. Where is it easiest for you to confront with your mouth and tolerate with your hands?
3. **Day 152:** Who was a "second coach" in your life, someone who loved you too much to leave you the same? What did grace look like through them?
4. **Day 153:** Why does enabling feel so much like love? What would a loving boundary look like in one relationship you're carrying?
5. **Day 154:** Jesus said both "Neither do I condemn you" and "Go and sin no more." Which half do you find harder to say to others? To hear yourself?
6. **Day 155:** What would it look like for our group, family or church to put the safety of the sheep above our own image?

Practice together: Have each person name one "gate" they need to shut this week: a habit, a pattern or an unhealthy permission. Details are optional. Then commit to checking on one another by the end of the week, with grace that trains rather than grace that shrugs.

Pray: Pray Psalm 82:3–4 over your church, asking God to make His house a safe place for the poor, the helpless and the wounded.

WEEK 32

Two Kings, One Throne

Envy and competition crown the wrong king. Under Jesus, another person's greatness provokes us to grow instead of tormenting us.

DAY 156

When Leviathan Is King

He sees everything that is high; he is king over all the sons of pride.

Job 41:34 (ESV)

At the end of the book of Job, God paints a picture of a creature no one can tame. Leviathan. Spears bounce off its scales. It churns the sea into a boiling pot and leaves a shining wake behind it. And God closes the description with a striking line: he is king over all the sons of pride.

I see in Leviathan a picture of a spirit that is still at work, even in the Church. It is the spirit of pride and competition, and it wants a throne.

Every heart has one throne. Only one king can sit on it. And you can tell who is sitting there by what you are chasing.

When Jesus is King, the pursuit of truth becomes the dream. When Leviathan is king, personal greatness becomes the goal. And here's the subtle part: you can pursue personal greatness *in ministry*. You can build platforms, grow followings and chase "being the best" while using all the right words. But somewhere along the way, the truth that once set you free becomes an obstacle on the path to success. A hard word might cost you an audience. A tender rebuke from the Spirit might slow you down. So you step around it.

That's the danger of a heart ruled by pride. Proverbs says, "Just as Death and Destruction are never satisfied, so human desire is never satisfied" (Proverbs 27:20). Leviathan never has enough. There's always another stage, another number, another rival.

Jesus offered a completely different kind of greatness. "For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life

as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). The people obsessed with being the best often miss the joy of serving at His table.

Who is sitting on your throne?

Almost right: I want to be great for God.
Right: I want the truth more than I want to be great.

When Jesus is King the pursuit of truth becomes the dream; when Leviathan is king personal greatness is the goal.

FOR THE ROAD

Is there a truth you've been stepping around because it might slow down your success?

Jesus, You alone belong on the throne of my heart. Dethrone every proud ambition in me, and make the truth my dream. Amen.

DAY 157

Renounce the Wish

This made Saul very angry. "What's this?" he said. "They credit David with ten thousands and me with only thousands. Next they'll be making him their king!" So from then on Saul kept a jealous eye on David.

1 Samuel 18:8–9

Jonathan, the king's son and heir to the throne, had every reason to see David as a threat. Instead, the day David came back from killing Goliath, Jonathan took off his own robe and gave it to David, along with his tunic, sword, bow and belt (1 Samuel 18:4). The prince handed his robe to a shepherd. He renounced his wish for the crown so God's choice could rise.

A few verses later, his father did the opposite. Saul was already king. He had the throne, the army and the crown. But the moment the women sang that David had killed his ten thousands, Saul stopped seeing a loyal servant and started seeing a rival. From that day on, he kept a jealous eye on the best warrior he had.

Saul is a picture of control-focused leadership. It looks strong. It wins. But it can't rest, because there's always someone who might have more.

C.S. Lewis saw this clearly in *Mere Christianity*. Pride, he said, takes no pleasure in having something, only in having more of it than the next person. "It is the comparison that makes you proud: the pleasure of being above the rest."

Saul held on to his position and lost his peace. Jonathan let go of his position and gained a friend for life.

Servant leadership looks weak to a competitive heart, but it empowers others instead of eyeing them.

Almost right: I need to stay on top so I can lead well.

Right: I'll lead well by lifting others up, even above me.

Comparison turns servants into rivals and rivals into enemies.

FOR THE ROAD

Whose success have you been watching with a jealous eye?

Lord, I lay down my wish to be above the rest. Give me Jonathan's heart, ready to hand my robe to the one You are raising up. Amen.

DAY 158

From Deliverer to Devourer

> *Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses because of the Cushite woman whom he had married, for he had married a Cushite woman. And they said, "Has the LORD indeed spoken only through Moses? Has he not spoken also through us?" And the LORD heard it.*
>
> **Numbers 12:1–2 (ESV)**

Miriam's story begins in the reeds of the Nile. Her baby brother is floating in a basket, hidden from Pharaoh's death sentence, and she stands at a distance to watch what will happen to him (Exodus 2:4). When Pharaoh's daughter finds the child, Miriam offers to find a Hebrew nurse and brings back her own mother. That little girl helped save the deliverer of Israel.

Years later, on the far shore of the Red Sea, Miriam the prophet takes a tambourine in her hand and leads the women in dancing and worship (Exodus 15:20–21).

Then comes Numbers 12. She and Aaron begin to talk against Moses. The complaint starts with his wife, but it quickly reveals what's underneath: "Has the LORD indeed spoken only through Moses? Has he not spoken also through us?"

It sounds so spiritual. God does speak through all of us. But underneath the prophetic language, Miriam was competing with her brother. The same woman who once protected the deliverer was now trying to tear him down.

The Lord heard it. The cloud lifted, and Miriam's skin was white with leprosy. She was shut outside the camp for seven days, and the whole

nation had to wait for her before it could move on (Numbers 12:15). Envy doesn't only wound its target. It stalls everyone.

There are two ways to respond to someone else's anointing. You can be provoked by their greatness, or you can be tormented by it. The writer of Hebrews tells us to "consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works" (Hebrews 10:24, KJV). That's holy provocation.

Torment does the opposite. It makes you smaller, then louder.

When his sister was struck, Moses cried out, "O God, I beg you, please heal her!" (Numbers 12:13). The one she attacked was the one who prayed for her.

Almost right: God speaks through me too, so why should they get the attention?
Right: Let their anointing provoke me to love and good works.

Envy shoots at others and wounds itself.

FOR THE ROAD

Whose anointing provokes you to grow, and whose anointing torments you?

Father, keep me a deliverer and never a devourer. Let the greatness You put in others make me hungry for You instead of jealous of them. Amen.

DAY 159

Choosing Admiration Over Envy

If one part suffers, all the parts suffer with it, and if one part is honored, all the parts are glad.

1 Corinthians 12:26

Picture a conference. Two men are on the program. One is a worship leader. The other is a professional athlete, invited to share his testimony.

The worship leader goes first, and the room fills with awe. The athlete watches from the side of the stage, and something unfamiliar starts to stir in him. He's used to the spotlight. Now he feels small.

When his turn comes, he stumbles over his words. Afterward the crowd flocks to the worship leader, and the athlete feels overlooked. By the next day, the insecurity has turned into envy, and the envy has started to turn into something close to hate.

Then he does something rare. He walks up to the worship leader and confesses it. He tells him he felt overshadowed. The other man listens with kindness and reminds him that they each have a part to play. In that confession, the poison loses its power. The rival becomes a brother again.

Admiration and envy often start in the same place. In the film *Amadeus*, Salieri first recognizes something divine in Mozart's music. That admiration could have made him a student. Instead it curdled into jealousy, and he spent his life plotting against the gift he once honored.

The difference between those two roads is often one honest conversation. Envy grows in secret. It loses its grip when we bring it into the light, confess it and choose to celebrate what God is doing in someone else.

A line attributed to Bette Midler puts it well: “The worst part of success is trying to find someone who is happy for you.” Be that someone. “A peaceful heart leads to a healthy body; jealousy is like cancer in the bones” (Proverbs 14:30).

When one part of the body is honored, all the parts can be glad.

Almost right: I admire them, I just wish it were me.
Right: I admire them, so I’ll learn from them and celebrate them.

Admiration studies the gift; envy wants it buried.

FOR THE ROAD

Is there someone you need to celebrate out loud, or someone you need to confess envy to?

Lord, I don’t want to be a Salieri. Pull every root of envy into the light, and give me a heart that is truly glad when You honor someone else. Amen.

DAY 160

Absalom at the Gate

Absalom would say to him, "See, your claims are good and right, but there is no man designated by the king to hear you." Then Absalom would say, "Oh that I were judge in the land! Then every man with a dispute or cause might come to me, and I would give him justice."

2 Samuel 15:3–4 (ESV)

Absalom was the handsomest man in Israel. He rode in a chariot with fifty men running ahead of him. And every morning he got up early and stood by the road at the city gate.

When anyone came with a complaint for the king, Absalom would stop him. "Where are you from?" Then came the line that changed history: "See, your claims are good and right, but there is no man designated by the king to hear you."

Notice what he did. He didn't argue. He agreed and validated every grievance. He sounded like the most compassionate man in the kingdom. And every time he said "you're right," he was quietly saying "the king is wrong, and I would be better."

That's how the Absalom spirit works, in a church, a family or a workplace. It doesn't look like rebellion. It looks like sympathy. It gathers the wounded and the frustrated with a gentle "I hear you," and then it turns their hurt into loyalty to itself. Negative comments, quiet undermining and side conversations at the gate sow discord until a house is divided.

The way of the Kingdom is different. If you have a real grievance, take it to the person directly. "If another believer sins against you, go

privately and point out the offense" (Matthew 18:15). Honor authority even when you disagree with it. And if you're the one being undermined, don't build your own gate across the road. "Don't say, 'I will get even for this wrong.' Wait for the LORD to handle the matter" (Proverbs 20:22).

Absalom won the people's hearts for a season. He lost everything else.

Almost right: I'm just listening to people who've been hurt.

Right: I'll help the hurting go to the right person, not gather them to me.

Sympathy that recruits is ambition in disguise.

FOR THE ROAD

When people bring you complaints about a leader, do you send them to the source or gather them to yourself?

Father, guard my mouth at the gate. Make me a peacemaker, not a heart-stealer, and teach me to trust You to defend me. Amen.

WEEK 32

Together

Meet once after Day 160. Envy is hard to admit out loud, so leaders, go first.

1. **Open:** Read Job 41:34 aloud. Ask: what does it look like when pride and competition sit on the throne of a heart, or a church?
2. **Day 156:** Where can the pursuit of "being great for God" quietly replace the pursuit of truth?
3. **Day 157:** Saul kept a jealous eye on David, while Jonathan handed him his robe. Who in your life would be easier to compete with than to lift up?
4. **Day 158:** Miriam's complaint sounded spiritual. How can we tell holy provocation from torment in our own hearts?
5. **Day 159:** Have you ever confessed envy to the person you envied, or had someone confess it to you? What happened?
6. **Day 160:** How can we tell compassion from an Absalom spirit? What should we do when someone brings us a complaint about a leader?

Practice together: Go around the circle and have each person honor someone else in the group by name: a gift, a grace or a growth they've seen in them. Then, this week, each of you celebrate one person outside the group whose success you might be tempted to envy. Say it to them directly.

Pray: Pray 1 Corinthians 12:26 over your group: "Lord, when one of us is honored, make all of us glad."

WEEK 33

Back on the Route

Recalculation ends when we take God's route over our preference: Word and Spirit together, voices under accountability, full obedience, and love that lets go of control.

DAY 161

Convenient Theology

And because of their unbelief, he couldn't do any miracles among them except to place his hands on a few sick people and heal them. And he was amazed at their unbelief.

Mark 6:5–6

Imagine a believer who never prays for the sick because it feels safer. If you never pray for anyone to be healed, you never have to stand in a hospital room and watch nothing happen. You never have to explain why the person you prayed for didn't get better.

But you also never see it happen.

There's a name for that: convenient theology. When we doubt that God speaks directly to us, heals the sick or raises the dead, we can end up living in a self-created reality where faith only works when things are visible and certain. It never steps out. It never risks. It is protected from disappointment, and it is also cut off from wonder.

In His own hometown, Jesus "couldn't do any miracles among them except to place his hands on a few sick people and heal them. And he was amazed at their unbelief." The people of Nazareth knew Him well. They had simply decided ahead of time what God could and couldn't do through the carpenter's son.

Paul gave the Church a better way: "Do not stifle the Holy Spirit. Do not scoff at prophecies, but test everything that is said. Hold on to what is good" (1 Thessalonians 5:19–21). Don't scoff, and don't swallow everything either. Test it. But testing requires something to test. You can't hold on to what is good if you never let God do anything.

Faith has always involved risk. Peter had to get out of the boat. The widow had to pour her oil into borrowed jars. A willing vessel will sometimes pray and not see the answer it hoped for. But a vessel that never makes itself available will never feel the joy of God moving through it.

Recalculating means letting God out of the box we built to protect ourselves.

Almost right: I don't pray for miracles so I won't be disappointed.
Right: I'll step out as a willing vessel and trust God with the outcome.

A faith that never risks disappointment will never witness a miracle.

FOR THE ROAD

Where have you made your theology convenient so you wouldn't have to be disappointed?

Lord, forgive me for deciding ahead of time what You can't do. Make me a willing vessel, and give me courage to step out even when I can't see the outcome. Amen.

DAY 162

Dry Up, Blow Up, or Grow Up

> *When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own but will tell you what he has heard. He will tell you about the future.*
>
> **John 16:13**

Here's a simple way to see how the Word and the Spirit work together.

The Bible defines marriage. The Spirit of Truth tells us who to marry.

The Bible tells us to work as unto the Lord. The Spirit tells us where and what that work should be.

The written Word, what many call the *Logos*, sets the boundaries. The Spirit speaks a *rhema*, a specific word for a specific moment, and He always speaks within those boundaries. He never contradicts what He already wrote.

"All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives" (2 Timothy 3:16). And the Spirit guides us into all truth. We need both.

When we separate them, things go wrong. Some believers hold the Word but quietly push the Spirit out. Their doctrine is right, but their faith grows cold and mechanical. Others chase the Spirit but drift from the Word. Every impression becomes "God told me," with nothing to measure it by.

R.T. Kendall put it memorably: "When we have the Word without the Spirit, we tend to 'dry up'; if we have the Spirit without the Word, we tend to 'blow up'; if we have both Spirit and Word, we tend to 'grow up.'"

There's a third danger too. Sometimes our feelings get in the way of the will of God, and sometimes our intellect gets in the way of the heart of God. Both can dress themselves up as discernment.

So we don't throw out the baby with the bathwater. We hold both, and we let each one keep the other honest.

Almost right: The Spirit told me, so I don't need to check it with Scripture.
Right: The Word sets the boundaries, and the Spirit leads me within them.

The Bible defines marriage; the Spirit of Truth tells us who to marry.

FOR THE ROAD

Do you lean more toward the Word without the Spirit, or the Spirit without the Word?

Holy Spirit, lead me into all truth, and keep me anchored in the Word You inspired. Don't let me dry up or blow up. Help me grow up. Amen.

DAY 163

Prophets Without Kings

Let two or three people prophesy, and let the others evaluate what is said.

1 Corinthians 14:29

Joseph was a prisoner, forgotten in Pharaoh's dungeon. Daniel was a captive, carried off to Babylon. Neither had a platform. Neither had a following. Yet in both stories, a pagan king sent for them. Pharaoh needed to know what his dreams meant. Nebuchadnezzar needed to know what his meant. And when Joseph and Daniel spoke, even the kings of the world recognized that God was in them (Genesis 41:38–39; Daniel 2:46–47).

When God places His words in your mouth, it gets noticed, by the Body of Christ and sometimes by the "pagan kings" around you.

Contrast that with something common today. Someone says, "God told me," and that settles it. No one can question it. No one can weigh it. They don't need counsel, accountability or elders. Their word becomes a license to operate on their own.

I call these "prophets without kings." Many of them are more like horoscope prophets: full of opinions, but without biblical literacy or anyone they answer to.

The book of Judges ends with a sobering line: "In those days Israel had no king; all the people did whatever seemed right in their own eyes" (Judges 21:25). That's what happens when every voice answers only to itself.

Paul gave the Church a better pattern. Let two or three speak, and let the others evaluate what is said. A genuine prophetic word isn't afraid of

being weighed. It submits itself gladly, because it belongs to God and not to the one speaking it. “Without wise leadership, a nation falls; there is safety in having many advisers” (Proverbs 11:14).

The restoration of the prophetic in our day has been a gift. But a love for God’s presence that doesn’t love His Word is only almost right. If you truly love His presence, you will also love and submit to what He’s already said, and to the brothers and sisters He’s placed around you.

Almost right: God told me, so I don’t need anyone else’s input.
Right: God spoke to me, so I’ll test it by His Word and bring it to others.

If you truly love God’s presence, you will also love and adhere to His Word.

FOR THE ROAD

Who has permission to weigh what you believe God is saying to you?

Father, I want to hear Your voice, and I want to be safe to correct. Keep my words rooted in Scripture and surrounded by wise counsel. Amen.

DAY 164

Kings Without Judges

And Saul said to Samuel, "I have obeyed the voice of the LORD. I have gone on the mission on which the LORD sent me."

1 Samuel 15:20 (ESV)

Two kings sinned. Two prophets came to confront them. What happened next decided everything.

The first king was Saul. God told him to destroy the Amalekites completely. Saul came back having spared their king and kept the best of the livestock. When Samuel arrived, Saul greeted him with confidence: "I have obeyed the voice of the LORD." Behind him, Samuel could hear the bleating of sheep. Saul had an answer for everything. The people took the animals. They were for sacrifice. He had done most of what God asked. He argued with the one man God had sent to correct him.

The second king was David. When Nathan stood before him and said, "You are that man!" (2 Samuel 12:7), David didn't explain or defend himself. He said, "I have sinned against the LORD" (2 Samuel 12:13). In many ways his sin was worse than Saul's. But David let the prophet in.

Giftedness didn't separate them. Saul was a king without a judge. He wanted Samuel's blessing but not Samuel's correction. David was a king who could still be told no.

That's a real danger in the Church today. Gifted leaders can drift toward a model that looks more like a CEO than a spiritual father. They surround themselves with people who agree with them, and they begin to see the resistance of wise counselors as restrictive rather than

protective. Their blind spots grow, because no one is allowed to point them out.

But this isn't only for leaders. Each of us has a little throne. And each of us needs a Samuel or a Nathan: someone with permission to say, "That's not full obedience." "Fools think their own way is right, but the wise listen to others" (Proverbs 12:15).

Partial obedience feels like obedience when no one is allowed to question it.

Almost right: I mostly did what God said, and I had good reasons for the rest.
Right: I welcome the voice that shows me where I fell short.

Insecure leaders call counsel a restriction; wise leaders call it protection.

FOR THE ROAD

Who in your life has permission to say, "You are that man" or "You are that woman"?

Lord, give me David's heart when I'm confronted, not Saul's defenses. Send me faithful voices, and make me humble enough to hear them. Amen.

DAY 165

Fear Wants the Wheel

> *Such love has no fear, because perfect love expels all fear. If we are afraid, it is for fear of punishment, and this shows that we have not fully experienced his perfect love.*
>
> **1 John 4:18**

In the *Star Wars* prequels, Anakin Skywalker is more gifted than anyone around him. But he is haunted by fear, above all the fear of losing the woman he loves. That fear makes him suspicious of his mentors and his closest friends. It pushes him into rash decisions and toward any power that promises control over what he can't control. Fear isolates him from the people who could have helped him, and Anakin becomes Darth Vader.

I see in that story a picture of what fear does to a child of God who forgets he has a Father.

Fear is the native language of the orphan. An orphan believes no one is coming to help, so he has to hold everything together himself. He grabs the wheel. He manages people. He can't receive correction, because correction feels like losing control. And the harder he grips, the further he drifts from the route God laid out.

That's why this season ends here. Recalculate began with an eleven-day trip that took forty years. Israel's detour didn't come from unclear directions. At the edge of the promise, fear of the giants talked them out of obeying (Numbers 14).

John names the cure. Perfect love expels fear. When you know your Father is good and for you, you can loosen your grip. You can let others speak into your life. You can obey without seeing every turn ahead.

“Seek his will in all you do, and he will show you which path to take” (Proverbs 3:6).

Kingdom authority has never belonged to the one who controls the most. It belongs to the one who trusts the Father the most.

Almost right: If I can control it, I can keep what I love safe.

Right: I trust my Father with what I love, so I don’t have to control it.

No one with a control spirit can walk in the authority of the Kingdom of God.

FOR THE ROAD

Where is fear pushing you to grab the wheel instead of trusting your Father with the route?

Father, I let go of the wheel. Fill me with Your perfect love until it drives out my fear, and lead me on Your route all the way home. Amen.

WEEK 33

Together

Meet once after Day 165. This week closes the season of Recalculate, so leave time to look back as well as forward.

1. **Open:** Read Mark 6:5–6 aloud. Ask: what does it mean that unbelief could limit what Jesus did in His own hometown?
2. **Day 161:** Where have you protected yourself from disappointment by expecting less of God?
3. **Day 162:** Do you lean more toward the Word without the Spirit, or the Spirit without the Word? What would "growing up" look like for you?
4. **Day 163:** Who has permission to weigh what you believe God is saying? If no one does, why not?
5. **Day 164:** Saul defended himself; David said, "I have sinned." What makes it hard to receive correction, and how can we make it safer to give?
6. **Day 165:** Where does fear make you grab for control? What would it look like to trust the Father with that this week?

Practice together: Look back over the whole season. Have each person name one place where God has recalculated their route, and one place where they still feel like they're fighting His direction. Pray for each other by name, and agree on one practical step of full obedience for the coming week.

Pray: Pray Romans 8:28 over one another: "Lord, work every route in our lives together for good, according to Your purpose."

SEASON SIX

Revolution

Driven by Eternity

WEEKS 34–38

WEEK 34

Driven by What?

Before eternity can change what we build, it asks what is actually driving us: recognition, comfort, success, or the King.

DAY 166

For the Love of the Game

Many people did believe in him, however, including some of the Jewish leaders. But they wouldn't admit it for fear that the Pharisees would expel them from the synagogue. For they loved human praise more than the praise of God.

John 12:42–43

There was a pastor who had been passed over by several large churches. He had real gifts and real potential, but the doors kept closing, and the rejection left him questioning his calling and his worth. So he met a close friend at a park to talk it through.

His friend asked him a simple question: "How much do you love to serve the Kingdom of God?"

The pastor broke down. "That's all I care about," he said.

His friend pointed across the park to a pickup basketball game. The men on the court were in their thirties and forties. Most of them had probably dreamed of playing professionally once. Now there was no money, no crowd and no contract. And still they showed up. They trained, risked injury and gave up time with work and family, just to play. Why? Because they loved the game.

That picture went straight to the pastor's heart. Why did he really want a bigger ministry? Was it the Kingdom, or the size of the room? He realized that serving God had never been about the platform. It was about loving the work and fulfilling his purpose, whatever the stage looked like.

John tells us about leaders who believed in Jesus but kept quiet, because they loved human praise more than the praise of God. Most of us would

never say that out loud. But the way we handle being overlooked often reveals what we have been playing for.

So here is the question that runs through this whole season: are we driven by the pleasures of this life, or are we driven by eternity?

Almost right: I want a bigger platform so I can do more for the Kingdom.

Right: I love the work, and I'll do it with joy whether the stands are full or empty.

If you only play when the crowd shows up, you never loved the game.

FOR THE ROAD

If no one ever noticed your service again, would you still love doing it?

Father, strip away my need to be seen. Give me a love for Your work that doesn't depend on the size of the room. Let Your approval be enough. Amen.

DAY 167

Idol or Soldier

> *Endure suffering along with me, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. Soldiers don't get tied up in the affairs of civilian life, for then they cannot please the officer who enlisted them.*
>
> **2 Timothy 2:3–4**

Picture two scenes side by side.

On the left is a talent-show stage. Bright lights, a cheering crowd, judges at a table, a contestant waiting to hear whether the votes came in. Everything on that stage depends on being seen and being liked.

On the right is a soldier in a trench. Mud on his boots. No audience. No applause. He is there because he was sent, and the only voice that matters to him is his commander's.

I believe much of Western Christianity looks more like the first picture than the second. Talent-show Christianity is built around the personal pursuit of prosperity, pleasure and recognition. It measures success by visibility. It asks, "Will this make me happy? Will this get me noticed?" Faith becomes one more way to chase our dreams.

Biblical Christianity looks like the trench. Paul told Timothy to endure suffering "as a good soldier of Christ Jesus." A soldier trains when it's boring. He obeys when it's costly. He doesn't get tangled up in civilian affairs, because he has one aim: to please the One who enlisted him. Paul said the same about athletes: "They do it to win a prize that will fade away, but we do it for an eternal prize" (1 Corinthians 9:25).

The stage thrives on visibility and worldly rewards. The trench is driven by eternity, knowing Jesus Himself is our reward. Jesus said, "Wherever

your treasure is, there the desires of your heart will also be" (Matthew 6:21).

None of this means God wants you miserable. Soldiers have brothers beside them, and the Commander provides for His own. But the question of the stage is "How am I doing?" The question of the trench is "What are my orders?"

Almost right: God wants me to shine, so the spotlight must be His blessing.

Right: God enlisted me, so pleasing my Commander is the only reward I need.

The stage asks who is watching. The trench asks who is commanding.

FOR THE ROAD

In what area of your faith are you performing for an audience instead of reporting to a Commander?

Lord Jesus, You are my Commander and my reward. Pull me off the stage and into the place You've stationed me, and make me faithful there. Amen.

DAY 168

Successful or Purposeful

For David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell asleep, was buried with his fathers, and saw corruption.

Acts 13:36 (NKJV)

Here is a sentence I want you to sit with: you can be legally saved and still not serve your purpose in your generation.

That may sound strange, so let me define three words we often blur together.

Calling is being adopted into God's family. "To all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God" (John 1:12). That is the foundation.

Assignment is a temporary duty for a season. A job, a role, a ministry, a place. Assignments change, because "for everything there is a season" (Ecclesiastes 3:1).

Purpose is the part you play in God's divine orchestra to impact the world for eternity. It is what David did when he "served his own generation by the will of God."

Saul shows us the difference between success and purpose. He was anointed. He was king. He won battles. By every outward measure he was successful. But when he took matters into his own hands, Samuel told him the Lord would have established his kingdom forever. "But now your kingdom must end, for the LORD has sought out a man after his own heart" (1 Samuel 13:14). Saul kept the crown for years. He lost the kingdom in a single afternoon.

That is what happens when a son lives like an orphan. He is legally adopted, but he is still consumed with selfish ambition and earthly

desires. He is chasing success because he is not secure in his place at the Father's table.

Success asks, "How far can I get?" Purpose asks, "What did my Father send me to do?" One can be measured in this life. The other is only measured in the next.

Almost right: I'm saved and I'm successful, so I must be in God's will.
Right: I'm a son, and I want to serve God's purpose in my generation.

You can keep the crown and still lose the kingdom.

FOR THE ROAD

Are you chasing success, or are you asking the Father what He sent you to do in your generation?

Abba, I don't want to be legally adopted and still live like an orphan. Show me my part in Your orchestra, and let me play it faithfully in my generation. Amen.

DAY 169

Under the Sun or In the Son

I observed everything going on under the sun, and really, it is all meaningless, like chasing the wind.

Ecclesiastes 1:14

Solomon had everything. Wisdom no one else had. Wealth that made silver as common as stones. Building projects, gardens, music, servants, and every pleasure a man could want. And at the end of it all, he looked around and called it vapor. Meaningless. Chasing the wind.

The actor Jim Carrey is often quoted as saying that everyone should get rich and famous and do everything they ever dreamed of, so they can see that it's not the answer. Solomon learned that lesson three thousand years earlier.

Notice that Solomon wasn't a fool. He carried a tremendous anointing of wisdom. But Ecclesiastes is wisdom seen through the lens of a man living "under the sun." It is life measured by opportunities, achievements and pleasures. It is the orphan mindset with a crown on its head.

Proverbs, by contrast, teaches us to live wisely as sons. And the New Testament takes us further still: from life under the sun to life in the Son. "Since you have been raised to new life with Christ, set your sights on the realities of heaven, where Christ sits in the place of honor at God's right hand. Think about the things of heaven, not the things of earth" (Colossians 3:1–2).

Same man, same wisdom, different lens. Under the sun, everything ends at the grave, so you grab what you can. In the Son, everything is seed for eternity, so you can give it away.

Jesus asked, “What do you benefit if you gain the whole world but lose your own soul?” (Mark 8:36). Solomon gained the world and found it empty. You don’t have to repeat his experiment.

Almost right: If I just reach the next level, I’ll finally be satisfied.
Right: Nothing under the sun can satisfy a heart made for the Son.

Success may bring happiness and pleasure, but it will never give you meaning and purpose.

FOR THE ROAD

What “next level” have you been counting on to finally satisfy you?

Lord Jesus, lift my eyes from life under the sun to life in You. I don’t want to gain the world and miss what matters. Be my meaning. Amen.

DAY 170

The Red Pill

Today I have given you the choice between life and death, between blessings and curses. Now I call on heaven and earth to witness the choice you make. Oh, that you would choose life, so that you and your descendants might live!

Deuteronomy 30:19

In *The Matrix*, Morpheus sits across from Neo and holds out two pills. Take the blue one, and Neo wakes up in his bed and goes on believing whatever he wants to believe. Take the red one, and he wakes up to the truth about the world he has been living in. Comfort or truth. Illusion or reality. Neo takes the red pill, and the truth turns out to be hard, cold and costly.

Later in the film, one of the crew members, Cypher, decides the truth is too hard. He makes a deal with the enemy to be put back into the illusion, and he betrays the people who freed him to get there. Sitting at a table with a steak he knows isn't real, he says it plainly: "Ignorance is bliss."

That scene always reminds me of Judas. He walked with the Truth for three years. He saw the miracles. And he traded it all for silver and the comfort of a world he understood.

Moses set the same choice before Israel. Life or death. Blessing or curse. And he told them how to choose life: "by loving the LORD your God, obeying him, and committing yourself firmly to him. This is the key to your life" (Deuteronomy 30:20).

Every day we face some version of this choice. The blue pill is the comfortable lie that says this life is all there is, so make yourself happy.

The red pill is the costly truth that we were made for eternity, and that following Jesus will cost us something here.

The blue pill never looks like betrayal at first. It just looks like rest. But the comfortable illusion always demands more than it gives.

Almost right: I believe the truth, but I'd rather not let it disturb my comfort.
Right: I'll choose the costly truth, because it leads to life.

Choosing between earthly pleasures and eternal significance is a decision that defines our destiny.

FOR THE ROAD

Where are you tempted to go back to a comfortable illusion?

Father, I choose life. Give me courage to see what's real and to keep choosing You when the truth is costly. Keep me from trading the real for the comfortable. Amen.

WEEK 34

Together

Meet once after Day 170. Start with honesty about motives; nobody in the room is free of the pull of the crowd.

1. **Open:** Read John 12:42–43 aloud. Ask: what does it look like today to love human praise more than the praise of God?
2. **Day 166:** If your ministry, job or influence never grew another inch, would you still love the work? Why or why not?
3. **Day 167:** Where do you see talent-show Christianity in our culture? Where do you see it in yourself?
4. **Day 168:** Talk through calling, assignment and purpose. Which one are you clearest about right now, and which one is foggy?
5. **Day 169:** Share a time you reached a goal and found it emptier than you expected. What did that teach you?
6. **Day 170:** What “blue pills” are most tempting for believers in this season of life?

Practice together: Each person names one place they serve where no one sees or applauds. This week, do that work deliberately as an offering to God alone. Next time you meet, share what changed in your heart when you stopped looking for the crowd.

Pray: Pray Colossians 3:1–2 over one another, asking God to lift each person’s eyes from life under the sun to life in the Son.

WEEK 35

Build an Ark, Not a Tower

Once the motive is exposed, eternity changes what we build: people over platforms, presence over legacy, calling over career.

DAY 171

“I Could Have Done More”

> *Then they said, “Come, let’s build a great city for ourselves with a tower that reaches into the sky. This will make us famous and keep us from being scattered all over the world.”*
>
> **Genesis 11:4**

Near the end of *Schindler’s List*, the war is over and Oskar Schindler is about to flee. He began the war as a party member and a profiteer, running a factory on cheap Jewish labor. Somewhere along the way, after witnessing the horror around him, his focus shifted from making money to saving as many lives as he could. He spent his fortune on bribes to keep his workers alive.

His workers gather to say goodbye. They give him a letter they have all signed and a ring engraved with words from the Talmud: whoever saves one life saves the world entire. And Schindler breaks. He looks at his car and his gold pin and counts the lives they could have bought. Weeping, he tells them, “I could have done more.”

That scene is a picture of two kinds of building.

The builders at Babel said, “Let’s build a great city for ourselves… This will make us famous.” Their tower was built to preserve their own name. Noah built something else. He built an Ark, and its whole purpose was to preserve life.

Every one of us is building one or the other. The question is whether it exists to make our name great or to carry people safely into the Kingdom. Paul warned that “on the judgment day, fire will reveal what kind of work each builder has done” (1 Corinthians 3:13). Towers look impressive until the fire comes. Arks look strange until the rain comes.

Schindler's tears are a gift to us, because we still have time. The moment to ask "Could I have done more?" is now, while our resources can still save someone.

Almost right: I'm building something great for God, and people will know His name through mine.
Right: I'm building an Ark, and its success is measured by who gets carried through the flood.

When you stop using people to save money and start using money to save people, you build an Ark of His Presence.

FOR THE ROAD

If your life's work were tested by fire tomorrow, what would survive?

Lord, I don't want to build a tower with my name on it. Teach me to spend what You've given me on people. Let me build an Ark of Your presence while there's still time. Amen.

DAY 172

People Will Think You're Crazy

> *It was by faith that Noah built a large boat to save his family from the flood. He obeyed God, who warned him about things that had never happened before.*
>
> **Hebrews 11:7**

When we moved our coffee shop into a new building, I thought I was renovating a building. I found out God was renovating a mindset.

That is often how God works. We think the project is the point. He is after the builder. And He is very particular about what He wants built, because what we can build and what He has asked us to build are not always the same thing.

Think about Noah. God told him to build a boat 450 feet long for a flood no one had ever seen. Hebrews says God warned him "about things that had never happened before." There was no precedent, no model, no proof. Noah couldn't start a GoFundMe to finance the Ark. Who would donate? To everyone watching, he looked like a man who had lost his mind.

That is one of the signs you are building a house the Lord will preserve: people may think you're crazy. Obedience to a word from heaven rarely makes sense to people who only see what's in front of them.

And here is the harder part. Noah could have used the same timber, the same skill and the same years to build something impressive for himself. A great house. A name in his city. It would have looked wiser to everyone around him. But it would have been underwater in forty days.

"Unless the LORD builds a house, the work of the builders is wasted" (Psalm 127:1). An empire built with your gifts, even an empire built "for

God," is still the wrong project if God asked you for an Ark.

The question isn't whether what you're building is good. The question is whether it's what He asked for.

Almost right: I'm building something big for God, so He must be pleased.
Right: I'm building what God actually asked for, even when it looks foolish.

You can't build an empire when God has asked you to build an Ark.

FOR THE ROAD

Is there something God has asked you to build that you've traded for something more impressive?

Father, renovate my mindset. I lay down my plans for an empire and pick up the tools for the Ark You've asked for, whatever people think. Amen.

DAY 173

I Will Waste My Life

Some of those at the table were indignant. "Why waste such expensive perfume?" they asked. "It could have been sold for a year's wages and the money given to the poor!" So they scolded her harshly. But Jesus replied, "Leave her alone. Why criticize her for doing such a good thing to me?"

Mark 14:4–6

Years ago I was invited to a gathering of Christian leaders focused on media and influence. During one conversation, a respected man of God said something that stopped me. He was talking about the young people at a house of prayer who were spending their days in worship and intercession, and he said they were wasting their lives.

I didn't agree. I told him I would happily choose to waste my life in the sight of man.

If giving your life to God in the secret place looks like waste to people, then waste it.

That word "waste" is exactly what the disciples used in Bethany. Mary broke a jar of perfume worth a year's wages and poured it over Jesus. To the people at the table it was poor stewardship. It could have been sold. It could have been used for ministry. They had a point, which is what made the criticism sound so spiritual.

But Jesus defended her. "She has done a good thing to me." And He promised that wherever the Good News was preached, her story would be told (Mark 14:9).

Right after that, Judas went to the chief priests and asked what they would pay him. One person poured out everything for Jesus. Another

put a price on Him.

We will always be tempted to preserve the appearance of success. To make sure our lives look productive and our choices make sense to the people watching. But the real question is simpler and harder: am I trying to move the hearts of men or the heart of God?

Almost right: I need to make sure my life looks fruitful to the people watching.

Right: I'll pour out everything for an audience of One, even if it looks like waste.

Am I trying to move the hearts of men or the heart of God?

FOR THE ROAD

What would you give to Jesus if you stopped worrying about whether it looked like a waste?

Jesus, You are worth everything. I break my jar at Your feet. Let my life look wasted to the world if it brings joy to Your heart. Amen.

DAY 174

Arks, Not Bunkers

> *I heard a loud shout from the throne, saying, "Look, God's home is now among his people! He will live with them, and they will be his people. God himself will be with them."*
>
> **Revelation 21:3**

Picture two rooms.

The first is underground. Concrete walls, a steel door, shelves stocked with canned food, water barrels, batteries and a generator. Someone has read about the end of the world and decided to survive it alone.

The second is a living room on a weeknight. A dozen people are sitting on couches and kitchen chairs. Someone is reading Scripture. Someone is crying and being prayed for. An older couple is helping a young husband figure out how to love his wife well. There are kids on the floor.

Both rooms are preparing for the end. Only one of them looks like the book of Revelation.

Many believers read Revelation and come away afraid. They start studying how to hide, how to stockpile, how to get out of the city. But Revelation was given not to incite fear so we build bunkers in the country. It was given so we would build Arks of His presence: communities that inspire hope and faithfulness and preserve the remnant.

The final picture of Revelation isn't a bunker. It's a dwelling place. "God's home is now among his people!" The whole story ends with God living with a family. If that is where history is going, then the best way to prepare for it is to start building that family now.

That is why Hebrews tells us, “Let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage one another, especially now that the day of his return is drawing near” (Hebrews 10:25). The nearer the end, the more we gather, not the more we hide.

Wisdom and preparation aren’t wrong. But a stockpile without a family of faith is only a longer way to be alone.

Almost right: The end is coming, so I need to protect myself and mine.

Right: The end is coming, so I need to gather God’s family around His presence.

Revelation was given not to make us build bunkers, but to make us build Arks of His Presence.

FOR THE ROAD

Is your preparation for hard times making you more connected to God’s family or more isolated from it?

Lord, take the fear out of my heart about the days ahead. Make my home and my circle an Ark of Your presence, where people are carried and disciples are made. Amen.

DAY 175

Career or Calling

> *Instead, he gave up his divine privileges; he took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being. When he appeared in human form, he humbled himself in obedience to God and died a criminal's death on a cross.*
>
> **Philippians 2:7–8**

Culture says to build your life according to your best career path. Find what you're good at, climb as high as you can, and get what you deserve. The Kingdom says to build according to the calling God set for you before the foundations of the world.

Look at how Jesus lived.

Jesus was the greatest husband who never had a wife. He was the best father who never had children. He was the wisest teacher, and He had no synagogue. He was the Great Physician without a practice. He was the only truly good man who ever lived, and He died a criminal's death for sinners.

Did Jesus get what He deserved?

No. And thank God He didn't, because if Jesus had gotten what He deserved, we would have gotten what we deserve.

That is the heart of the cross. It isn't about getting what you think you deserve. It's about pressing through your pain so that someone you love gets their promise. Paul said Jesus "gave up his divine privileges" and "took the humble position of a slave." He chose the calling over the career.

Jesus said, "If any of you wants to be my follower, you must give up your own way, take up your cross, and follow me" (Matthew 16:24).

That doesn't mean God is against your work or your gifts. It means your gifts belong to your calling, and your calling belongs to Him.

Heaven keeps a very different résumé.

Almost right: I've earned this, so God must want me to have it.
Right: I'll press through what I don't deserve so someone I love gets their promise.

The pain is temporary, but the promise is eternal. Be driven by eternity, not your pain.

FOR THE ROAD

Where are you holding on to what you think you deserve instead of pressing through for someone else's promise?

Jesus, You never got what You deserved so I could receive what I never could. Make me like You. Let my life be a cross that carries someone else into their promise. Amen.

WEEK 35

Together

Meet once after Day 175. This week is about what you're building, so bring your plans and be willing to hold them loosely.

1. **Open:** Read Genesis 11:4 aloud. Ask: what are some modern "towers" that people build to make a name for themselves?
2. **Day 171:** What would it look like for you to use your money or resources to save people this month?
3. **Day 172:** Has God ever asked you to build something that looked foolish to others? What happened?
4. **Day 173:** Who in your life has been accused of "wasting" their life on Jesus? What do you admire about them?
5. **Day 174:** Is our group more like a bunker or an Ark? What would make it more of an Ark?
6. **Day 175:** Where are you tempted to choose career over calling? What would pressing through look like?

Practice together: Choose one person outside the group who needs to be carried right now. Decide together on one concrete way to help them this week with your time, your money or your presence. Make it costly enough that it feels a little like breaking a jar.

Pray: Pray Psalm 127:1 over each person's work, asking the Lord to build what He wants and tear down anything that is only a tower.

WEEK 36

Run to Win

An Ark is built by runners: people who train when no one is watching, bear reproach, die like seeds, and run their leg of a race that started long before them.

DAY 176

Many Run to Finish

Don't you realize that in a race everyone runs, but only one person gets the prize? So run to win! All athletes are disciplined in their training. They do it to win a prize that will fade away, but we do it for an eternal prize.

1 Corinthians 9:24–25

Deion Sanders is often quoted as saying that when he watched his own highlight reel, he didn't think those were his best plays. His best plays, he said, happened at practice when no one was there. He practiced the way he wanted to play, so that when the game came, it felt like practice.

I spent a lot of years in football, from college through the NFL, and I can tell you that line is true. Greatness is rarely made under the lights. It is made in the unseen places, where discipline and hunger and preparation are formed long before anyone is watching.

Paul knew that world too. He wrote to the Corinthians, who lived near one of the great athletic games of the ancient world. "Run to win!" he told them. "All athletes are disciplined in their training." Then he described his own training: "I discipline my body like an athlete, training it to do what it should" (1 Corinthians 9:27).

The Lord once spoke something to me that I've never been able to shake: "Son, many run the race of life to finish, but few run to win."

Finishing matters. But there is a way of running the Christian life that is only about crossing the line. Stay saved. Don't mess up too badly. Make it to heaven. That is a finisher's faith.

Running to win is different. It means training when no one sees. It means living with an imperishable crown in view, a prize that will never

fade.

The question isn't whether you're in the race. You are. The question is how you are running it.

Almost right: As long as I finish the race, I'm doing fine.
Right: I'm running to win, and I train for the eternal prize when no one is watching.

Many run the race of life to finish, but few run to win.

FOR THE ROAD

What does your training look like when no one is watching?

Lord, I don't want to just make it across the line. Light a fire in me to run for the prize that never fades. Make my secret life with You my best practice. Amen.

DAY 177

The Dark Knight

But when you pray, go away by yourself, shut the door behind you, and pray to your Father in private. Then your Father, who sees everything, will reward you.

Matthew 6:6

At the end of *The Dark Knight*, Gotham's district attorney, Harvey Dent, has been the city's great hope. He is the public face of justice, the hero with a name and a face. But by the end of the film, grief and rage have turned him into a killer.

Batman faces a choice. If the city learns what Dent became, its hope will die with him. So Batman takes the blame for Dent's crimes. He lets Gotham believe he is the villain, so that the city can keep believing in the good. The film ends with the police hunting the very man who saved them.

That is a strange kind of heroism. No parade. No credit. Only reproach.

Jesus called His followers to that kind of life. He said, "When you pray, go away by yourself, shut the door behind you." Give in secret. Fast in secret. Serve in secret. "Your Father, who sees everything, will reward you."

And He told us that sometimes the reward would come with insults attached. "God blesses you when people mock you and persecute you and lie about you and say all sorts of evil things against you because you are my followers. Be happy about it! Be very glad! For a great reward awaits you in heaven" (Matthew 5:11–12).

The world's heroes need a spotlight. Kingdom heroes can work in the shadows, misunderstood and unthanked, because they know the One

who sees.

The greatest example, of course, is Jesus Himself. He took blame that wasn't His, bore reproach He didn't deserve, and was counted among the criminals so that we could be called righteous.

Almost right: If I'm doing right, people should see it and honor it.

Right: If I'm doing right, I can bear reproach, because my Father sees in secret.

True heroism often involves self-sacrifice, enduring reproach, and choosing righteousness over personal glory.

FOR THE ROAD

What good thing are you doing that you secretly wish more people noticed?

Father, You see in secret. Free me from needing credit. Give me the courage to carry reproach for what is right, the way Jesus carried it for me. Amen.

DAY 178

What's in It for Me?

> *I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat is planted in the soil and dies, it remains alone. But its death will produce many new kernels, a plentiful harvest of new lives. Those who love their life in this world will lose it. Those who care nothing for their life in this world will keep it for eternity.*
>
> **John 12:24–25**

Hold a single grain of wheat in your open palm. It's safe there. It's whole. Nothing will happen to it. And nothing will ever come from it. It will stay one grain for as long as you protect it.

Now picture a field in late summer, gold to the horizon, heavy with harvest. Every stalk in that field began with a seed that was willing to be buried.

Jesus said that a kernel of wheat that refuses to die "remains alone."

Many have called the rising generation the "me generation." Paul warned that in the last days "people will love only themselves" (2 Timothy 3:2). Before committing to anything, the first question is, "What's in it for me?" How will I benefit? What will I gain? What's my return on this investment of time and energy?

Every one of us carries that question inside. But I believe God is planning a miraculous transformation in this generation. I believe many of the very people who were labeled self-centered are going to play a crucial part in a great harvest of souls, and surprise the world with their humility.

That transformation will start the way every harvest starts: with seeds willing to die.

The Moravian leader Count Zinzendorf is remembered for a startling motto for missionaries: “Preach the gospel, die, and be forgotten.” It sounds bleak until you look at the field. The Moravians helped spark a missionary movement that reached around the world, and most of their names we’ll never know.

So when that question rises in you, answer it with Jesus’ words. What’s in it for me? A harvest I may never see. A life I’ll keep for eternity.

Almost right: I’ll commit once I know what’s in it for me.
Right: I’ll fall into the ground and die, and trust God with the harvest.

Lord, let the change begin with me.

FOR THE ROAD

Where are you holding on to your life like a grain in an open palm?

Jesus, I don’t want to remain alone. Plant me. Let the “me” in me die, so that a harvest can grow. Lord, let the change begin with me. Amen.

DAY 179

When Love Carries a Sword

Don't imagine that I came to bring peace to the earth! I came not to bring peace, but a sword. … If you love your father or mother more than you love me, you are not worthy of being mine; or if you love your son or daughter more than me, you are not worthy of being mine.

Matthew 10:34, 37

Most of us picture Jesus with gentle eyes and open arms, a Savior on a cross. That picture is true. But there are moments in the Gospels when Jesus looks less like a Savior on a cross and more like a slayer with a sword.

This is one of them. "I came not to bring peace, but a sword."

He wasn't talking about violence. He was talking about loyalty. When Jesus calls someone to follow Him, that call can cut straight through family expectations, cultural traditions and the plans other people had for our lives. A son chooses Christ, and a father feels betrayed. A daughter obeys God, and a mother doesn't understand.

That isn't because God loves conflict. It's because His love is supremely loyal, and it asks for our supreme loyalty in return. God's love is a refiner's fire. It purifies, and purifying is rarely quiet.

Jesus put it in the language of farming. "Anyone who puts a hand to the plow and then looks back is not fit for the Kingdom of God" (Luke 9:62). Any farmer will tell you that you can't plow a straight row while staring over your shoulder. The moment you look back, the furrow bends.

Following Jesus doesn't mean we stop loving our families. It means we love them from the right place. When Christ is first, every other love is put in order. When family is first, even good love becomes an idol.

If your obedience has created distance with someone you love, don't harden your heart and don't give up hope. Keep honoring them. Keep praying. The same sword that divides can also, in God's time, cut the cords that keep them from Him.

Almost right: Love means keeping the peace with my family, whatever it costs.
Right: Love means giving Christ my first loyalty, even when it costs me peace.

You can't plow a straight row looking over your shoulder.

FOR THE ROAD

Whose approval are you most afraid to lose by fully following Jesus?

Jesus, You are my first love and my first loyalty. Give me courage to follow You without looking back, and grace to keep loving the people who don't understand. Amen.

DAY 180

The World Was Not Worthy

All these people earned a good reputation because of their faith, yet none of them received all that God had promised. For God had something better in mind for us, so that they would not reach perfection without us.

Hebrews 11:39–40

Hebrews 11 is often called the Hall of Faith, and it starts out like a highlight reel. Gideon, Barak, Samson, David, Samuel. They conquered kingdoms, shut the mouths of lions, quenched fire and put whole armies to flight.

Then the chapter turns. Some were tortured. Some were sawed in half. “Some went about wearing skins of sheep and goats, destitute and oppressed and mistreated. They were too good for this world, wandering over deserts and mountains, hiding in caves and holes in the ground” (Hebrews 11:37–38).

Some of them saw miracles. Some of them saw prison. And here’s the line that should stop us: “none of them received all that God had promised.”

Not one. They lived and died believing a promise they never fully held in their hands.

Why? Because “God had something better in mind for us, so that they would not reach perfection without us.” The race of faith is a relay. They ran their leg faithfully and handed off the baton. Now they are part of the “huge crowd of witnesses” (Hebrews 12:1), waiting for us to run ours.

Leonard Ravenhill is often quoted as saying that the early church was married to poverty, prisons and persecution, while today the church is married to prosperity, personality and popularity. It stings, because so much of our faith expects to receive everything in this lifetime.

But the heroes of Hebrews 11 measured their lives by faithfulness, not by what they received. They were looking for a city with eternal foundations.

You may not see every promise fulfilled in your lifetime. That doesn't mean you failed. It may mean you ran your leg well and placed the baton in someone else's hand.

Almost right: If I have enough faith, I'll see every promise fulfilled in my lifetime.
Right: I'll run my leg faithfully, because the promise will be completed together with us.

Some of God's heroes saw the miracle. Some saw the prison. Heaven calls them both faithful.

FOR THE ROAD

Whose baton are you carrying, and whose hand will you place it in?

Father, thank You for the faithful ones who ran before me. Help me run my leg well, even if I never see the finish, and put the baton safely in the next hand. Amen.

WEEK 36

Together

Meet once after Day 180. Runners need teammates, so let this be a time of honest encouragement.

1. **Open:** Read 1 Corinthians 9:24–25 aloud. Ask: what's the difference between running to finish and running to win?
2. **Day 176:** What does your "practice" look like when no one is around? What would make it stronger?
3. **Day 177:** Have you ever carried blame or misunderstanding for doing the right thing? How did God meet you there?
4. **Day 178:** Be honest: where does "What's in it for me?" show up in your decisions?
5. **Day 179:** Has following Jesus ever created tension with someone you love? How are you honoring them in it?
6. **Day 180:** Who handed you the baton of faith? Who are you handing it to?

Practice together: Each person names one hidden discipline they will practice this week, such as a set time of prayer, a secret act of generosity or a fast, and tells no one outside the group. Pair up and check in midweek with a single text: "Still running?"

Pray: Pray John 12:24 over one another, asking God to plant each person like a seed and bring a harvest from what they lay down.

WEEK 37

Eternity in the Pain

When the race hurts, the rescue doesn't come and the enemy doubles the quota, eternity holds us inside God's timing and God's presence.

DAY 181

The Womb Called Time

Yet God has made everything beautiful for its own time. He has planted eternity in the human heart, but even so, people cannot see the whole scope of God's work from beginning to end.

Ecclesiastes 3:11

Here is a picture I find helpful: this earth is a womb called time.

A baby in the womb is alive, real and growing, but not yet born into the world it was made for. Every week matters. Lungs are forming. Eyes are developing. Strength is being built for a life the baby can't yet imagine. But a baby born too early is not blessed with a head start. It is fragile, and it needs help to do what it would have done naturally if it had been given more time.

Our lives on earth are like that. We are alive in Christ, real and growing, but not yet born into the eternity we were made for. "He has planted eternity in the human heart." That's why this world never quite feels like home. It isn't supposed to. It's the womb, not the world.

So what do we do in the meantime? We grow. We let God form what can only be formed in this season. James tells us to let endurance do its work, "for when your endurance is fully developed, you will be perfect and complete, needing nothing" (James 1:4).

Many of us want to rush the process. We want the ministry before the character. The platform before the humility. The promise before the patience. We push for an early delivery and call it faith. But rushing the process causes spiritual prematurity. The gift arrives before the lungs are ready to breathe the air it brings.

God is not slow. He is thorough. “He has made everything beautiful for its own time.” Not before its time.

If you’re in a cramped, dark season right now, it may not be a tomb. It may be a womb. Something is being formed in you that you’ll need for eternity.

Almost right: If God has promised it, I should push for it now.
Right: If God has promised it, I’ll let Him form me until it’s time.

Rushing the process causes spiritual prematurity.

FOR THE ROAD

What are you trying to rush that God may still be forming?

Father, I trust Your timing. Form in me everything I’ll need for what You’ve promised. Keep me from rushing what You are making beautiful in its time. Amen.

DAY 182

Bricks Without Straw

May the LORD judge and punish you for making us stink before Pharaoh and his officials. You have put a sword into their hands, an excuse to kill us!

Exodus 5:21

Moses walked into Pharaoh's court with the best news Israel had heard in four hundred years. God had seen their misery. He was going to set them free.

Pharaoh's answer was swift. From that day on, the slaves would no longer be given straw to make their bricks. They would have to gather it themselves. And the quota would not go down. Same number of bricks, half the supplies. When they fell short, their foremen were beaten.

So who did the people blame? Not Pharaoh. They blamed Moses. "May the LORD judge and punish you for making us stink before Pharaoh."

I see in Pharaoh a picture of the enemy, and in Moses a picture of the prophetic voice. Very often, when God's people hear a word about freedom, the enemy responds by doubling the workload. People get discouraged, frustrated and overwhelmed, until they start to doubt that the promise was ever for them. And strangely, the messenger who raised their hopes becomes the target, instead of the father of lies who is fighting the promise.

There's a reason God allows these battles. Judges tells us He left enemies in the land "to teach warfare to generations of Israelites who had no experience in battle" (Judges 3:2). When you understand the enemy's schemes, the extra quota looks different. It's a distraction

meant to move your eyes from the Father of Lights to the giants in the land.

When Pharaoh later tried to bargain, Moses refused to leave anything in Egypt: “not a hoof can be left behind” (Exodus 10:26). That’s our posture too. We don’t negotiate with the old ways of the orphan mindset.

Increased pressure after a promise doesn’t mean the promise was false. Often it means the promise is real enough to fight.

Almost right: Things got worse after the word, so the word must have been wrong.

Right: Things got worse after the word, so I’ll keep my eyes on God and not the giants.

We must not leave a hoof behind in Egypt.

FOR THE ROAD

Have you been blaming a messenger for warfare that really came from the enemy?

Father of Lights, open my eyes to see the enemy’s schemes. When the pressure doubles, keep my gaze on You and Your promise. I won’t leave a hoof behind. Amen.

DAY 183

Oil but No Resurrection

When she told the man of God what had happened, he said to her, "Now sell the olive oil and pay your debts, and you and your sons can live on what is left over."

2 Kings 4:7

Two women in the same chapter of the Bible met the same prophet, and their stories ended very differently.

The first was a widow. Her husband had died, and she was left in debt. The creditor was coming to take her two sons as slaves. Elisha told her to gather empty jars from her neighbors and pour her one flask of oil into them. The oil kept flowing until every jar was full. She sold it, paid the debt and kept her sons.

A few verses later, a woman from Shunem lost her only son. He died in her lap. She went to Elisha, and he came and stretched himself over the boy, and the child came back to life.

One woman got her son back from the dead. The other got oil. Her debts were paid and her boys were safe, but she still went to bed alone. Her husband stayed in the grave.

Why didn't God raise him too?

We aren't told. But I believe there's a lesson in the silence. Sometimes the world doesn't need God to rescue us like a knight on a white horse, meeting every expectation. Sometimes the world needs to see us endure.

The widow's oil was a miracle, but it was a different kind of miracle. It was provision in the middle of loss.

David knew that kind of faith. “Even when I walk through the darkest valley, I will not be afraid, for you are close beside me” (Psalm 23:4). He didn’t say God would remove the valley. He said God would be close in it.

If you prayed for resurrection and got oil, don’t despise the oil. It’s evidence that He is with you.

Almost right: If God really loved me, He would rescue me the way I asked.
Right: God is with me in the pain, and His presence is its own miracle.

Sometimes the world needs to see our endurance in the face of injustice more than a miraculous rescue.

FOR THE ROAD

Where have you received oil instead of the resurrection you asked for?

Lord, I don’t understand all Your answers, but I know You’re close. Thank You for the oil that keeps me going. Let my endurance be a testimony of Your presence. Amen.

DAY 184

“Why Didn’t You Heal Me?”

We now have this light shining in our hearts, but we ourselves are like fragile clay jars containing this great treasure. This makes it clear that our great power is from God, not from ourselves.

2 Corinthians 4:7

In the third season of *The Chosen*, Jesus is preparing to send His disciples out two by two to preach and to heal. One of them, the disciple the show calls Little James, walks with a limp. He has watched Jesus heal the blind, the lame and the sick. Now he’s being sent to lay hands on others, and he has one honest question. Why hasn’t Jesus healed him?

It’s one of the most tender scenes in the series. Jesus doesn’t scold him for asking. He speaks to him with love, and He points to something Little James hasn’t seen: there is a testimony in praising God in spite of his condition. People who are not healed will look at him and see that faith can still stand.

That scene is a creative portrayal, not Scripture. But the question is as real as any in the Bible. Paul asked it too. Three times he begged the Lord to take away his thorn. And three times the answer was the same: “My grace is all you need. My power works best in weakness” (2 Corinthians 12:9).

That’s rarely the answer we want. And when we aren’t healed, it’s easy to conclude that God loves us less, or that our faith is weak.

But Paul gives us another picture: fragile clay jars holding a great treasure. The jar doesn’t have to be perfect for the treasure to be real. In fact, its fragility is what makes the treasure obvious.

God does still heal, and we should keep asking. But if the healing hasn't come yet, you are not forgotten. You may be carrying a testimony that a healed person never could.

Almost right: If He loved me, He would fix this.
Right: His grace is enough, and His power rests on my weakness.

God doesn't always remove the weakness. Sometimes He moves into it.

FOR THE ROAD

What weakness have you been ashamed of that God might want to fill with His power?

Jesus, I still ask You to heal me. But if the answer is not yet, let Your grace be enough. Let Your power rest on my weakness so others can see You. Amen.

DAY 185

The Lion and the Lamb

But one of the twenty-four elders said to me, "Stop weeping! Look, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the heir to David's throne, has won the victory."

Revelation 5:5

In the movie *Taken*, a retired agent learns that his teenage daughter has been kidnapped overseas. On the phone with the men who took her, he calmly warns them what he is capable of and promises that if they don't let her go, he will find them. And then he does. He tears through every obstacle until his daughter is safe in his arms.

Something in us longs for a father like that. Not only kind, but strong. Not only loving, but dangerous to evil.

Many believers know Jesus as the Lamb of God who died on Calvary. Fewer know Him as the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Warrior King who is coming back to judge in righteousness. And without the Lion, our picture of God gets small. We start treating Him like a hard-working man with a great heart but a resource problem.

That isn't the God of the Bible. John was told to look for a Lion, and when he looked, he saw a Lamb that looked as if it had been slaughtered (Revelation 5:6). Same Person. The One who was slain is the One who has won the victory. Paul tells us to "notice how God is both kind and severe" (Romans 11:22).

We need a righteous King who will set wrong things right. We need a safe and loving God just as much as we need a powerful and dangerous God. A Lamb without a Lion can comfort you, but can't defend you. A Lion without a Lamb could defend you, but you'd never dare come near.

In Jesus, we get both. He bled for us, and He will fight for us.

Almost right: God loves me, but there's only so much He can do.
Right: He is the slain Lamb and the conquering Lion, fierce for His children.

The Lion's roar and the Lamb's blood were never meant to be separated, so we would trust that we are protected, provided for, and confident as sons and daughters.

FOR THE ROAD

Do you tend to see God more as the Lamb or the Lion? What does that do to your prayers?

Jesus, Lion of Judah and Lamb of God, I trust You with all of me. Thank You for bleeding for me and fighting for me. Make me confident as Your child. Amen.

WEEK 37

Together

Meet once after Day 185. Some people in the room may be in real pain this week, so listen more than you fix.

1. **Open:** Read Ecclesiastes 3:11 aloud. Ask: what does it mean that God has “planted eternity in the human heart”?
2. **Day 181:** What have you tried to rush that God was still forming in you?
3. **Day 182:** Have you seen pressure increase right after God gave you a promise? How did you respond?
4. **Day 183:** Share a time you received “oil” instead of the rescue you asked for. Where was God in it?
5. **Day 184:** What makes it hard to believe God’s grace is enough when healing hasn’t come?
6. **Day 185:** Which side of Jesus do you need to see more clearly right now, the Lamb or the Lion? Why?

Practice together: Ask whether anyone in the group is carrying an unanswered prayer for healing or rescue. Gather around that person, lay hands on them if they’re comfortable, and pray boldly for the miracle. Then pray just as boldly for grace, presence and endurance while they wait.

Pray: Pray 2 Corinthians 12:9 over one another: “Lord, let Your grace be enough, and let Your power rest on our weakness.”

WEEK 38

Marked for the King

Sealed by truth and loyal to the throne, we choose a side, refuse to stay silent, and carry revival and reformation out into the world.

DAY 186

The Bowl of Soup

Make sure that no one is immoral or godless like Esau, who traded his birthright as the firstborn son for a single meal.

Hebrews 12:16

In January 2020 I had a dream I still think about. It was an end-days battle, and its imagery seemed to blend two films: the great final battle of *Avengers: Endgame* and the wish-granting "Dreamstone" of *Wonder Woman 1984*, a stone that gives you what you want and quietly takes something precious in return.

At one point in the dream, I was offered a choice. I could pursue my own desire, or I could stay with the eternal mission God had given. The temptation was real. But the conviction of the Holy Spirit made something clear: it was not truly a choice at all. His ways lead to real life and fulfilled desire, because Jesus Himself is the good news.

I believe the dream carried a message for the body of Christ. The call to pursue righteousness must outweigh the pursuit of personal happiness.

There is a civil war rising in church culture: the pursuit of happiness against the pursuit of righteousness. It reminds me of the long war between the house of Saul and the house of David. "As time passed David became stronger and stronger, while Saul's dynasty became weaker and weaker" (2 Samuel 3:1). One house was built on self-will. The other was built on a heart after God.

Esau is the picture of the first house. He came in hungry from the field, and for one bowl of stew he gave away his birthright. Genesis says simply that "Esau showed contempt for his rights as the firstborn" (Genesis 25:34).

Those who prioritize their own comfort will be tempted to make Esau's trade. Those who cherish the presence of the Lord will lay down their own desires and feast on something far richer: the fulfillment of "Your will be done."

Almost right: God wants me happy, so following my desires must be His will.
Right: God wants me holy, and His will is where real joy is found.

Many will trade their faith for a bowl of soup labeled "My Will Be Done."

FOR THE ROAD

What "bowl of soup" has been tempting you to trade away something eternal?

Father, I don't want to sell my birthright for a moment of satisfaction. Your will be done in me. Let me feast on Your presence instead of my own way. Amen.

DAY 187

Empathy on a Tether

I know all the things you do. I have seen your love, your faith, your service, and your patient endurance. And I can see your constant improvement in all these things. But I have this complaint against you. You are permitting that woman, that Jezebel who calls herself a prophet, to lead my servants astray.

Revelation 2:19–20

Watch a kite on a windy day. It climbs and dips and soars. It looks free. Now imagine someone deciding that the string is holding it back, and cutting it loose.

For a moment the kite seems to fly higher. Then it tumbles. The string was never its prison. The string was what let it fly.

Jesus' letter to the church in Thyatira is one of the most encouraging and most sobering in Revelation. He praised them for their love, their faith, their service and their patient endurance, and even said they were growing in all of it. That is a beautiful church. Most of us would love to belong to it.

But there was one problem. They tolerated Jezebel. They let a false prophet lead God's people into sin, and nobody stopped her.

I call this the sin of untethered empathy. Thyatira had a big heart, and that heart had come loose from the truth. Their compassion didn't want to confront. Their love didn't want to offend. So they tolerated what was destroying the very people they loved.

Empathy is a gift from God. Jesus wept with Mary and Martha. He was moved with compassion for the crowds. But His compassion was

always tied to truth. He never helped anyone by agreeing with what was killing them.

Paul gives us the balance: “we will speak the truth in love, growing in every way more and more like Christ” (Ephesians 4:15). Truth is the string. Love is the wind. You need both to fly.

If you lean toward truth, ask God to soften your heart. If you lean toward empathy, ask Him to strengthen your spine. Either way, keep the kite on the string.

Almost right: Real love never confronts anyone.

Right: Real love feels deeply and still tells the truth.

Truth without empathy is offensive, but empathy without truth is a lie.

FOR THE ROAD

Where has your compassion come loose from the truth, or your truth from compassion?

Jesus, You are full of grace and truth. Keep my love tied to Your Word, and keep my words full of Your love. Give me courage to care enough to be honest. Amen.

DAY 188

Who Sits on the Throne

For the Lord declares, "I have placed my chosen king on the throne in Jerusalem, on my holy mountain."

Psalm 2:6

Here is something to stretch your mind. If you went back a billion years before Genesis 1, you would still be closer to Genesis 1 than to the beginning of God. Because God has no beginning.

Psalm 2 opens with the nations in an uproar. Kings and rulers are plotting together against the Lord and His Anointed. It sounds like the evening news. Then the camera turns to heaven, and God isn't pacing or worrying. He laughs. And He makes a declaration: "I have placed my chosen king on the throne."

The Father is saying, in effect, that nothing can knock His Son off His throne.

That matters, because so many believers ride an emotional roller coaster based on who holds earthly power. When the people we hoped for win, we feel safe. When they lose, we feel afraid. Our peace rises and falls with headlines.

But Isaiah gives us a different vantage point. "God sits above the circle of the earth. The people below seem like grasshoppers to him!" (Isaiah 40:22). It's not about who sits in the halls of power but who sits above the circle of the earth.

Think about who is on that throne. He is the Ancient of Days. The Alpha and Omega. The Bright Morning Star, the Chief Shepherd, the Cornerstone, the Counselor, the Creator and the Deliverer. He is the Lamb of God and the King of kings, the Prince of Peace, the Bread of

Life and the Living Word. “The Spirit who lives in you is greater than the spirit who lives in the world” (1 John 4:4).

This doesn’t mean we stop caring about our nations or praying for our leaders. Scripture tells us to do both. It means our security doesn’t depend on them.

Almost right: I’ll feel safe once the right people are in power.
Right: I’m safe because the right King is already on the throne.

Nothing can knock His Son off His throne.

FOR THE ROAD

How much of your peace rises and falls with the news?

Father, You have set Your King on Zion, and no one can move Him. Settle my heart in that truth. I will pray for my leaders, but I will trust in my King. Amen.

DAY 189

The Mark of God

And now you Gentiles have also heard the truth, the Good News that God saves you. And when you believed in Christ, he identified you as his own by giving you the Holy Spirit, whom he promised long ago.

Ephesians 1:13

Some believers have spent years studying the mark of the beast. They have charts, timelines and theories about numbers. They are determined not to be fooled.

But as one teacher has pointed out, very little attention goes to the other mark in Scripture: the mark of God. And if we are marked by God, we never have to fear taking the enemy's mark.

Ezekiel saw that mark in a vision. Before judgment fell on Jerusalem, God sent a man with a writer's case through the city to mark the foreheads of everyone who wept and sighed over the sins being committed there (Ezekiel 9:4). Those people were protected. Not because they had the right chart, but because they had the right heart. They grieved what grieved God.

The New Testament tells us how believers receive God's mark: He identifies us as His own by giving us the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of truth, and He guides us into all truth (John 16:13).

Paul also tells us what leaves people open to deception. They perish "because they refuse to love and accept the truth that would save them" (2 Thessalonians 2:10). Notice he doesn't say they lacked information. He says they didn't love the truth.

That's the real protection. Not fear, and not endless speculation, but a heart that loves the truth, even when it is uncomfortable, and grieves sin, even when it's popular.

Stay alert, but don't spend more energy avoiding the wrong mark than receiving the right one. Ask the Spirit of truth to seal your heart so deeply that a lie would feel foreign to you.

Almost right: If I study the mark of the beast, I won't be deceived.

Right: If I love the truth and grieve what grieves God, I'm sealed by His Spirit.

The truth is still the truth, even if no one believes it. A lie is still a lie, even if everyone believes it.

FOR THE ROAD

Do you spend more time studying deception or loving the truth?

Holy Spirit, Spirit of truth, seal me as Yours. Give me a heart that loves the truth and weeps over what breaks Yours. Keep me from every lie. Amen.

DAY 190

For Such a Time as This

If you keep quiet at a time like this, deliverance and relief for the Jews will arise from some other place, but you and your relatives will die. Who knows if perhaps you were made queen for just such a time as this?

Esther 4:14

Esther had every reason to stay quiet. She lived in a palace with servants and a crown. No one in the court knew she was a Jew. As long as she kept her head down and followed the rules, she was safe.

Then a decree went out to destroy her people. And Mordecai sent her a message that cut through her comfort: if you keep quiet now, help will come from somewhere else, but you will miss the reason you were placed here. “Who knows if perhaps you were made queen for just such a time as this?”

Palace law said no one could approach the king uninvited. Esther could have hidden behind that rule. Instead she fasted, gathered her people to pray and said, “If I must die, I must die” (Esther 4:16). She stood in the gap.

God once said through Ezekiel, “I searched for someone to stand in the gap in the wall so I wouldn’t have to destroy the land, but I found no one” (Ezekiel 22:30). God was looking, and no one stepped forward.

This is what the season of Revolution is about. Reformation restores the Kingdom within the family of God. Revolution carries revival and reformation into the world, the way Joseph did in Egypt, Daniel did in Babylon and Esther did in Persia. They were Kingdom activists, faithful in pagan places, who spoke when silence would have been sin. James

says it plainly: “It is sin to know what you ought to do and then not do it” (James 4:17).

David served God’s purpose in his own generation. Esther served hers. Now it’s your turn. You are not where you are by accident.

Almost right: I’ll stay faithful, follow the rules and keep my head down.

Right: I’ll stand in the gap and speak, because I was placed here for such a time as this.

Silence in the palace is still a choice.

FOR THE ROAD

Where has God placed you “for such a time as this,” and what is He asking you to say or do there?

Lord, I don’t want You to look for someone to stand in the gap and find no one. Here I am. Give me Esther’s courage to speak and to serve Your purpose in my generation. Amen.

WEEK 38

Together

Meet once after Day 190. This closes the season of Revolution, so end by sending one another out.

1. **Open:** Read Esther 4:14 aloud. Ask: where might God have placed each of us “for such a time as this”?
2. **Day 186:** What does the pursuit of happiness look like when it dresses up as faith? What’s your “bowl of soup”?
3. **Day 187:** Do you lean more toward truth or toward empathy? What would it look like to hold both?
4. **Day 188:** How does the news affect your peace? What helps you remember who is on the throne?
5. **Day 189:** What would it look like to “weep and sigh” over what grieves God, without becoming cynical?
6. **Day 190:** Where are you tempted to stay quiet when God may be asking you to speak?

Practice together: Look back over the last five weeks of this season. Have each person name one place in the world, such as a workplace, a school, a neighborhood or a family, where they sense God is sending them as an Ark-builder and a gap-stander. Write them down and commit to pray for those places by name.

Pray: Pray Ezekiel 22:30 in reverse over one another: “Lord, when You look for someone to stand in the gap, may You find us.”

SEASON SEVEN

Release

Divine Pruning

WEEKS 39–42

WEEK 39

The Disturbed Nest

God ends what is comfortable on purpose. Release begins when we stop reading His pruning as rejection and start hearing it as a call to fly.

DAY 191

Good for Great

Their disagreement was so sharp that they separated. Barnabas took John Mark with him and sailed for Cyprus.

Acts 15:39

Paul and Barnabas had been through everything together. Barnabas was the one who vouched for Paul when the believers in Jerusalem were still afraid of him (Acts 9:27). They carried the gospel across Cyprus and into Galatia side by side. Then they argued over whether to take John Mark on the next trip.

Read that split as failure and you miss what came next. Paul took Silas and headed toward Europe. One missionary team became two. Years later, Paul wrote from prison, “Bring Mark with you when you come, for he will be helpful to me in my ministry” (2 Timothy 4:11). The ending wasn’t the end of the story.

Welcome to the season of Release. It’s the season of necessary endings and divine pruning, when God asks us to let go of what we know so He can give us what we need.

Jesus said the Father prunes the branches that already bear fruit (John 15:2). That surprises people. We expect God to cut away what’s dead. We don’t expect Him to cut what’s working. But a vine that keeps every shoot spreads its strength too thin. The gardener cuts so the life of the vine can go where the fruit is.

Release often feels like loss before it looks like fruit. A role ends. A partnership changes. A door you loved closes. The almost-right response is to treat every ending as an attack and hold on tighter out of loyalty. The right response is to ask the Gardener what He’s making room for.

Not every ending is from God. Some come from sin and call for repentance. But some are His shears, and those are mercy.

Almost right: Holding on to what is good because it's familiar.

Right: Letting go of the good when God is making room for the great.

Sometimes we have to let go of the familiar for faith, and the good for the great.

FOR THE ROAD

What good thing in your life might God be pruning to make room for more fruit?

Father, You are the Gardener and I am the branch. When You cut, help me trust Your hands, and show me what You're making room for. Amen.

DAY 192

The Nest Is the Starting Place

He found him in a desert land, and in the howling waste of the wilderness; he encircled him, he cared for him, he kept him as the apple of his eye. Like an eagle that stirs up its nest, that flutters over its young, spreading out its wings, catching them, bearing them on its pinions.

Deuteronomy 32:10–11 (ESV)

A palliative nurse named Bronnie Ware spent years sitting with people in their last weeks and wrote down the regrets she heard most. The top of her list: "I wish I'd had the courage to live a life true to myself, not the life others expected of me." Close behind: I wish I hadn't worked so hard.

Now set that beside Moses. At 120, "his eye was undimmed, and his vigor unabated" (Deuteronomy 34:7, ESV). In his final song over Israel, he didn't look back and celebrate the palace years. He celebrated the wilderness. "He found him in a desert land."

Moses had forty years in Pharaoh's house and eighty in the desert. Looking back, he saw the desert as the place where God carried His people.

Then he reached for a picture: an eagle stirring up its nest. A nest is a gift. It's warm, safe, soft and close to the parent who feeds you. But an eaglet that never leaves it will never fly. So at the right time, the nest gets uncomfortable on purpose.

That's what God does in the wilderness. He refines us, protects us, provides for us, disciples us and purifies us. In the wilderness God

dethrones the false god called Comfort. Even Jesus, “full of the Holy Spirit,” was “led by the Spirit in the wilderness” (Luke 4:1).

We all start in some kind of nest: a home, a church, a job, a circle of friends, a familiar way of doing things. It’s a blessing. But when God stirs it, He isn’t evicting you in anger. He’s moving you toward the life you would regret not living.

Almost right: A comfortable nest is proof of God’s blessing.

Right: The wilderness is where God refines, protects, provides, disciples and purifies me.

The nest is the starting place, not the destination.

FOR THE ROAD

What “nest” have you been treating as the destination?

Lord, You stir the nest because You love me. When comfort becomes my god, dethrone it, and carry me on Your wings into what You have for me. Amen.

DAY 193

Growth Is Not the Same as Fruit

My suffering was good for me, for it taught me to pay attention to your decrees.

Psalm 119:71

Not long ago I talked with a childhood friend about the trials, adversity and rejection we both went through as kids. We'd walked through a lot of the same pain. But as we talked, I noticed something. I came out of those years with optimism and thankfulness. He came out more skeptical and regretful.

Same soil. Different harvest.

People who grow fruit will tell you that excessive growth tends to bear less fruit. A tree can push out shoots and leaves all summer, look healthy from the road, and still give you a thin crop. Growth and fruitfulness aren't the same thing. That's why they prune.

We usually measure our lives by growth: bigger, busier, more. God measures by fruit. While we strive for comfort and control, God wants character, faith and endurance, and He loves us enough to let us walk through the fire to get them. "I have refined you in the furnace of suffering" (Isaiah 48:10).

The psalmist learned this. "I used to wander off until you disciplined me; but now I closely follow your word" (Psalm 119:67). Then he said what few of us would say out loud: my suffering was good for me.

That isn't saying pain is good. It's saying God is good, and He doesn't waste it. In every season He invites us to extract a revelation of His character and put it in our quiver.

I don’t think the difference between my friend and me was how much we suffered. I think it was what we looked for in it. The question that changes the harvest is simple: Lord, what are You showing me about You?

And it’s never too late to ask it. The God who prunes is the same God who restores.

Almost right: If my life is growing, God must be pleased.

Right: God is after fruit, and He’ll prune my growth to get it.

Regular pruning will diminish the need for severe pruning.

FOR THE ROAD

What has a past hardship taught you about God’s character that you can put in your quiver?

Father, I don’t want to come out of my seasons bitter. Prune what needs to go, and let every hard place leave me with more of You. Amen.

DAY 194

Job's Nest of Routine

Then I thought, "I shall die in my nest, and I shall multiply my days as the sand."

Job 29:18 (ESV)

Before everything fell apart, Job had the life people dream about. Listen to him remember it: "when my steps were washed with butter, and the rock poured out for me streams of oil!" (Job 29:6, ESV). His children filled his house. His name opened doors. Everything he touched turned to gold. He had the Midas touch.

And he did everything right. He rose early to offer sacrifices for each of his children, just in case (Job 1:5). He feared God and stayed away from evil. So he made a quiet assumption: I shall die in my nest.

That's the danger of routine. Nothing in Job's devotion was wrong. But a godly life can slowly become a system. If I pray this way, give this way and live this way, the outcome is secured. We start trusting God's principles more than God's faithfulness. We use His principles to control the outcome instead of trusting Him whatever the outcome.

Don't let the principles get in the way of the promise.

Obedience was always meant to be rooted in the goodness of God, not in our need for control. When Job's nest was torn apart, the system broke, and his friends spent chapter after chapter trying to fix it. God never handed Job an explanation. He gave Job Himself. At the end Job said, "I had only heard about you before, but now I have seen you with my own eyes" (Job 42:5).

If we know all the answers, there's no room to grow. Job lost his answers and found his God.

Your routine may be holy. Keep it. But if God disturbs it, don't assume you failed the formula. God disturbs your nest because it has grown too small for who you are.

Almost right: If I do everything right, God will keep my life secure.
Right: I obey because God is good, and I trust Him whatever the outcome.

It is better to know God than to know all the answers.

FOR THE ROAD

Where have you been trusting a spiritual formula more than the faithfulness of God?

Lord, I don't want to love Your principles more than I love You. If my nest has grown too small, stir it, and let me see You with my own eyes. Amen.

DAY 195

A God Who Flies Faster Than You Fall

The eternal God is your refuge, and his everlasting arms are under you.

Deuteronomy 33:27

There's an old story preachers love to tell about eagles. When a female eagle chooses a mate, the story goes, she tests him. She carries a twig high into the sky and lets it fall, and he has to dive and catch it. Then a branch, from lower. Then something heavier, lower still. She's looking for one thing: a father who can fly faster than her eaglet can fall.

Whatever the birds really do, the picture holds. We serve a God who can fly faster than we can fall.

Moses needed that God. He grew up in Pharaoh's house with every comfort Egypt could offer, but he refused to stay there. He "chose to share the oppression of God's people instead of enjoying the fleeting pleasures of sin" (Hebrews 11:25). That was his leap out of the nest.

And he fell. He killed an Egyptian, his own people rejected him, and he ran for the desert. "Moses assumed his fellow Israelites would realize that God had sent him to rescue them, but they didn't" (Acts 7:25).

Have you ever stepped out in faith and landed face first in disappointment? God getting you out of the nest has less to do with your disobedience and more to do with your destiny. The fall wasn't the end of Moses. Forty years later, God met him at a burning bush.

Here's the lesson of the eagles. They don't flap their way into the sky on their own strength. They stand on a rock, wait for the wind, and then leap. Stand on the Rock, who is Christ. Wait on the wind of the Spirit. Then take the leap of faith.

Falling reminds us how much we depend on God, and how patient to be with others in their process.

Almost right: Faith means flapping harder until I get off the ground.

Right: Faith means standing on the Rock, waiting on the wind of the Spirit, then leaping.

Sometimes it feels like God is destroying you when He is really developing you.

FOR THE ROAD

Where did you once step out and fall, and what might God have been developing in you there?

Father, You fly faster than I can fall. Teach me to stand on the Rock and wait for Your wind, and give me courage to leap again. Amen.

WEEK 39

Together

Meet once after Day 195. Go first if you're leading, and give people room to talk about endings that still hurt.

1. **Open:** Read Deuteronomy 32:10–11 aloud. Ask: why would a loving parent make the nest uncomfortable?
2. **Day 191:** Share an ending that felt like loss at the time but made room for something better. What did God make room for?
3. **Day 192:** What has the wilderness given you that comfort never could?
4. **Day 193:** Think of someone who came through the same pain as you with a different harvest. What made the difference?
5. **Day 194:** What spiritual routine have you been tempted to use as a formula for control? How would trusting God's faithfulness change it?
6. **Day 195:** Tell about a time you stepped out in faith and fell. Where was God when you landed?

Practice together: Have each person name one "nest" in their life right now: a comfort, a routine or a familiar role. Don't fix anything. Simply ask each person, "If God were stirring this nest, what would He be calling you toward?" Write the answers down and revisit them at the end of the season.

Pray: Pray Isaiah 40:31 over each other: "Lord, as we wait on You, give us new strength. Teach us to soar."

WEEK 40

Release the Debt, Guard the Heart

Release is not the same as reopening every door. Forgive freely, love widely, give trust where there is evidence, and keep your heart open to the risk of love.

DAY 196

What You Meant for Evil

> *But don't be upset, and don't be angry with yourselves for selling me to this place. It was God who sent me here ahead of you to preserve your lives.*
>
> **Genesis 45:5**

Joseph's life reads like a portrait of Jesus painted centuries ahead of time.

Both were beloved sons. Both were doubted by their own brothers (John 7:5). Both were betrayed for silver. Both were raised to the seat of authority, Joseph at Pharaoh's right hand and Jesus at the right hand of the Father. And both went unrecognized by the very people they came to save. When Joseph's brothers came to Egypt hungry, "although Joseph recognized his brothers, they didn't recognize him" (Genesis 42:8).

Joseph has all the power. His brothers are bowing. He could finally have the vindication he waited for through the pit and the prison. Instead, he feeds them.

He wept. He tested them. But in the end he spoke the words that sum up his life: "You intended to harm me, but God intended it all for good" (Genesis 50:20).

Jesus went further. With the nails still in His hands, before anyone said they were sorry, He prayed, "Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34).

Many of us are waiting to be vindicated before we let go. We want the people who sold us to see us on the throne. We want them to admit it. Until then we hold the debt. That sounds like justice, but it keeps us chained to the pit long after God has lifted us out.

Release doesn't mean what they did was okay. It means you've seen that God is bigger than what they did. Joseph could release his brothers because he saw the saving of many lives. His pain had a purpose larger than his own story.

Ask God to show you what He is saving through your pain. Then open your hands.

Almost right: I'll let it go once they finally admit what they did.

Right: I let it go now, because God has already turned it for good.

They may have sold you, but God sent you.

FOR THE ROAD

Whose apology have you been waiting for before you let go?

Jesus, You forgave with the nails still in Your hands. Show me what You are saving through my pain, and give me grace to release those who sold me. Amen.

DAY 197

Forgiveness Is Not the Same as Trust

So watch yourselves! If another believer sins, rebuke that person; then if there is repentance, forgive. Even if that person wrongs you seven times a day and each time turns again and asks forgiveness, you must forgive.

Luke 17:3–4

Here's a practice that has helped many people get free: write a letter of forgiveness you never send. Name the person. Name what they did and how it hurt. Don't soften it. Then write, "I forgive you. I release you to God." Give it to Him in prayer.

Notice what that letter does and doesn't do. It releases the debt. It doesn't hand the person your house keys.

Many believers get stuck because they think forgiveness and trust are the same thing. If I forgave you, I have to act like it never happened. So they either refuse to forgive because they aren't ready to trust, or they forgive and walk straight back into harm.

Jesus calls us to forgive freely. "Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others" (Colossians 3:13). He told us to forgive "anyone you are holding a grudge against" while we pray (Mark 11:25), before they ever ask. That release of bitterness is unconditional. It happens between you and God, and it sets you free whether they change or not.

But look closely at Luke 17. Jesus says to rebuke, "then if there is repentance, forgive." Reconciliation is a two-way street. You can release the debt by yourself, but you can't rebuild the relationship by yourself. Restored trust follows repentance, and it grows with evidence over time.

As the saying goes, “Love needs action. Trust needs proof. Sorry needs change.”

Forgiveness is a command, but trust must be rebuilt. You can cancel the debt today and still let trust return one faithful step at a time. That isn’t unforgiveness. It’s wisdom, and it keeps the door to real reconciliation open.

Almost right: If I really forgave them, I have to trust them again.

Right: I release the debt today, and I let trust be rebuilt as repentance proves itself.

Forgiveness is given freely; trust has to be earned.

FOR THE ROAD

Is there someone you haven’t forgiven because you thought it meant trusting them again?

Father, You forgave me completely. Help me release every debt I’m holding, and give me wisdom to know how and when trust can be rebuilt. Amen.

DAY 198

Love Everyone, Trust Selectively

Guard your heart above all else, for it determines the course of your life.

Proverbs 4:23

Some of the most painful words in the Psalms aren't about enemies. David wrote, "If an enemy were insulting me, I could endure it… But it is you, a man like myself, my companion, my close friend, with whom I once enjoyed sweet fellowship at the house of God" (Psalm 55:12–14, NIV).

Enemies wound. Friends devastate. The person who hurt David most was someone he had worshiped beside.

That's why Scripture tells us to guard our hearts above all else. Not because people are bad, but because the heart is precious, and the course of our lives flows out of it.

Love and trust are different things. Love, as Jesus commands it, is inclusive. It reaches everyone, enemies included (Matthew 5:44). Trust is selective. It's a deeper level of closeness and vulnerability, and it has to be earned and kept.

Jesus lived this way. Early in His ministry, many believed in Him because of His miracles. "But Jesus didn't trust them, because he knew all about people" (John 2:24). He loved the crowds. He healed them, fed them and died for them. But He didn't hand His heart to everyone who cheered. He had the Twelve, and within the Twelve, He had three.

We tend to get this backwards. We think love means giving everyone full access, so when someone betrays us we decide love itself is

dangerous and close up to everybody. Both mistakes come from treating love and trust as the same thing.

Love inclusively. Trust selectively. Give your kindness to all, your counsel to many, and your heart to the few who have shown over time that they can carry it.

Almost right: If I love someone, I should trust them with everything.
Right: I love everyone, and I trust those who have shown they can carry my heart.

Not everyone can steward your heart.

FOR THE ROAD

Have you been giving full access to someone who hasn't earned it, or closing your heart to everyone because of one betrayal?

Jesus, You loved everyone and knew what was in every heart. Make my love wide and my trust wise, and guard my heart with Your peace. Amen.

DAY 199

Become Someone Who Can Be Trusted

Many claim to have unfailing love, but a faithful person who can find?

Proverbs 20:6 (NIV)

There are two sentences most of us long to hear. The first is “I love you.” The second is “I trust you.”

While “I love you” is a beautiful and powerful declaration, “I trust you” holds a unique and profound significance. Trust is the ground love rests on.

For two days we’ve talked about guarding our hearts from people who haven’t earned trust. Now let’s turn the question around. Can I be trusted?

Solomon noticed that love is easy to claim and faithfulness is hard to find. Plenty of people say “I love you.” Far fewer can be counted on when it costs them something.

Jesus showed us where trust is built: “If you are faithful in little things, you will be faithful in large ones” (Luke 16:10). Trust isn’t built in big moments. It’s built in small ones nobody applauds. Showing up when you said you would. Keeping a confidence. Telling the truth when a small lie would be easier. Letting your yes mean yes (Matthew 5:37).

It’s possible to be a very loving person and still be hard to trust. We feel deeply, give generously and say all the right things. Then we’re late again. We forget. We exaggerate. We share someone’s secret with “a few close friends for prayer.” Love without consistency keeps the people closest to us a little on guard.

The source of that consistency isn't willpower. It's God's own faithfulness. "Great is his faithfulness; his mercies begin afresh each morning" (Lamentations 3:23). The more we rest in His faithfulness to us, the more faithful we become to others.

Almost right: I'm a loving person, so people should trust me.
Right: I want to be a trustworthy person, faithful in small things so love has somewhere to rest.

You may love someone who is hard to trust, but loving someone you can fully trust brings peace.

FOR THE ROAD

In what small thing have you been less faithful than your love would suggest?

Lord, Your faithfulness is new every morning. Make me someone people can trust with little and with much, so my love can be a safe place. Amen.

DAY 200

Love Is a Risk, Not a Reward

Then the LORD said to me, "Go and love your wife again, even though she commits adultery with another lover. This will illustrate that the LORD still loves Israel, even though the people have turned to other gods and love to worship them."

Hosea 3:1

I once had a teammate I'll call Corwin. He was as devoted a husband as any man I knew. He poured himself into his marriage and went the extra mile to show his wife love. When friends raised concerns, he brushed them off. He believed his effort would protect them.

Then he found out she had been unfaithful. It hit him like a freight train. All that devotion hadn't guaranteed anything.

As he healed, Corwin learned that love can't be earned or possessed. It has to be given freely. Scarred but stronger, he came out ready to love again, this time understanding what love really is.

Many of us carry the same lie: love is the reward for passion and commitment. Give enough, do enough, be good enough, and love is guaranteed. When we treat love as a transaction, we grow resentful the moment someone doesn't hold up their end.

Real love is a risk. It makes you vulnerable to heartbreak no matter how well you love.

God knows this better than anyone. He told Hosea to go and love an unfaithful wife again as a picture of His own love for a people who kept turning to other gods. If God, whose love is flawless, endures rejection, we shouldn't be surprised that love costs us something.

This isn't a call to stay in abuse or to forget what we learned this week about trust. Wisdom and safety still matter. It's a call not to let fear close your heart. Love that "never gives up" (1 Corinthians 13:7) doesn't try to control the outcome. It's anchored in God's grace rather than our effort. "We love each other because he loved us first" (1 John 4:19).

Almost right: If I love well enough, I'll be loved back.

Right: I love freely, knowing it's a risk, because that's how God loves me.

True love is not controlling the outcome, but a choice to trust, forgive and persist.

FOR THE ROAD

Where have you been treating love as something you earn or something you're owed?

Father, You loved me first, knowing I could walk away. Heal what fear has closed in me, and teach me to love freely again. Amen.

WEEK 40

Together

Meet once after Day 200. Forgiveness and betrayal are tender subjects, so let people pass if they need to, and keep what's shared in the room.

1. **Open:** Read Genesis 50:20 aloud. Ask: what made it possible for Joseph to say this to the brothers who sold him?
2. **Day 196:** Without naming anyone, is there an apology you've been waiting for before you let go? What would releasing it look like?
3. **Day 197:** Why do so many believers confuse forgiveness with trust? How has that confusion kept people stuck?
4. **Day 198:** How did Jesus love everyone without trusting everyone? What does that look like in your relationships?
5. **Day 199:** Name one small, daily way you could become more trustworthy this week.
6. **Day 200:** Has hurt made you treat love as too risky? What would it look like to open your heart again with wisdom?

Practice together: Before you leave, give each person a blank card. Invite everyone to write a short letter of forgiveness they'll never send, release the person to God, and then tear up or keep the card privately. Close by sharing, only if they want to, one area where they're asking God to rebuild trust slowly and wisely.

Pray: Pray Colossians 3:13 together: "Lord, You forgave us, so help us forgive others."

WEEK 41

Root, Branch and Leaf

Once the heart is free, we can discern our relationships: who stays for the cross, who receives correction, and where loyalty belongs. Then we release what was only ever seasonal.

DAY 201

Leaf, Branch and Root People

A friend is always loyal, and a brother is born to help in time of need.

Proverbs 17:17

There's a saying that has made the rounds for years: the people in your life are like the parts of a tree.

Some are leaf people. They come and go with the seasons. They give you a little shade for a while, and then the weather turns and they're gone. That's not betrayal. That's what leaves do.

Some are branch people. They're stronger. They hold weight and stay longer. But when a real storm hits, some of them snap.

And a few are root people. You rarely see them, because roots work underground. But they hold you up in every season, and they last a lifetime.

A lot of heartache comes from expecting every leaf to be a root. We grieve someone's leaving as if it were a failure, when God brought them for a season and the season is over. "For everything there is a season" (Ecclesiastes 3:1). Henry Cloud wrote a whole book called *Necessary Endings*, and Release is the season where we learn them.

The trees know how to repent. They die to their original form as a seed to become something that bears fruit. And every autumn, a tree lets its leaves go. It doesn't cling to them. It pulls its strength down into the roots and gets ready for what's next.

So honor your leaf people for the shade they gave. Thank God for your branch people. And invest in your root people, because they are rare.

Then ask yourself one more question. What kind of friend am I? In whose life am I a leaf, and in whose life am I becoming a root?

Almost right: Every relationship God gives me should last a lifetime.

Right: I honor each person for their season, and I invest deeply in the roots.

The trees know when it's the right season to stop giving resources and attention to things that need to die.

FOR THE ROAD

Who has been a root person in your life, and when did you last tell them?

Lord of every season, thank You for every person You've sent, for a season or for a lifetime. Help me release the leaves with gratitude and tend the roots with love. Amen.

DAY 202

Who Stays for the Cross

Be happy with those who are happy, and weep with those who weep.

Romans 12:15

Jonathan should have been David's rival. He was the king's son, next in line for the throne. When David killed Goliath and the nation started singing his name, Jonathan had every reason to be jealous.

Instead, he took off his own robe and gave it to David, along with his sword, his bow and his belt (1 Samuel 18:4). He celebrated the young man who would one day wear the crown he was born to inherit.

Years later, David was hiding in the wilderness with Saul hunting him. No crowds. No songs. And "Jonathan went to find David and encouraged him to stay strong in his faith in God" (1 Samuel 23:16).

Jonathan passed both tests of a true friend.

The first test is your success. Notice who celebrates your wins without envy. Some people love you as long as you stay a step behind them. When God promotes you, they go quiet.

The second test is your crushing. Notice who stays when things fall apart. Some friends vanish in hard seasons. Others are the reverse: their interest peaks only when you're struggling, and they drift away once you're back on your feet. Be careful of that too.

Paul put both tests into one verse. Be happy with those who are happy. Weep with those who weep. A real friend does both.

This isn't a reason to keep score on everyone you know. It's a reason to treasure the Jonathans God has given you, thank them and invest in

them.

It's also an invitation to become one. When your friend is promoted, can you rejoice without comparing? When your friend is crushed, will you go and find them in the wilderness?

Almost right: The friends who show up in my crisis are my real friends.

Right: My real friends rejoice when I win and weep when I'm crushed.

Genuine friends will celebrate your crown and support you through your cross.

FOR THE ROAD

Which is harder for you: rejoicing with a friend who's winning, or staying with a friend who's hurting?

Jesus, thank You for the Jonathans in my life. Make me a friend who celebrates without envy and stays in the wilderness without being asked. Amen.

DAY 203

The Wise, the Foolish and the Wicked

> *So don't bother correcting mockers; they will only hate you. But correct the wise, and they will love you.*
>
> **Proverbs 9:8**

Picture bringing the same honest correction to three different people.

The first listens, thinks about it, and thanks you. The second nods, then explains why it wasn't really their fault. The third turns on you, and suddenly you're the problem.

Henry Cloud, in *Necessary Endings*, calls these the wise, the foolish and the wicked. The way a person handles correction tells you who they are.

Scripture shows all three. When Jethro told Moses he was wearing himself out judging the people alone, "Moses listened to his father-in-law's advice and followed his suggestions" (Exodus 18:24). That's the wise. When Samuel confronted Saul for disobeying God, Saul had an explanation: the troops took the plunder, and it was for a sacrifice anyway (1 Samuel 15:21). That's the foolish. When King Ahab was asked about the prophet Micaiah, he said, "I hate him. He never prophesies anything but trouble for me!" (1 Kings 22:8). Later he had him thrown in prison. That's the wicked.

The almost-right response is to treat everyone the same. We keep pouring correction into mockers who only resent us for it, or we cut off a wise friend the first time they stumble. But wisdom pays attention to the response. Correct the wise, and they'll love you. Let the foolish reap the consequences of their choices instead of rescuing them again. Keep your distance from the wicked, and pray for them from there.

Before you sort anyone else, though, ask the harder question. When someone corrects me, which one am I? Do I listen? Do I explain? Or do I attack?

“Fools despise wisdom and discipline” (Proverbs 1:7). But anyone, at any age, can choose to become teachable. That’s where wisdom starts.

Almost right: Love keeps correcting everyone the same way until they change.
Right: Love lets each person’s response to correction show me how to respond to them.

How people respond to correction reveals their character.

FOR THE ROAD

The last time someone corrected you, did you listen, explain or attack?

Father, make me teachable. Give me wisdom to know how to respond to others, and a soft heart when You send correction my way. Amen.

DAY 204

Honor Belongs to Man, Loyalty Belongs to God

And you must love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your strength.

Deuteronomy 6:5

In the movie *True Lies*, a woman discovers that the husband she thought was a dull computer salesman has been living a double life as a secret agent. In his own way he was devoted to her, but he was lying to her the whole time.

I've always thought that title makes a good warning. There's true loyalty, and there are true lies.

Some people are fiercely loyal to you. They'll defend you, take your side and stand with you no matter what. That feels like the best kind of friend. But watch what else they're loyal to. If someone is loyal to you but casual about God's commands, their loyalty may have more to do with what they get from you than with love. Loyalty that isn't rooted in God can turn on you the day you stop being useful.

Jesus said, "You can identify them by their fruit, that is, by the way they act" (Matthew 7:16). True loyalty grows out of a shared commitment to God. A friend like that will sometimes tell you no, because they love God more than they love your approval.

So here's the line we need to draw. Honor demands respect, but loyalty demands devotion.

Scripture tells us to "take delight in honoring each other" (Romans 12:10). Honor your parents, your leaders, your spouse and your friends. Value them, listen to them and speak well of them. But your ultimate

devotion, the all-your-heart, all-your-soul, all-your-strength kind, belongs to God alone.

When loyalty to a person outranks loyalty to God, honor turns into idolatry and friendship turns into a trap. When God has our loyalty, we're free to honor people well without being owned by any of them.

Almost right: The people who are loyal to me deserve my loyalty in return.
Right: I honor people, and I keep my loyalty for God.

Honor belongs to man, but loyalty only belongs to God.

FOR THE ROAD

Is there a relationship where your loyalty to a person has started to outrank your loyalty to God?

Lord, You alone deserve all my heart, soul and strength. Teach me to honor people well and to give my devotion only to You. Amen.

DAY 205

When Family Becomes an Idol

If you love your father or mother more than you love me, you are not worthy of being mine; or if you love your son or daughter more than me, you are not worthy of being mine.

Matthew 10:37

In the TV series *Breaking Bad*, Skyler White starts with a simple, sympathetic goal: keep the family together. But as she learns the truth about her husband Walter's double life, that goal becomes a trap. Step by step, to protect the picture of a whole family, she covers his lies and ends up laundering his drug money. She thinks she's protecting her children. She's feeding the very thing that's destroying them.

It's fiction, but the pattern is real. When family unity is lifted above truth, it becomes an idol.

That's why Jesus said something that still shocks us. He isn't against families. He's against anything, even a good thing, taking His place. Family commitment turns toxic when it's cut off from God's call to righteousness.

One quiet way this happens is through holy words. Honor. Loyalty. Covering. Those words are biblical. But when they're detached from God's character, they become tools of control, and abuse in families and marriages has often hidden behind them. Biblical honor doesn't protect sin. It protects truth, dignity and righteousness. Scripture tells us to expose the deeds of darkness, not to shelter them (Ephesians 5:11).

There's a balance. When you prioritize ministry over family, you shelter selfish ambition. But when you prioritize your personal family over God's family, you erect a monument and worship your own image.

Sometimes loving your family well means refusing to let them destroy themselves with compromise. And if you are being harmed at home, telling the truth dishonors no one. Reach out to a trusted pastor or counselor. If you're in danger, call emergency services, or in the US, the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 1-800-799-7233.

God isn't asking you to love your family less. He's asking you to love Him most, because that's the only way to love them well.

Almost right: Honoring my family means keeping its secrets.
Right: Honoring my family means bringing what's in the dark into the light.

The Bible does not call concealment honor. It calls darkness into light.

FOR THE ROAD

Is there anything in your family being kept in the dark in the name of honor?

Father, be first in my home. Give me courage to love my family with truth, and bring every hidden thing into Your light, where it can be healed. Amen.

WEEK 41

Together

Meet once after Day 205. Some of these questions touch close relationships, so speak about patterns, not people, and keep what's shared in the room.

1. **Open:** Read Ecclesiastes 3:1 aloud. Ask: why is it so hard to accept that some relationships are only for a season?
2. **Day 201:** Without naming names, describe a leaf, a branch and a root in your life. Which are you becoming for others?
3. **Day 202:** Who celebrated your crown and stayed for your cross? What made them that kind of friend?
4. **Day 203:** Share how you tend to respond to correction. What helps you listen instead of explaining or attacking?
5. **Day 204:** What's the difference between honoring someone and being loyal to them? Where is that line hardest to keep?
6. **Day 205:** How can a family honor one another without covering what needs to be brought into the light?

Practice together: Each person writes down one root person in their life and one practical way to invest in that relationship this week: a call, a meal, a note of thanks. Then pair up and ask each other one question: "When I've corrected you, how did I do it? Was it with love?"

Pray: Pray Romans 12:15 over the group: "Lord, make us friends who rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep."

WEEK 42

Open Hands

Release what we try to own: our position, our people, our opportunities, our comfort, and finally the outcomes themselves. What's left is rest.

DAY 206

The Most Obedient Position

All of you together are Christ's body, and each of you is a part of it.

1 Corinthians 12:27

When I was in high school, I had to choose between football and choir. I took some good advice and chose football. Then came a second choice. Every young player wants a skill position, the ones that touch the ball and make the highlight reel. I was asked to play offensive line.

Linemen don't get many headlines. Most people in the stands never learn our names. But looking back, I know this: if I hadn't taken that advice, or if I hadn't embraced the position I was asked to play, I would have had a short football career.

Many in the Church are making the opposite choice. We want the position more than the Kingdom.

Paul wrote to a church that was competing over gifts and platforms. "All of you together are Christ's body." Then he asked a string of questions: Are we all apostles? Are we all prophets? Are we all teachers? "Of course not!" (1 Corinthians 12:29–30). "God has put each part just where he wants it" (1 Corinthians 12:18).

Randy Clark once observed that in Christianity every stream thinks it's the river and every lane thinks it's the highway. When we chase the most visible role, we start to believe our part is the whole thing, and the body starts pulling against itself.

The question isn't whether God has a place for you. He does. The question is which place you want. The one that gets seen, or the one He assigned?

Offensive linemen know something the crowd doesn't. The touchdown doesn't happen without them. In God's Kingdom, the hidden places are never wasted. He sees the part you play when no one else is watching, and He's the One who rewards it.

Almost right: I want the position where I can make the biggest impact for God.

Right: I want the position where I can be the most obedient to God.

Do we want the most visible position, or the most obedient position?

FOR THE ROAD

Is there a position God has asked you to play that you haven't fully embraced?

Lord, You placed every part of the body where You wanted it. Free me from the hunger to be seen, and make me faithful in the place You've given me. Amen.

DAY 207

People Are God's Treasure, Not Your Property

Absalom did this with everyone who came to the king for judgment, and so he stole the hearts of all the people of Israel.

2 Samuel 15:6

Absalom got up early every morning and stood by the road to the city gate. When people came with a case for the king, he greeted them and told them, "You've really got a strong case here! It's too bad the king doesn't have anyone to hear it" (2 Samuel 15:3). When they tried to bow, he took their hands and kissed them. He kept it up for four years, and then he declared himself king.

Absalom had spent years shut out of his father's presence. "Absalom lived in Jerusalem for two years, but he never got to see the king" (2 Samuel 14:28). Rejection, left unhealed, often turns into control.

I see in Absalom and Jezebel two faces of the same spirit. Absalom stole the hearts of the people. Jezebel stole the heart of the king. Absalom ruled through the crowd; Jezebel ruled through Ahab. Different paths, same root: control.

Control wants people more loyal to us than to God, and it grows out of insecurity, the orphan fear of being left. The spirit of control gets exposed when we start treating people like our possessions instead of God's treasure we're called to serve. If we're stewarding them, we'll release them when it's their season to move on, and we'll bless them on the way out. If we treat them as property, we'll be offended and bitter every time someone leaves.

This cuts both ways. When you don't trust God as a righteous Judge, you can't be under leadership. And when you don't trust God as a loving Father, you shouldn't be in leadership.

Watch for kisses that come with an agenda. "Wounds from a sincere friend are better than many kisses from an enemy" (Proverbs 27:6). A true shepherd will sometimes wound you with the truth. Absalom only ever kissed.

Almost right: The people God gave me should stay loyal to me.
Right: The people God gave me are His, and I serve them and release them in their season.

People belong to the Lord and not to us. Their hearts are ours to steward, not to own.

FOR THE ROAD

Is there someone whose leaving you've taken personally? What would it look like to bless them on their way?

Father, the people in my life are Yours. Heal the rejection that makes me grasp, and teach me to serve with open hands. Amen.

DAY 208

I Am Doing a Great Work

> *So I replied by sending this message to them: "I am engaged in a great work, so I can't come. Why should I stop working to come and meet with you?"*
>
> **Nehemiah 6:3**

Nehemiah had nearly finished the wall around Jerusalem. The gaps were closed. Only the doors were left. That's when the invitation came.

Sanballat and Geshem asked him to meet them in one of the villages on the plain of Ono. It sounded reasonable, even diplomatic. But Nehemiah realized they were plotting to harm him, so he sent back one sentence: I am engaged in a great work, so I can't come.

They sent the same message four times. Four times he gave the same answer. The fifth time, they sent an open letter accusing him of plotting rebellion against the king. Nehemiah didn't flinch: "There is no truth in any part of your story" (Nehemiah 6:8). Stopping his God-given vision would have been the real rebellion, against the King of kings.

Most attacks on our assignment don't look like attacks. They look like opportunities. A good invitation. A meeting that seems wise. A side project that would only take a little time. The giants of opportunity show up to distract you, so your energy is drained and you're easier to discourage.

Think about Noah. Many read Genesis 6:3 as a 120-year window before the flood. However long it took, that's a long time to keep building a boat under a clear sky. How many times do you think he wondered whether he had truly heard God?

Not every opportunity is an invitation from God. Some are an invitation down to the plain of Ono. You don't owe anyone a new explanation every time they ask. You can give the same answer Nehemiah did and keep building.

When you stay on the wall, God finishes what He started. Nehemiah's wall was done in fifty-two days (Nehemiah 6:15).

Almost right: It's a good opportunity, so it must be from God.

Right: If it pulls me off the wall, it isn't my assignment.

Distractions are not a coincidence. They're warfare.

FOR THE ROAD

What "good opportunity" keeps inviting you down to the plain of Ono?

Lord, You gave me a work to do. Give me the clarity to recognize distraction, the courage to say no, and the strength to keep building until it's finished. Amen.

DAY 209

When Kings Go Out to Battle

Remember, it is sin to know what you ought to do and then not do it.

James 4:17

David had been fighting since he was a teenager. He was the shepherd boy who faced a giant with five smooth stones when nobody expected anything from him, and the king who built a nation.

Then one spring, “when kings normally go out to war,” David stayed behind in Jerusalem (2 Samuel 11:1).

Maybe he felt he had too much to risk now that he was king. Maybe he thought he’d earned a rest. Whatever the reason, Scripture records what came next: a walk on the palace roof, a woman named Bathsheba, and a chain of sin that cost a faithful soldier his life (2 Samuel 11). David allowed comfort to abort his assignment for that season.

Passivity means accepting whatever happens without active response or resistance. It looks harmless. It’s often where the enemy does his best work.

Comfort doesn’t cultivate the conditions for power. Muscles grow under weight. Faith grows under pressure. When we drift toward places where our gifting, talent and work ethic can carry us so we never have to trust God, we don’t get safer. We get weaker.

David allowed his desires to speak louder than his responsibilities and his destiny. Our culture says your desires define who you are. God says your adoption defines who you are. “You received God’s Spirit when he adopted you as his own children” (Romans 8:15). When you know you’re a son or daughter of the King, your desires don’t get the throne.

And remember the rest of David's story. When he was confronted, he repented, and God restored him. Even after the rooftop, there was mercy.

If you've been sitting out the battle, it isn't too late. Get up and go where the King is going.

Almost right: My desires tell me who I really am.
Right: My adoption tells me who I am, and that puts my desires in their place.

You cannot have strength without resistance.

FOR THE ROAD

What battle has comfort been keeping you from?

Father, I am Your child before I am anything else. Wake me from passivity, put my desires in their place, and send me back to the battle You've called me to. Amen.

DAY 210

R.E.S.T.

For only we who believe can enter his rest.

Hebrews 4:3

A storm hit the Sea of Galilee. Waves broke over the side of the boat, and the disciples panicked. And Jesus “was sleeping at the back of the boat with his head on a cushion” (Mark 4:38).

That wasn’t exhaustion. That was rest. Jesus wasn’t resting because the storm was over. He was resting because He trusted His Father with the outcome.

All through this season of Release, we’ve been letting go: of the comfortable nest, the debts we were owed, relationships that were only for a season, the position we wanted, the people we tried to own, the good things that pulled us off the wall. Now we come to the last thing, and the hardest: the outcomes themselves.

Here’s a simple way to remember it. R.E.S.T. Release Everything. Surrender Totally.

Rest isn’t a break, a nap, a vacation, or even just a Sabbath day. Those are gifts, but you can take every one of them and still be anxious. Rest is not the absence of activity. It’s the absence of anxiety.

Biblical rest is radical trust. It’s releasing timelines, expectations and the need to control. It’s trusting God with what you cannot carry. Hebrews says Israel missed God’s rest in the wilderness because they wouldn’t trust Him. Rest has always been a faith issue.

Jesus’ invitation still stands: “Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28).

The prayer of someone who has learned to rest is simple: I will obey and leave the results to You.

That's how the season of Release ends. Not with empty hands, but with open ones. And open hands are exactly what God loves to fill.

Almost right: I'll rest once everything is under control.

Right: I rest because God is in control, even when nothing else is.

Trust begins where control ends.

FOR THE ROAD

What outcome are you still trying to carry that God is asking you to release?

Father, I release everything and surrender totally. I will obey and leave the results to You. In Jesus' name, amen.

WEEK 42

Together

Meet once after Day 210. This closes the season of Release, so leave time at the end to look back over the last four weeks.

1. **Open:** Read Matthew 11:28 aloud. Ask: what's the difference between being tired and being weary?
2. **Day 206:** What position has God asked you to play that doesn't come with a spotlight? How have you seen Him honor it?
3. **Day 207:** Have you ever held on to people as if they belonged to you, or been held that way? What did it do to the relationship?
4. **Day 208:** What distractions dressed up as opportunities have pulled you off your wall?
5. **Day 209:** Where has comfort made you passive? What would "going out to battle" look like this month?
6. **Day 210:** What outcome are you still gripping? What would it mean to say, "I will obey and leave the results to You"?

Practice together: Look back at the "nests" you named in Week 39. Go around the group and share what God has stirred, what you've released, and what you're still holding. Then, as a closing act, have everyone hold out open hands while one person reads Hebrews 4:3 aloud.

Pray: Pray the R.E.S.T. prayer together: "Lord, we release everything and surrender totally. We will obey and leave the results to You."

SEASON EIGHT

Reward

Surviving the Anointing

WEEKS 43–47

WEEK 43

The Anointing Is Not the Approval

In the season of Reward, we learn that a gift shows God's goodness, not our virtue.

DAY 211

Anointed but Not Surrendered

And so, dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to give your bodies to God because of all he has done for you. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice—the kind he will find acceptable. This is truly the way to worship him.

Romans 12:1

Saul had every mark of a man God was with. Samuel poured oil on his head. On the road home, the Spirit of God came on him so powerfully that he began to prophesy, and the people who had known him all his life asked, “What? Is even Saul a prophet?” (1 Samuel 10:11).

Chosen. Anointed. Prophesying. And still not surrendered.

A few chapters later God gave Saul a clear command about the Amalekites. Saul obeyed most of it. He spared King Agag and kept the best of the sheep and cattle. When Samuel arrived, Saul met him with a smile and a spiritual explanation: the animals were for a sacrifice to the Lord. Samuel answered with words that still cut: “Obedience is better than sacrifice” (1 Samuel 15:22).

Here is the trap. Anointing is God’s empowerment for a calling. Surrender is something else. It is a daily death to self and a willing yes to God’s will. Being talented and anointed does not mean a person has godly character or a life fully yielded to God. Saul is the warning that being chosen and greatly anointed is not enough to fulfill your purpose in your generation.

Many know how to offer the sacrifice called their gifts, their talents and their anointing. Few know how to offer the Lord intimacy, trust and obedience. We bring Him the song, the sermon, the platform. He asks

for the heart behind them. Saul gave God animals and kept his own will, and that is why surrender can't be a one-time event. Jesus said we take up the cross *daily* (Luke 9:23).

Almost right: I give God my gifts, my talents and my anointing.
Right: I give God my intimacy, my trust and my obedience, and He decides what to do with my gifts.

God wants the one holding the offering more than the offering.

FOR THE ROAD

What "best of the flock" are you holding on to and calling it a sacrifice?

Father, I don't want to hand You my gifts and keep my heart. Take all of me today, and teach me to obey You before I try to impress You. Amen.

DAY 212

Power Amplifies the Heart

As a face is reflected in water, so the heart reflects the real person.

Proverbs 27:19

Plug a microphone into a large amplifier and something simple happens. The amplifier doesn't change the singer's voice. It doesn't fix the pitch or add any skill. It just makes whatever is already there louder. A beautiful voice fills the room. A voice that's off-key fills the room too.

Power works the same way. So do money, promotion, influence and anointing. Money and promotion don't change a person. They only give a person the power to fund the ambitions and fantasies that were hidden in the heart until the resources arrived to bring them to life.

That's why God is so committed to working on the heart before He turns up the volume. He told Israel, "I have refined you, but not as silver is refined. Rather, I have refined you in the furnace of suffering" (Isaiah 48:10). The wilderness is not wasted time. It is where He tunes the voice before He hands you the microphone.

A person who has always had strength often takes it for granted. A person who has known weakness understands what strength is for. That's why God so often chooses the unlikely. He isn't looking for the strongest candidate. He's looking for a heart that power can safely amplify.

So before you ask God for a bigger platform, ask Him to search what's in you now. If you're impatient with a small team, you'll be a tyrant with a large one. If you're generous with a little, you'll be generous with much. "Humble yourselves under the mighty power of God, and at the right time he will lift you up in honor" (1 Peter 5:6).

Almost right: If God would just give me more power, more money, more influence, I could do so much good.

Right: God refines my heart first, because whatever He gives me will make it louder.

Promotion doesn't change you. It just turns up the volume on who you already are.

FOR THE ROAD

If God doubled your influence tomorrow, what would it amplify in you?

Lord, refine my heart before You raise my voice. Burn away what I would not want the world to hear, and make me safe to trust with more. Amen.

DAY 213

Prophetic Kings Without Character

For God's gifts and his call can never be withdrawn.

Romans 11:29

Think about who got the most important dreams in the Old Testament.

In Joseph's day, the dream that would set the course of nations for fourteen years didn't come to Joseph or to his father Jacob. It came to Pharaoh, a pagan king who worshiped other gods (Genesis 41). Centuries later, Daniel was one of the most consecrated men in Scripture. Yet the dream that unveiled the rise and fall of empires far into the future was given to Nebuchadnezzar, an idolatrous and arrogant king (Daniel 2).

God gave the revelation to the pagan and the interpretation to the faithful.

That should settle something for us. Receiving supernatural messages or having prophetic insight does not reveal a person's character. Revelation is God's sovereign choice. He can speak through whomever He wants, whenever He wants. Accuracy proves that God is speaking. It doesn't prove that the speaker is walking with God.

Paul says God's gifts and call can never be withdrawn. That's a beautiful promise and a sobering one. It means a gift can keep working long after the heart has drifted. A person can stay accurate and stay unrepentant at the same time. The presence of a gift says nothing about maturity or moral integrity.

So where do we look? We look where Joseph and Daniel point us. Both of them carried revelation, but what made them trustworthy was how they lived when no one was rewarding them: in a prison, in a foreign

court, in a lions' den. Their character carried the weight their gift brought.

When you're deciding whom to follow, don't be dazzled by how much someone knows. Watch how they live. "You can identify them by their fruit" (Matthew 7:16).

Almost right: Their words are so accurate, God must be pleased with their life.
Right: Accurate words show God is speaking; a godly life shows the speaker is surrendered.

Revelation shows God's sovereignty. Character shows a person's surrender.

FOR THE ROAD

Whom have you trusted because of their gift, without ever looking at their fruit?

Holy Spirit, give me eyes that aren't impressed by the wrong things. Make me more like Joseph and Daniel, faithful where no one sees. Amen.

DAY 214

Fire From Heaven Is Not Enough

He did astounding miracles, even making fire flash down to earth from the sky while everyone was watching.

Revelation 13:13

Picture a crowd watching fire fall from the sky. Most of us would assume that's God. Elijah called down fire, after all. Fire from heaven sounds like proof.

But Revelation shows us a figure at the end of the age, the beast from the earth that we often call the false prophet, who does exactly that. He works great signs, even fire from heaven in front of everyone, and he uses those signs to lead the world into false worship. The miracle is real. The source is not God.

That means signs alone can't tell you where something came from. Supernatural power can be counterfeited, and impressive manifestations can deceive people into following someone they should never trust.

Jesus warned us about this from the other side. On judgment day, He said, many will say, "Lord! Lord! We prophesied in your name and cast out demons in your name and performed many miracles in your name." And He will answer, "I never knew you" (Matthew 7:22–23). They had the activity. They were missing the relationship.

Paul names what is missing. "If I had the gift of prophecy, and if I understood all of God's secret plans and possessed all knowledge, and if I had such faith that I could move mountains, but didn't love others, I would be nothing" (1 Corinthians 13:2). Without love, the most profound gifts are just noise.

This isn’t a reason to fear the supernatural or stop asking God for His power. It’s a reason to test what we see. When something spectacular happens, ask better questions. Does it lead people to worship Jesus or the one on stage? Is there love? Is there obedience? Is there fruit when the lights go out?

Almost right: Miracles are happening, so God must be in it.

Right: Miracles show power; love, obedience and fruit show whose power it is.

Fire from heaven proves there is power. Only fruit tells you whose.

FOR THE ROAD

Have you ever followed a ministry or a person mainly because of what you saw happen?

Jesus, I want to be known by You, not just busy for You. Keep me close enough to tell Your fire from every imitation. Amen.

DAY 215

Successful Is Not Surrendered

Thus Solomon finished the house of the LORD and the king's house. All that Solomon had planned to do in the house of the LORD and in his own house he successfully accomplished.

2 Chronicles 7:11 (ESV)

If anyone could have written a book on success, it was Solomon. He asked God for wisdom and received riches and honor on top of it. He built the Temple his father only dreamed about. He built a palace. Kings and queens traveled to hear him. Scripture says he successfully accomplished everything he planned.

And then: "In Solomon's old age, they turned his heart to worship other gods instead of being completely faithful to the LORD his God" (1 Kings 11:4).

The most successful king in Israel's history finished the building and lost the heart.

This is why revival tarries in the Church. We confuse success with surrender. A finished project feels like faithfulness. A growing ministry feels like God's approval. A full calendar feels like devotion. But success, wisdom and even anointing are not substitutes for a heart that stays fully given to God.

Being anointed doesn't mean you've fully submitted to God. If you assume your anointing equals surrender, you risk letting a speck in your eye grow into a mountain-sized blind spot. Solomon's wisdom didn't protect him from his own desires. His gifts kept working while his heart wandered.

Notice when Solomon drifted. Not in the hard years of building. It happened afterward, in the years of plenty, when there was nothing left to prove. The temple was done. The heart was not.

Jesus asked, “What do you benefit if you gain the whole world but lose your own soul?” (Mark 8:36). The question isn’t whether you can build something great for God. It’s whether you’ll still be His when the building is finished.

Almost right: Look at everything God has let me build. My heart must be right.
Right: What I’ve built proves God is good; only my devotion after the building shows my heart.

Your anointing isn’t a measure of your virtue. Your spiritual gifts showcase God’s goodness and mercy.

FOR THE ROAD

What have you finished for God that you might be leaning on as proof of your devotion?

Lord, I don’t want to finish the work and lose my first love. Keep my heart fully Yours in the years of plenty. In Jesus’ name, amen.

WEEK 43

Together

Meet once after Day 215. Let the leader go first on each question, and keep the focus on your own hearts, not on leaders you've watched fall.

1. **Open:** Read Romans 11:29 aloud. Why is it both comforting and sobering that God doesn't take His gifts back?
2. **Day 211:** Saul brought God a sacrifice instead of obedience. What "offerings" are easiest for you to give God in place of surrender?
3. **Day 212:** If power amplifies the heart, what would a bigger platform amplify in you right now, for good or for bad?
4. **Day 213:** Why do you think God gave Pharaoh and Nebuchadnezzar such important dreams? What does that teach us about gifts and character?
5. **Day 214:** What questions can we ask when we see something spectacular, to discern its source?
6. **Day 215:** Solomon drifted after the temple was finished. When are you most vulnerable: in the building or after it?

Practice together: Each person names one gift God has given them. Then the group answers this for each person: what would surrender look like in the way you use that gift this week? Write it down and check in next time.

Pray: Pray Romans 12:1 over one another: "Lord, we give You our bodies, our gifts and our hearts as a living sacrifice. Keep us on the altar."

WEEK 44

Power vs. Permission

Once we see that gifts prove nothing, the question becomes how we use them: under whose direction, for whose glory and from what motive.

DAY 216

The First One Who Didn’t Survive His Anointing

Your heart was filled with pride because of all your beauty. Your wisdom was corrupted by your love of splendor. So I threw you to the ground and exposed you to the curious gaze of kings.

Ezekiel 28:17

Before there was a fallen king or a fallen preacher, there was a fallen angel.

Ezekiel 28 is addressed to the king of Tyre, but for centuries many Christians have read part of it, along with Isaiah 14, as a picture of Lucifer’s fall. God describes the one He made: “I ordained and anointed you as the mighty angelic guardian” (Ezekiel 28:14). Perfect in beauty. Full of wisdom.

His anointing had a purpose. He was made to guard God’s glory and reflect it. That was the assignment.

Then something shifted inside him. “I will climb to the highest heavens and be like the Most High” (Isaiah 14:14). The one created to protect God’s glory wanted it for himself. He wanted the worship that belongs to God alone.

Notice what Ezekiel says was corrupted: his wisdom. The gift didn’t disappear. It got bent. What was meant to glorify God became a tool for self-glorification and, in the end, for ruin. And his fall didn’t stay private. Sin and rebellion spread into the whole created order. Those who carry influence never fall alone.

I see in Lucifer a picture of the first being who didn’t survive his anointing. Your gift came with an assignment: to reflect His glory, not to

collect your own. The moment we start using the stage to make ourselves shine, we've begun walking the same road, even if we never say the words out loud.

The cure is the opposite posture. Jesus, who truly was equal with God, "gave up his divine privileges; he took the humble position of a slave" (Philippians 2:7). Lucifer grasped. Jesus emptied Himself. One fell; the other was exalted.

Almost right: God gave me this gift, so I should use it to shine.
Right: God gave me this gift to guard and reflect His glory, never to gather my own.

An anointing made to guard His glory will destroy the one who uses it to gather his own.

FOR THE ROAD

Where are you tempted to let your gift reflect you instead of Him?

Lord, every gift I have came from You. Keep me from grasping at Your glory. Make me a mirror, not a spotlight. Amen.

DAY 217

Power Without Permission

> *You will become pregnant and give birth to a son, and his hair must never be cut. For he will be dedicated to God as a Nazirite from birth. He will begin to rescue Israel from the Philistines.*
>
> **Judges 13:5**

Samson's life reads like an action movie. He tied torches to the tails of three hundred foxes and set the Philistines' fields on fire. He killed a thousand men with the jawbone of a donkey. He carried off the gates of a city.

There is no question the power was real. Scripture says plainly that "the Spirit of the LORD came powerfully upon him" (Judges 14:19). Samson was chosen before he was born, set apart as a Nazirite, and called to begin Israel's deliverance.

But look at what triggered most of those feats. A bet lost over a riddle. Anger after his wife was given to another man. Personal revenge. The power came from God, but the timing and the target came from Samson's own impulses. That's the tension of his life: power versus permission.

Samson treated his consecration lightly. He went after women God had warned Israel about. He scooped honey out of a dead lion, the kind of thing a Nazirite was told to stay away from. And though he was called to judge Israel, he never really led them. He acted alone, for his own reasons, and the nation stayed under Philistine rule.

Blind, chained and mocked, Samson prayed, "Sovereign LORD, remember me again" (Judges 16:28). God answered. His hair had begun to grow back, and grace was not finished with him. But it is

heartbreaking to think of what his life could have been if the fear of the Lord had governed his strength.

An anointing is real power. But real power used without God's direction will always cost more than it wins.

Almost right: God's power is on me, so whatever I use it for must be OK.

Right: God's power on me must move under God's direction, in the fear of the Lord.

If we do not learn to crucify our flesh privately, our flesh will eventually crucify us publicly.

FOR THE ROAD

Is there an area where you are using real gifts on your own impulse instead of God's direction?

Sovereign Lord, I don't want to win battles You never sent me to fight. Teach me to fear You, and govern my strength by Your Spirit. Amen.

DAY 218

Only What the Father Is Doing

So Jesus explained, "I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself. He does only what he sees the Father doing. Whatever the Father does, the Son also does."

John 5:19

Picture the pool of Bethesda in Jerusalem. John tells us crowds of sick people lay on its porches: blind, lame, paralyzed. Jesus walked into that scene and healed one man who had been sick for thirty-eight years. Then He slipped away into the crowd (John 5:1–13).

One man. Surely He could have healed them all. Why not empty the porches?

When the religious leaders challenged Him, Jesus gave His answer. The Son does nothing on His own. He does only what He sees the Father doing.

The Son of God, full of the Spirit and with all power available to Him, refused to act on His own initiative. He didn't heal because He could. He healed because the Father was moving. His power was always under permission.

That's a hard word for gifted people. Our natural pull is to rely on our strengths, our talent, our momentum. If we can do it, we assume we should. But "it is not by force nor by strength, but by my Spirit, says the LORD of Heaven's Armies" (Zechariah 4:6). Impressive activity that God didn't authorize, no matter how well meant, can lead us into spiritual danger.

There's a line often credited to Augustine: "Without God, we cannot. Without us, God will not." Both halves matter. We are not passive. God

chooses to work through us. But we're not the source either. We are co-laborers who wait to see what the Father is doing before we put our hands to it.

That kind of waiting only comes from knowing Him. You can't see what the Father is doing if you aren't looking at the Father. Intimacy comes before authority.

Almost right: I have the gift and the opportunity, so I should do it in Jesus' name.
Right: I watch what the Father is doing and join Him there, with His permission.

Power without permission is still rebellion, even when it works.

FOR THE ROAD

What are you doing because you can, rather than because you've seen the Father doing it?

Father, open my eyes to see what You are doing today. Keep me from acting on my own, and let everything I do flow from knowing You. Amen.

DAY 219

Presence or Power? It Comes Down to Motive

For he raised us from the dead along with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms because we are united with Christ Jesus.

Ephesians 2:6

In the movie *Bruce Almighty*, a frustrated news reporter named Bruce Nolan is handed the powers of God for a short time. At first he's thrilled. He uses his new abilities to get what he wants, to control events and to come out on top. It doesn't take long for everything around him to slide into chaos. Only when Bruce learns humility and love does he begin using power for anyone but himself.

It's a comedy, but it exposes something real: power in a heart that doesn't yet know love becomes self-serving.

The pursuit of God's presence and the pursuit of His power look almost identical from the outside. Same prayer meetings. Same hunger. What's the difference? Motive.

The pursuit of power is often driven by a need to perform in order to gain an identity. It tries to earn a seat at the table by what it can do. The pursuit of presence is driven by a desire to obey and to know God. It starts from a seat already given. Paul says we are *already* seated with Christ in heavenly places. We aren't climbing toward that seat. We're living from it.

Is power wrong? Not at all. Jesus promised it (Acts 1:8). But power should be a benefit of intimacy, not the motivating factor. Pursuing

power before presence is like getting married for what a spouse can give you rather than for the relationship itself.

Here's the good news for sons and daughters. Your identity in Christ can't be broken. You are adopted. But your intimacy with Him can be disrupted by disobedience. That's why the real test of power always reveals where our loyalty lies.

Almost right: I'm pursuing God's power so I can finally be somebody in His Kingdom.

Right: I'm pursuing His presence from the seat He's already given me, and His power comes as the fruit of that closeness.

The pursuit of presence and the pursuit of power look almost identical. The difference is motive.

FOR THE ROAD

If God gave you His power but not His presence, would you notice the difference?

Father, I don't want to use You to become somebody. I want You. Let any power I carry grow out of knowing You. Amen.

DAY 220

Crown, Cross and Thorn

Even though I have received such wonderful revelations from God. So to keep me from becoming proud, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger from Satan to torment me and keep me from becoming proud.

2 Corinthians 12:7

Paul was caught up to paradise and heard things too sacred to put into words (2 Corinthians 12:2–4). He was a gifted teacher and writer who planted churches across the known world.

And with all of that, God gave him a thorn.

I see three things every believer carries, and Paul carried all of them.

There is a **crown**: the unique gifts and abilities God has given you to influence the world around you. Paul's was revelation, teaching and leadership.

There is a **cross**: the daily surrender of your own understanding and desires, so that Christ's splendor can shine through you instead of your own. Paul's cross was preaching Christ crucified at great personal cost.

And there is a **thorn**: the specific weakness or suffering that distresses you and keeps you dependent. Paul begged God three times to take his away. God said no, and gave him grace instead.

The almost-right way to handle a crown is to wear it as a possession. It's easy to become proud of our gifts, but they are a stewardship, not property. The cross keeps the crown pointed in the right direction, and the thorn keeps the one wearing it on his knees.

Moses had all three as well: a leader's calling, the constant surrender of his own understanding, and the insecurities he carried from the burning bush onward. Together they made him usable.

The thorn in your side is not your defeat. It's the beginning of your dependency on divine strength. When you stop treating it as the end of your usefulness and let it drive you to Him, you'll hear what Paul heard: "My grace is all you need."

Almost right: My gifts are my crown, and my weakness is what holds me back.
Right: My crown is guided by the cross and kept humble by the thorn, and all three belong to God.

Don't let your crown fall, but remember to let the cross guide your path.

FOR THE ROAD

Name your crown, your cross and your thorn. Which one are you most tempted to resent?

Jesus, thank You for every gift. Teach me to carry my cross with humility and to receive my thorn as a reason to lean on You. Amen.

WEEK 44

Together

Meet once after Day 220. This week can stir up honest talk about motives, so make it a safe place to confess, not to compare.

1. **Open:** Read John 5:19 aloud. What would change in your week if you truly did only what you saw the Father doing?
2. **Day 216:** Lucifer's gift was corrupted, not removed. What does it look like when a real gift starts to be used for self-glory?
3. **Day 217:** Samson had real power and little permission. Where do you see a gap between your ability and God's direction?
4. **Day 218:** Why do you think Jesus healed only one man at Bethesda? What does that teach us about doing good things God hasn't assigned?
5. **Day 219:** How can you tell whether you're pursuing God's presence or His power?
6. **Day 220:** Share your crown, your cross and your thorn. How has your thorn kept you close to God?

Practice together: Before you leave, each person writes down one thing they've been doing "because they can." Pray over it as a group this week, asking the Father to confirm, redirect or remove it. Share what you heard next time.

Pray: Pray Zechariah 4:6 together: "Not by force, not by strength, but by Your Spirit, Lord. Let everything we do this week be by Your Spirit."

WEEK 45

The Descent After the Summit

The real danger is not the battle but the comfort that follows the reward; abundance tests us harder than lack.

DAY 221

The Danger Is the Descent

If you think you are standing strong, be careful not to fall.

1 Corinthians 10:12

On Mount Everest, many of the climbers who die don't die on the way up. They die on the way down. After they reach the top, exhaustion rises and focus fades. Success breeds a false sense of security, and that's when discipline quietly begins to slip.

The summit is the goal everyone trains for. The descent is the part nobody celebrates. But the mountain doesn't care how glorious the view was at the top.

David's story follows the same path. He had climbed. He had killed the giant, survived Saul's spear, waited out the wilderness years, and taken the throne. Then 2 Samuel 11 opens with a quiet, devastating line: "In the spring of the year, when kings normally go out to war," David stayed home in Jerusalem.

His fall didn't come in battle. It came in comfort. He stepped away from his calling, and compromise followed. One evening on a rooftop led to adultery, a cover-up and a murder. The man after God's own heart fell, not on the dangerous climb, but on the easy way down.

That's the warning for every season of reward. The danger isn't the climb. It's the descent. Adversity tends to keep us praying. Breakthrough, comfort and success can slowly pull us off course without our even noticing.

Paul wrote to people who felt secure: "If you think you are standing strong, be careful not to fall." He wasn't trying to scare them. He was trying to keep them roped in.

So if God has just brought you through, if the promotion came, the healing came or the door finally opened, don't unclip. This is the time to keep showing up in the secret place. Keep the same disciplines that carried you up. The view from the top is a gift. Getting home safely is faithfulness.

Almost right: I made it through. I've earned a break from the fight.

Right: I made it through, and now I guard my heart even more closely on the way down.

Discipleship is proven not in breakthrough, but in the consistency that follows it.

FOR THE ROAD

Where has a recent win made you a little less careful?

Lord, thank You for every summit. Keep me from coasting on the way down. Give me daily, unseen faithfulness after every breakthrough. Amen.

DAY 222

Mercy Is Not Permission

Don't you see how wonderfully kind, tolerant, and patient God is with you? Does this mean nothing to you? Can't you see that his kindness is intended to turn you from your sin?

Romans 2:4

Picture a man who rolls through the same stop sign every morning on his way to work. The street is empty. Nothing happens. Months go by. Without ever deciding it, he stops thinking of it as a stop sign at all. Nothing bad has happened, so it must be fine.

The Teacher in Ecclesiastes saw the same thing in the human heart: "When a crime is not punished quickly, people feel it is safe to do wrong" (Ecclesiastes 8:11).

That's one of the most dangerous misreadings in the Christian life. God's patience gives us room to repent. We take it as His approval to continue. The longer nothing happens, the more spiritual our excuses become. *If God were really upset, wouldn't He have stopped me by now?*

Here's what sets that confusion in motion. When you value the favor of man more than the favor of God, you start to confuse God's mercy with God being complicit with your rebellion. As long as people still applaud and the blessings still come, we assume heaven has signed off. We misdiagnose His mercy as Him turning a blind eye to habitual sin.

But mercy is not a blind eye. Mercy is God holding the door open. Peter tells us why judgment sometimes seems slow: "He is being patient for your sake. He does not want anyone to be destroyed, but wants everyone to repent" (2 Peter 3:9).

That turns delay into an invitation. If you've been getting away with something, you haven't been getting away with it. You've been given time. The kindest thing you can do with that time is to use it for what it was meant for: to turn around while the door is still open.

Almost right: God hasn't stopped me, so He must be OK with it.
Right: God hasn't stopped me yet because He's giving me time to repent.

When you value the favor of man more than the favor of God, you will mistake His mercy for His approval.

FOR THE ROAD

Is there a "stop sign" in your life you've stopped seeing because nothing has happened yet?

Father, thank You for Your patience. Don't let me waste it. Turn my heart while Your kindness is still holding the door open. Amen.

DAY 223

Abundance Without Purpose

For when you have become full and prosperous and have built fine homes to live in, and when your flocks and herds have become very large and your silver and gold have multiplied along with everything else, be careful! Do not become proud at that time and forget the LORD your God, who rescued you from slavery in the land of Egypt.

Deuteronomy 8:12–14

In 1968 a researcher named John B. Calhoun built what has been called a mouse utopia. He named it Universe 25. It had everything a mouse could want: unlimited food and water, perfect temperature, no predators, and nesting space for about 3,840 mice. He started with eight.

At first the colony boomed. Then, with every need met and nothing to strive for, it began to unravel. Young males turned violent. Older males withdrew. Mothers neglected their young. A strange group appeared that the researchers called “the beautiful ones.” They groomed themselves constantly, but they wouldn’t fight, mate or engage. Perfect on the outside, empty on the inside. The population peaked at about 2,200 and then never recovered. Births stopped, and the colony died out in the middle of a paradise.

Calhoun’s warning was that abundance without meaningful roles leads to collapse. It’s a chilling picture for any comfortable culture, and any comfortable Christian.

Moses gave Israel the same warning before they ever saw the Promised Land. He wasn’t worried about the wilderness. He was worried about the fine homes. Lack had kept them dependent. Plenty could make them forget.

God never designed us to thrive on comfort alone. He designed us for purpose: a calling, a cross, a people to serve and a Kingdom to build. Paul's life was full of hardship, yet it overflowed with meaning (2 Corinthians 11:23–28). The beautiful ones had everything and nothing to live for.

In a season of plenty, thank God, then ask Him what it's for. Blessing without an assignment slowly starves the soul.

Almost right: God has given me comfort and plenty, so I must be in a good place.
Right: God has given me plenty for a purpose, and I'll stay alive inside by serving it.

Abundance without purpose will destroy us faster than scarcity and crushing seasons.

FOR THE ROAD

In what area of your life do you have plenty but no clear purpose for it?

Lord, don't let comfort make me forget You. Show me what my abundance is for, and keep me alive inside by giving me something worth living for. Amen.

DAY 224

When He Became Powerful

> *But when he had become powerful, he also became proud, which led to his downfall. He sinned against the LORD his God by entering the sanctuary of the LORD's Temple and personally burning incense on the incense altar.*
>
> **2 Chronicles 26:16**

Uzziah became king of Judah at sixteen, and for most of his reign he did what pleased the Lord. He sought God, and God made him prosper. He won wars, built towers and dug wells, and his fame spread as far as Egypt. The King James Version puts it beautifully: "he was marvellously helped, till he was strong" (2 Chronicles 26:15, KJV).

Till he was strong. That's the turning point.

Once Uzziah was powerful, he walked into the Temple to burn incense himself, a task God had given only to the priests. Eighty priests followed him in and told him to leave. He raged at them, and in that moment leprosy broke out on his forehead. He lived the rest of his life in isolation (2 Chronicles 26:17–21).

What happened? Uzziah didn't stop believing in God. He stopped depending on Him. The help that had made him strong became, in his mind, his own strength. And strength without dependence starts reaching for roles God never gave it.

C. S. Lewis captured this in *The Screwtape Letters*, where a senior demon notes that "prosperity knits a man to the World." A man thinks he is finally finding his place in the world, while the world is quietly finding its place in him.

Nobody feels proud while they're desperate. Pride grows when we feel at home, established and capable. The very season when we need God least, in our own eyes, is the season we need Him most.

The upside-down Kingdom works the other way. There, need is something we never outgrow, because it keeps us close to the One who helps us.

Almost right: I've finally found my place. God has made me strong.

Right: God has made me strong, so I need to stay closer to Him than ever.

In the upside-down Kingdom, the first is last and the last is first.

FOR THE ROAD

Where have you started to treat God's help as your own strength?

Lord, I was marvelously helped. Don't let me forget it. Keep me dependent on You, especially on the days I feel strong. Amen.

DAY 225

Piped-In Water

You say, "I am rich. I have everything I want. I don't need a thing!" And you don't realize that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked.

Revelation 3:17

Laodicea was a wealthy city with one real weakness: water. It had no good supply of its own, so water was brought in from a distance through pipes. By the time it arrived, it was lukewarm and barely drinkable.

Its neighbors had it better. Nearby Hierapolis was known for its hot mineral springs, the kind people went to for healing. Colossae had cold, fresh water from the mountains. So when Jesus told the Laodicean church, "I wish that you were one or the other!" (Revelation 3:15), they knew exactly what He meant. Be cold enough to refresh people, or hot enough to heal them. Don't be like your own pipes.

Any athlete knows there are two kinds of help. After a hard game you need to recover, to be refreshed so you can go again. When you're injured, you need healing before you can get back on the field. Cold water refreshes. Hot springs heal. Lukewarm does neither.

What made Laodicea lukewarm? Distance. They had settled for secondhand revelation. They knew about God from what had been piped in to them, and they had stopped drawing from the source. Their wealth made it easy. When you have everything you want, you don't feel thirsty.

That's the danger of the Reward season. Comfort lets us live on secondhand faith: someone else's worship playlist, someone else's

sermon, someone else's encounter. It's all real water, but it has traveled too far to do anybody any good.

The rich young ruler had the same blind spot. He thought he had everything, but when Jesus invited him to let go and follow, he walked away sad (Mark 10:17–22).

Jesus' answer to Laodicea is tender: "Look! I stand at the door and knock" (Revelation 3:20). He isn't asking for better pipes. He's offering Himself.

Almost right: I'm doing well. I'm blessed, and I'm still in church.

Right: I'm drawing from the Source again, so I can refresh the weary and help heal the wounded.

Secondhand revelation always arrives lukewarm.

FOR THE ROAD

Which are you right now: cold enough to refresh, hot enough to heal, or piped in lukewarm?

Jesus, I hear You knocking. I don't want secondhand faith. Come in and be my source again, so my life can refresh and heal others. Amen.

WEEK 45

Together

Meet once after Day 225. This week is for people who are doing well, so be honest about the quiet ways comfort is shaping you.

1. **Open:** Read Deuteronomy 8:12–14 aloud. Why do you think Moses was more worried about Israel's comfort than about their hardship?
2. **Day 221:** Think of your last breakthrough. What disciplines slipped afterward?
3. **Day 222:** Why is it so easy to read God's patience as His approval? What helps you take His kindness as an invitation to repent?
4. **Day 223:** What would "abundance without purpose" look like in a family, a church or a nation?
5. **Day 224:** Uzziah was "marvelously helped, till he was strong." Where are you tempted to forget the help?
6. **Day 225:** Where are you living on secondhand faith? What would it take to drink from the Source again?

Practice together: Each person picks one area of plenty in their life (time, money, a skill, a home) and names a purpose God could have for it. Commit to one concrete step this week that puts that abundance to work for someone else.

Pray: Pray 1 Corinthians 10:12 for one another: "Lord, where we think we are standing strong, keep us from falling. Keep us faithful on the way down."

WEEK 46

The Money Test

Provision is where the heart shows itself: money is not the reward, it is the exam.

DAY 226

Money Is the Test, Not the Goal

> *No one can serve two masters. For you will hate one and love the other; you will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and be enslaved to money.*
>
> **Matthew 6:24**

In the movie *The Family Man*, Jack Campbell is a Wall Street executive who seems to have it all: power, money, status and a penthouse. One morning he wakes up in a completely different life. He's married to the girlfriend he left behind years earlier, they have two children, they live in a modest house, and he works at a tire store. At first Jack fights it with everything in him. Slowly, he discovers a richness his wealth had crowded out. The movie doesn't call money evil; it shows what money can quietly replace.

Peter Vescovi, in *The Great Money Reform*, puts it this way: "In the world money is the goal. In the Kingdom money is the test."

That one sentence changes everything. If money is the goal, then more is always better and the only question is how to get it. If money is the test, then every paycheck, every bill and every windfall is an exam. God uses money to test our faithfulness in small things before He trusts us with greater ones. "If you are faithful in little things, you will be faithful in large ones" (Luke 16:10).

The test isn't mainly about how much you have. It's about what has you. Jesus didn't say you shouldn't serve God *and* money. He said you *can't*. Sooner or later one of them will be master. We will either serve His presence or worship His provision.

How can you tell which way you're leaning? Where do your thoughts drift when you're anxious? What would you refuse to give up if God asked? "Wherever your treasure is, there the desires of your heart will also be" (Matthew 6:21).

Wealth isn't wicked. But security was never meant to come from a balance. It comes from a Father who knows what you need before you ask.

Almost right: If I'm financially secure, I'll finally be free to serve God.
Right: Money is a test of whom I already serve, and a tool for His Kingdom.

We will either serve His presence or worship His provision.

FOR THE ROAD

If money is the test, what grade would your last month's spending give your heart?

Father, You are my security. Teach me to pass the money test, to hold Your provision loosely and Your presence tightly. Amen.

DAY 227

Stewardship Has No Finish Line

> *He gave five bags of silver to one, two bags of silver to another, and one bag of silver to the last—dividing it in proportion to their abilities. He then left on his trip.*
>
> **Matthew 25:15**

Picture two runners.

The first is running toward a finish line marked "prosperity." If he crosses it, he has nothing left to run for. If he never crosses it, he feels defeated and is tempted to call himself a failure. Either way, the finish line ends the race.

The second runner isn't running toward a line at all. He's drawing water from a well that has no bottom. Every day he pours his heart into whatever God has put in his hands, and every day there is more to draw. He never arrives, so he never quits.

That's the difference between a prosperity gospel and a stewardship gospel.

When your goal is prosperity, your motivation depends on the outcome. When your goal is faithfulness, you put your heart and soul into whatever God has entrusted to you, and no matter what the result looks like, you leave no stone unturned.

Look at the parable. The master didn't give everyone the same amount. One received five bags, one two, one a single bag, "in proportion to their abilities." And when he returned, the servant with two heard the same words as the servant with five: "Well done, my good and faithful servant" (Matthew 25:23). The reward wasn't for reaching a number. It was for faithfulness.

The one who failed wasn't the one with the least. It was the one who buried what he had out of fear.

So stop measuring your race by how close you are to some finish line. Ask a better question: *Am I being faithful with what's in my hands today?* That question never runs out of answers.

Almost right: God wants me to reach a place of wealth, so I'm running hard to get there.

Right: God wants me faithful with what's in my hands today, and that never runs dry.

Prosperity has a finish line; stewardship is a well you will never reach the bottom of.

FOR THE ROAD

What has God put in your hands right now that you've been waiting to "arrive" before using fully?

Lord, I don't want to run toward a finish line You never drew. Make me faithful with what You've given me, and let me hear "well done" for that. Amen.

DAY 228

Equal Stewardship, Not Equal Outcomes

You have said, "What's the use of serving God? What have we gained by obeying his commands or by trying to prove to the LORD of Heaven's Armies that we are sorry for our sins? From now on we will call the arrogant blessed. For those who do evil get rich, and those who dare God to punish them suffer no harm."

Malachi 3:14–15

If being right with God always made you rich, Malachi's people would never have said those words. They looked around and saw the arrogant prospering while they struggled. The same complaint fills the Psalms. Jesus even warned that in the last days, because lawlessness would increase, "the love of many will grow cold" (Matthew 24:12, ESV).

The false prosperity gospel makes a quiet mistake. It confuses equal stewardship with equal outcomes. It promises everyone with "enough faith" the same result: wealth and health, regardless of calling, ability or God's specific purpose for that life.

Scripture tells a different story. Set two men side by side.

Solomon stewarded immense riches and influence in a palace. John the Baptist lived in the wilderness on locusts and wild honey. Solomon's wealth didn't keep his heart from drifting into idolatry. John stayed faithful to his calling all the way to prison and a beheading. Jesus said there was no one greater than John (Matthew 11:11).

If net worth measured favor, Solomon wins easily. But riches and net worth don't determine authority or impact in God's Kingdom. Faithfulness does.

True stewardship means managing what God has given you according to your own abilities and assignment and giving your best, not having the highest net worth. Your race is not your neighbor's race. Comparing blessings will only lead to envy and distraction.

The gospel isn't empty of promises or blessings. God is a good Father who loves to provide. But eternity is far more important than earthly comfort. And if God uses pain to lead us into our ultimate purpose, so be it. His love is the true reward, both in this life and in eternity.

Almost right: If I have enough faith, I'll be blessed the same way they are.
Right: If I'm faithful with my assignment, I'm blessed, whatever my outcome looks like.

Riches and net worth do not determine authority or impact in God's Kingdom.

FOR THE ROAD

Whose outcome have you been comparing your life to?

Father, I don't need someone else's blessing. I want to be faithful with mine. Let Your love be my reward. Amen.

DAY 229

The Golden Calf Called the Tithe

What sorrow awaits you teachers of religious law and you Pharisees. Hypocrites! For you are careful to tithe even the tiniest income from your herb gardens, but you ignore the more important aspects of the law—justice, mercy, and faith. You should tithe, yes, but do not neglect the more important things.

Matthew 23:23

Imagine counting out mint leaves. One for God, nine for me. Then the dill. Then the cumin. The Pharisees were so careful with their tithe that they measured it down to the spices in their gardens.

Jesus didn't tell them to stop. "You should tithe, yes." But He said they were ignoring the weightier things: justice, mercy and faithfulness. They had turned giving into a kind of golden calf, a religious object they could point to while their hearts stayed far from God.

That temptation hasn't gone away. It's possible to be a faithful tither and still be living in disobedience. It's possible to give generously and still hold on to sin. We can begin to treat our giving as a payment that keeps God satisfied while we do what we want in other areas.

But God will not ignore sexual sin just because you always give your tithe. He isn't bribed by our offerings. Faithfulness in one area doesn't excuse disobedience in another. "The LORD detests the sacrifice of the wicked, but he delights in the prayers of the upright" (Proverbs 15:8).

There is a right order. Obedience comes first, and generosity flows out of it. A faithful heart will always end up generous, because a heart surrendered to God holds everything loosely. But a generous hand doesn't always mean a faithful heart. Paul said you could give

everything you have to the poor and, without love, gain nothing (1 Corinthians 13:3).

So give. Give gladly, give faithfully and give first. Just don't let your giving become the thing you hide behind. God wants more than ten percent of your money. He wants one hundred percent of you.

Almost right: I'm faithful with my tithe, so God must be pleased with me.
Right: I'm surrendered in obedience, and my generosity flows out of that.

Obedience will always lead to generosity, but generosity will not always lead to obedience.

FOR THE ROAD

Is there an area of disobedience you've been hoping your generosity would cover?

Lord, I don't want to bargain with You. Take my whole heart, not just my offering, and let my giving flow from obedience. Amen.

DAY 230

The True Blessed Life

Then he said to them, "You like to appear righteous in public, but God knows your hearts. What this world honors is detestable in the sight of God."

Luke 16:15

Jesus said those words to religious leaders who loved money and laughed at His teaching. Then He told them a story.

There was a rich man who dressed in the finest clothes and lived every day in luxury. At his gate lay a beggar named Lazarus, covered in sores, so hungry he longed for the scraps from the rich man's table. Even the dogs came and licked his wounds (Luke 16:19–21).

Now picture how that scene would be read by a gospel that measures blessing by wealth. The rich man would be the testimony. Lazarus would be the cautionary tale. Someone would ask what was wrong with Lazarus's faith. Someone would suggest he had a curse to break.

Then Jesus turns the whole thing upside down. Both men die. Lazarus is carried by angels to Abraham's side. The rich man finds himself in torment. The man everyone would have called blessed was the one whose life was empty.

Let that be a sober warning to any church that looks at success through the lens of material wealth. The Bible defines the true fruit of a blessed life as "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control" (Galatians 5:22–23). Not one of them can be bought.

Words have real meanings, but we often give them our own. We've done that with *prosperity*. What if you've already been made prosperous and

simply never noticed? When greed, envy, competition and a lack of stewardship become normal, we squander what God has given through endless comparison. We fail to celebrate it or even to thank Him for it.

In a social media age, provoking envy has become a goal. Paul says the opposite: “Let us not become conceited, or provoke one another, or be jealous of one another” (Galatians 5:26).

Almost right: The blessed life is the one with the most to show for it.

Right: The blessed life bears the fruit of the Spirit and gives thanks for what God has already given.

The blessed life is measured by fruit, not by furniture.

FOR THE ROAD

What has God already given you that comparison has kept you from enjoying?

Father, open my eyes to the riches I already have in You. Grow Your fruit in me, and make me grateful instead of envious. In Jesus’ name, amen.

WEEK 46

Together

Meet once after Day 230. Money is a private subject for most people, so share what you can, keep what's shared in the room, and don't press anyone for numbers.

1. **Open:** Read Matthew 6:24 aloud. What does it look like in everyday life to be "enslaved" to money?
2. **Day 226:** If money is a test, what is the hardest part of the test for you right now?
3. **Day 227:** Are you running toward a finish line or drawing from a well? How can you tell?
4. **Day 228:** Whose outcome are you most tempted to compare yourself to? What is your own assignment?
5. **Day 229:** Why is it possible to be generous and still disobedient? Why does obedience always lead to generosity?
6. **Day 230:** Read Galatians 5:22–23. Which of these "riches" do you see growing in the person next to you?

Practice together: Go around the group and have each person name three blessings God has already given them that money can't buy. Then decide together on one act of generosity your group can do this month for someone in need.

Pray: Pray Matthew 6:21 together: "Lord, let our treasure be in You, so our hearts will be with You."

WEEK 47

Crown Without the Cross

Reward ends with what we build with our influence: a Babel protected from correction, or an Ark of His presence carried by accountable servants.

DAY 231

Double Honor, Double Accountability

Elders who do their work well should be respected and paid well, especially those who work hard at both preaching and teaching.

1 Timothy 5:17

Most of us know this verse. Fewer of us keep reading.

Paul gives leaders who serve well “double honor”: respect, authority and fair pay. A healthy church gives it gladly. But three verses later, in the same letter of instruction, he adds: “Those who sin should be reprimanded in front of the whole church; this will serve as a strong warning to others” (1 Timothy 5:20).

Double honor comes with double accountability. You can’t keep one and throw away the other.

Yet many leaders passionately claim the first half and quietly reject the second. An ordinary member who falls into sin is often corrected quickly. A leader in a pattern of sin is too often protected with a misused phrase: “Touch not mine anointed” (Psalm 105:15, KJV). That verse was God’s protection over His covenant people. It was never meant to shield shepherds from correction.

When accountability is seen as accusation, you know we have drifted from the ancient paths and the fear of the Lord has left the room.

Too many leaders want the crown without the cross, the paycheck without purity, the honor without holiness, and the stage without the higher standard Scripture requires. They forget that “when someone has been given much, much will be required in return” (Luke 12:48).

Spiritual fathers and mothers don’t get the same permissions as spiritual sons and daughters. Children are naturally self-centered and immature.

Leadership requires servanthood, consistency, humility and the fear of the Lord.

None of this is about tearing leaders down. Correction is meant to protect the flock and to give the one who has fallen a real path back to God. Healthy leaders welcome it, because it keeps them safe.

Almost right: I'm God's anointed, so I deserve honor and shouldn't be questioned.

Right: Because I've been given honor, I welcome a higher standard of accountability.

Charisma may draw a crowd, but character is what qualifies a leader.

FOR THE ROAD

Who has real permission to correct you, and when did you last let them?

Lord, I want the cross with any crown You give me. Surround me with people who will tell me the truth, and give me a heart that welcomes it. Amen.

DAY 232

“I Go, Sir,” and Never Went

> *What do you think? A man had two sons. And he went to the first and said, “Son, go and work in the vineyard today.” And he answered, “I will not,” but afterward he changed his mind and went. And he went to the other son and said the same. And he answered, “I go, sir,” but did not go. Which of the two did the will of his father?*
>
> **Matthew 21:28–31 (ESV)**

Most believers can quote John 3:16. Far fewer can quote James 3:16: “For wherever there is jealousy and selfish ambition, there you will find disorder and evil of every kind.”

We are living in a John 3:16 versus James 3:16 season: will we trust Jesus as our Shepherd or our own selfish ambition?

Jesus’ story of the two sons gets right to it. The second son had the right words: “I go, sir.” He just never showed up in the vineyard. The first son started badly, but he went.

God isn’t into lip service. “So why do you keep calling me ‘Lord, Lord!’ when you don’t do what I say?” (Luke 6:46).

When it comes to the work God gives us, there are three postures we can take.

The first is **ownership**, which is really control. *This is my vineyard, my ministry, my business, my plan.* But “unless the LORD builds a house, the work of the builders is wasted” (Psalm 127:1).

The second is what I call **“abandon ship,”** which is apathy. *It’s all God’s anyway, so I’ll just sit back.* That sounds humble, but Scripture

says someone who won't even provide for his own household has denied the faith (1 Timothy 5:8).

The third is **stewardship**, which is co-labor. We go into the vineyard alongside the Father, doing what we see Him doing. It's His field, and we actually show up to work it.

The son who said "I go, sir" looked like a steward and lived like he owned his own time. That's how close lip service can come to obedience.

Almost right: "Yes, Lord, I'm with You," and then going on with my own plans.
Right: Getting up and going into the vineyard with the Father, even if my first answer was wrong.

God isn't into lip service.

FOR THE ROAD

What have you said "I go, sir" to that you still haven't done?

Father, change my mind where I've said no, and get me moving where I've only said yes. Amen.

DAY 233

A Person on a Team, Not a King in a Kingdom

Now these are the gifts Christ gave to the church: the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastors and teachers. Their responsibility is to equip God's people to do his work and build up the church, the body of Christ.

Ephesians 4:11–12

Picture a quarterback who decides he doesn't need a line. He's the most talented player on the field, so he sends the blockers to the sideline. On the first snap he's flat on his back. Talent without a team doesn't make a great player. It makes a sacked one.

Paul describes five ministry gifts Christ gave to His Church. Not one of them was designed to stand alone. Each is meant to function as a person on a team, not as a king in his own kingdom. And each one, when it slips out from under accountability, has its own counterfeit.

Apostles without accountability will birth businesses instead of movements.

Prophets without accountability will birth a breakdown instead of a breakthrough.

Evangelists without accountability will birth converts instead of sons and daughters.

Pastors without accountability will birth entitled children instead of selfless servants.

Teachers without accountability will birth scholars instead of disciples.

Notice that every counterfeit is *almost* right. A business can look a lot like a movement. A convert looks like a son on the day he walks the aisle. A scholar can quote what a disciple lives. That's what makes these drifts so hard to see from the inside.

The gifts are meant to balance one another. The prophet needs the teacher's grounding. The evangelist needs the pastor's care. The apostle needs all of them to keep a vision from becoming an empire. Together, they produce what Paul was after: a body growing up into maturity in Christ.

If you carry a gift, don't run from the team that can correct it. They are not a threat to your calling. They are the reason it will last.

Almost right: My gift is strong enough that I don't really need anyone else.
Right: My gift is meant to work on a team, and accountability keeps it producing real fruit.

Prophets without accountability will birth a breakdown instead of a breakthrough.

FOR THE ROAD

Which of the five counterfeits would your gift most likely drift toward without others around you?

Jesus, thank You for the gifts You've given Your Church. Plant me on a team, keep me teachable, and let my gift build Your body instead of my kingdom. Amen.

DAY 234

Your Position or Your Recognition

Don't be selfish; don't try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves.

Philippians 2:3

Shaquille O'Neal and Kobe Bryant won three straight NBA championships together. Many still believe they could have won more. They weren't really fighting over each other's positions. One was a dominant center, the other a brilliant guard. The fight was over who got more of the credit for the team's success.

That distinction is worth noticing. The spirit of control says, "I want your position." The spirit of competition says, "I want your recognition."

Saul felt it the day the women sang, "Saul has killed his thousands, and David his ten thousands!" (1 Samuel 18:7). David wasn't after Saul's throne. Saul was still king. But David was getting the credit, and Saul couldn't bear it.

Even the disciples weren't immune. At the Last Supper, hours before the cross, they argued about which of them was the greatest. Jesus answered, "I am among you as one who serves" (Luke 22:27).

Here's a hard truth: you cannot serve someone you are in competition with. You'll always be measuring them instead of helping them.

You know competition has taken root when protecting your platform becomes more important than protecting God's people. Every shepherd eventually has to decide: do I want to entertain an audience or train up an army? It's easier to entertain an audience, because then you never

have to worry about being replaced. But the goal of every good shepherd is to equip an army that might one day outgrow him.

The answer to competition is to change what you're building. Stop trying to get a seat at the influential table. Start setting tables where tired, overlooked people can rest and belong.

Almost right: I'm not trying to take anyone's place. I just want my contribution to be recognized.

Right: I'm equipping others to go further than me, and I'm happy to set the table.

You cannot serve someone you are in competition with.

FOR THE ROAD

Whose recognition bothers you more than it should?

Jesus, You came to serve. Take the competition out of my heart, and make me glad when others receive the credit. Amen.

DAY 235

Babel or the Ark

But among you it will be different. Whoever wants to be a leader among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first among you must become your slave. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many.

Matthew 20:26–28

Joseph had three seasons of authority, and he passed the same test in all of them.

In Potiphar's house, he kept his integrity when no one was watching. In prison, he served the other prisoners faithfully. In the palace, second only to Pharaoh, he used his power to save lives, including the brothers who had sold him (Genesis 39–41; 50:20).

That's the season of Reward. It is the stewardship of power, position, purity and promotion. Peter Vescovi says it plainly: "In the world, power is the goal; in the Kingdom, power is the test."

This season decides what you'll build with what God puts in your hands. You can build a Tower of Babel, a monument of selfish ambition made to make a name for yourself (Genesis 11:4). Or you can build an Ark of His presence, a place made for making disciples and carrying people through the storm.

When we take an ownership mentality instead of a stewardship mentality, we build more platforms of selfish ambition in our churches instead of altars of self-sacrifice. Provision is meant to fund His vision, not ours. Even Jesus, God in the flesh, only fulfilled His Father's vision.

A spiritual gift plus faithful stewardship of that gift becomes an anointing, and it will give you favor with people. But intimacy plus obedience becomes authority, and it gives you favor with God. Reward tests whether we'll settle for the first when He's offering the second.

If you've built some Babel in this season, bring it down and build again on His terms. The God of Joseph is still turning prisons into palaces for servants who stay faithful.

Almost right: God has given me influence, so I'll build something great for Him.
Right: God has given me influence to serve, so I'll build what carries His presence and makes disciples.

Provision is to fund His vision, not our vision.

FOR THE ROAD

Look at what you're building right now. Is it more like Babel or more like the Ark?

Father, everything I have is Yours. Make me a servant like Joseph, and let me build an Ark of Your presence, not a tower with my name on it. In Jesus' name, amen.

WEEK 47

Together

Meet once after Day 235, the last week of the Reward season. Speak about leaders with honor, and keep the focus on what you are building.

1. **Open:** Read Matthew 20:26–28 aloud. Why does Jesus make servanthood the measure of greatness?
2. **Day 231:** Why do you think accountability so often feels like accusation? What makes correction safe to receive?
3. **Day 232:** Ownership, “abandon ship” or stewardship: which posture do you most often slip into?
4. **Day 233:** Which of the five counterfeits (business, breakdown, converts, entitled children, scholars) have you seen up close? What would the real thing look like?
5. **Day 234:** Do you struggle more with wanting someone’s position or someone’s recognition?
6. **Day 235:** What is one “Babel” in your life you need to bring down, and one way you can build an “Ark” this month?

Practice together: Look back over the whole Reward season. Have each person name one gift, one responsibility and one area of influence God has given them. Then pray for each person that they’ll steward it as a servant, with accountability.

Pray: Pray for one another: “Lord, give us the cross with every crown. Make us servants who build an Ark of Your presence.”

SEASON NINE

Repeat

Break the Cycle

WEEKS 48–52

WEEK 48

Leaders Talk, Fathers Walk

The cycle will repeat one way or another, so this season opens by asking what we'll pass on: rebellion or righteousness. That starts with telling true fathers from people who only lead.

DAY 236

Repeat Your Righteousness or Your Rebellion

I lay the sins of the parents upon their children; the entire family is affected—even children in the third and fourth generations of those who reject me. But I lavish unfailing love for a thousand generations on those who love me and obey my commands.

Exodus 20:5–6

Look at the numbers in that verse. Three or four generations on one side. A thousand on the other. Sin has a long reach, but mercy has a longer one.

Every life is a pattern, and someone is copying it. Your kids are learning how to handle anger by watching how you handle it. The young believer you sit beside on Sunday is learning what a Christian looks like by watching what you do on Monday. Nobody gets to opt out of being an example.

We've come to the last season of the book: Repeat. It sounds like the easiest one. It isn't. Every season we've walked through, the crushing, the turning, the revival, the reforming, the releasing, will repeat in your life and in the lives of the people who come after you. Something is going to get passed down.

Here's the almost right that catches so many of us. We see the cycle in our family, the temper, the addiction, the silence, the religion without relationship, and we think seeing it is the same as breaking it. *I know where that leads. I'll never be like that.* Then one day we hear our father's voice come out of our own mouth.

Seeing a pattern is the beginning. It isn't the end. Patterns are broken by choosing, on purpose and every day, what you'll repeat instead. Paul told the Philippians, "Keep putting into practice all you learned and received from me—everything you heard from me and saw me doing" (Philippians 4:9). He wasn't ashamed to be copied, because he'd decided what was worth copying.

You will repeat something. Choose it.

Almost right: I've seen the cycle, so I won't repeat it.
Right: I'll repeat something, so I'm choosing what it will be.

You will either repeat your righteousness or you will repeat your own rebellion.

FOR THE ROAD

What pattern from your family line do you most want to end with you, and what will you repeat in its place?

Father, Your mercy reaches farther than any sin in my family line. Let what I pass on be faithfulness, not rebellion, and let it reach a thousand generations. Amen.

DAY 237

Revival Is a Cycle, Not a Moment

Won't you revive us again, so your people can rejoice in you?

Psalm 85:6

Notice the word *again*. The psalmist had already seen God move. He knew revival wasn't a one-time event. It was something God's people would need over and over.

We tend to remember revival as a moment. A service that went late. An altar full of people. A summer when everything felt alive. Those moments are real, and I thank God for them. But if revival is only a feeling we had once, we'll spend our lives trying to get back to a room instead of going forward with God.

Look back over the seasons we've walked through this year. Refinement crushed what was false. Repentance brought us home as sons and daughters instead of orphans. Revival counted the cost of following Jesus. Reformation tore down traditions that had replaced His Word. Revolution set our eyes on eternity. Release taught us to let go. Reward tested what we'd do with influence. None of those was meant to end with us. Each one was meant to make us someone who can walk the next person through it.

And Recalculate? That's the season you don't have to take. It's the long way around, the holding pattern we fall into when we trust human wisdom over God's Word. "Today when you hear his voice, don't harden your hearts" (Hebrews 3:15). Israel didn't wander because the wilderness was too hard. They wandered because they wouldn't trust Him in it. There's a wilderness of obedience that leads somewhere, and a wilderness of disobedience that leads in circles.

Repeat is where the whole process turns outward. You go through it again, and this time you bring someone with you.

Almost right: Revival is a powerful moment I keep trying to get back to.

Right: Revival is a process I keep walking through, and I bring others with me.

Breaking the cycle means embracing the process again, as a spiritual parent to the next generation.

FOR THE ROAD

Which season from this year are you most ready to walk someone else through?

Lord, revive me again, and don't let me wander in circles. Make me someone who goes forward with You and brings others along. In Jesus' name, amen.

DAY 238

Moses' Eighty Years

You led your people along that road like a flock of sheep, with Moses and Aaron as their shepherds.

Psalm 77:20

How long was Moses in the wilderness? Most of us would say forty years. But that's only half the answer.

Moses fled Egypt at forty and spent the next forty years in the desert of Midian, tending sheep. "Forty years later, in the desert near Mount Sinai, an angel appeared to Moses in the flame of a burning bush" (Acts 7:30). Then he went back to Egypt and spent another forty years leading Israel through the same kind of wilderness. That's eighty years, not forty.

The first forty, he learned the wilderness alone. He learned where the water was, how to survive the heat, how to wait on God when nothing was happening. The second forty, he took what he'd learned and led a nation through it.

That's the difference between a leader and a father. Leaders talk about the wilderness. They can preach a good sermon on it. They can tell you it builds character and that God is with you. All true. But fathers grab your hand and show you how to get through it. They've been there. They know where the water is. And they don't just tell you; they walk it with you.

Paul did this with Timothy. He didn't hand him a book on ministry. He took him along, let him watch, sent him out and wrote to him from prison. Timothy then did the same for others.

Maybe no one did that for you. Maybe you got through your wilderness alone. Peter Vescovi put it simply: “Do for others what wasn’t done for you. That’s how you break the cycle.”

Your first forty years may be over. Someone needs your second forty.

Almost right: Teaching people about the wilderness.

Right: Taking them by the hand and walking them through it.

Leaders talk about the wilderness, but fathers grab your hand and show you the way through.

FOR THE ROAD

What wilderness have you already learned that someone near you is walking right now?

Father, don’t let my hard years be wasted on me alone. Show me who needs a hand in the place I’ve already walked. Amen.

DAY 239

Provider or Father?

The thief's purpose is to steal and kill and destroy. My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying life. I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd sacrifices his life for the sheep.

John 10:10–11

Here's a hard contrast, but it teaches something we need. Think about a man who runs young women on the street for profit, and then think about a good father. Strangely, they make the same promises. *I'll take care of you. I'll protect you. I'll provide for you. You need me.*

On the surface, the words sound alike. That's what makes the counterfeit work. The way you tell them apart is by looking underneath the words, at three things.

The first is motive. An exploiter provides because he wants something from you. A father provides because he wants something for you.

The second is method. An exploiter keeps control through charm, fear, guilt and dependence. A father gives, teaches and disciplines in love, and he's willing to lay down his life. Jesus warned against leaders who "lord it over" people (Mark 10:42). A father kneels.

The third is outcome. Under an exploiter, people shrink and break. Under a father, they grow and flourish. Barnabas took a risk on Saul when no one trusted him, and Saul became Paul (Acts 9:27). That's what a father's covering produces: someone bigger than they were.

Spiritual abuse is real, and if you've been hurt by a leader who used you, I'm sorry. That was never God's heart for you. But don't let a counterfeit convince you there's no real thing. Counterfeits only exist because the real thing is valuable.

Those same three tests, motive, method and outcome, work far beyond leadership. They're how you tell right from almost right in almost anything.

Almost right: A leader who covers me, provides for me and tells me what to do.
Right: A father who gives himself for me and makes me stronger than I was.

An exploiter feeds on you; a father feeds you.

FOR THE ROAD

Are the people who lead you making you stronger, or more dependent on them?

Good Shepherd, You laid down Your life for me. Heal what was broken by those who used me, and make me a leader who gives instead of takes. Amen.

DAY 240

Fathers Don’t Have the Same Permissions as Sons

But you must be careful so that your freedom does not cause others with a weaker conscience to stumble.

1 Corinthians 8:9

A friend of mine who speaks in churches around the country once spent a casual evening at a bar with a youth pastor. The two of them handled alcohol very differently that night, and the youth pastor drank heavily. It became a lesson my friend carried with him: the people who follow a leader don’t copy his liberties in moderation. They copy them to excess.

That’s why fathers don’t have the same permissions as sons. A son can carry certain freedoms because he’s mostly responsible for himself. A father is always being watched and always being copied. “Not many of you should become teachers in the church, for we who teach will be judged more strictly” (James 3:1).

This isn’t about drawing up a list of rules. It’s about knowing that what you allow in yourself, the people under you will allow more of. A little yeast works through the whole batch (1 Corinthians 5:6).

The same principle shows up when we try to help someone who has fallen. Scripture tells us to “gently and humbly help that person back onto the right path. And be careful not to fall into the same temptation yourself” (Galatians 6:1). Notice both halves: gentleness, and carefulness. Compassion is right. But compassion without boundaries slowly turns into permission. We stop restoring the person and start making room for the sin.

So hold both. Be gentle with the fallen, and be clear about the line. Love them back onto the path without moving the path to where they are.

Leadership isn't a license. It's a weight. And the more people who are watching, the more carefully a father walks.

Almost right: It's my freedom, and I'm not responsible for what others do with it.
Right: My freedom is someone else's example, so I carry it carefully.

Fathers don't have the same permissions as sons.

FOR THE ROAD

What freedom do you enjoy that would hurt someone if they copied it to excess?

Lord, make me a father and not just a free man. Teach me to restore others gently without making room for what destroys them. Amen.

WEEK 48

Together

Meet once after Day 240. Share honestly about the fathers you had, the ones you didn't, and the one you want to become.

1. **Open:** Read Exodus 20:5–6 aloud. Why do you think God's mercy reaches so much farther than the consequences of sin?
2. **Day 236:** What pattern in your family have you seen clearly, but still found yourself repeating? What would choosing a different pattern look like this week?
3. **Day 237:** Looking back over this year's seasons, which one changed you most? Who could you walk through that same season?
4. **Day 238:** Who grabbed your hand in a wilderness season, or who do you wish had? What would "doing for others what wasn't done for you" look like for you?
5. **Day 239:** Talk through the three tests: motive, method and outcome. Where else, besides leadership, could they help you tell right from almost right?
6. **Day 240:** Why do people copy a leader's freedoms to excess? How do we restore someone gently without tolerating what hurt them?

Practice together: Each person names one person younger in the faith whom they could walk alongside this month. Be specific: a name, a time, one thing you'll do together. Check in with each other next week.

Pray: Pray Exodus 20:6 over the group, asking God to lavish His unfailing love on a thousand generations through each family here. Then pray for each person by name to become a father or mother to someone.

WEEK 49

The Courage to Correct

Eli could still help Samuel hear God, but he would not restrain his own sons. Real fathering holds love and consequences together, and it keeps loving when the results disappoint.

DAY 241

Samuel Heard, Eli Discerned

So he said to Samuel, "Go and lie down again, and if someone calls again, say, 'Speak, LORD, your servant is listening.'" So Samuel went back to bed.

1 Samuel 3:9

Every great athlete has a coach who could never have done what the athlete does. The coach may be slower, older, past his prime. He couldn't cover that receiver or make that throw. But he can still teach it, because he knows what it's supposed to look like.

That's the picture of Eli and Samuel. Three times God called the boy's name in the night, and three times Samuel ran to Eli: "Here I am. Did you call me?" Samuel could hear. He just didn't know what he was hearing.

Eli, by then, was almost blind (1 Samuel 3:2), and his spiritual sight had dimmed too. But he still knew what God's voice sounded like. On the third time, Eli understood, and he told the boy exactly how to answer.

Samuel could hear the voice of God, but it was Eli who helped him discern it.

We live in a day when many young believers are hearing from God. That's a gift. But a gift with no one to guide it can go wrong in a hurry. Raw hearing without seasoned wisdom produces confusion, pride and a lot of "God told me" that God never said.

And here's the encouragement for those of us who are older. You may not feel as sharp as you once were. You may not hear as clearly or move as fast. That doesn't make you useless. It may make you exactly what a

young Samuel needs: someone who has walked with God long enough to say, “That’s Him. Here’s how you answer.”

Gifted people need seasoned people. “As iron sharpens iron, so a friend sharpens a friend” (Proverbs 27:17).

Almost right: I hear God for myself, so I don’t need anyone to guide me.

Right: I hear God, and I let seasoned people help me understand what I’m hearing.

Samuel could hear the voice of God, but it was Eli who helped him discern it.

FOR THE ROAD

Who is your Eli, and if you’re further along, who is your Samuel?

Speak, Lord, Your servant is listening. Give me the humility to be guided, and the faithfulness to guide someone else. Amen.

DAY 242

The Father Who Kept the Peace

> *Meanwhile, the boy Samuel served the LORD by assisting Eli. Now in those days messages from the LORD were very rare, and visions were quite uncommon.*
>
> **1 Samuel 3:1**

Yesterday we saw Eli at his best. He could coach someone else's son to hear God. Today we see the tragedy behind it: he couldn't correct his own.

Notice how the chapter where Samuel learns to hear begins. Messages from the Lord were very rare. The high priest of Israel, the man whose whole job was to stand between God and the people, wasn't hearing much from heaven. Why?

Eli's sons, Hophni and Phinehas, served at the altar and treated the Lord's offerings with contempt. Eli knew. He scolded them, but he never restrained them, and God said that in doing so Eli had honored his sons more than Him (1 Samuel 2:29).

I think Eli loved his boys. That's what makes this so dangerous. Passivity often wears the face of love. It looks like a gentle father who hates conflict, who wants a calm house, who hopes his kids will grow out of it.

But look at what the quiet cost. It cost Eli the voice of God; the word grew rare on his watch. It cost his family the priesthood (1 Samuel 2:30–35). And it cost the nation. On the day the ark was captured, both of his sons died in battle, and when Eli heard the news, he fell and died (1 Samuel 4:17–18). A whole nation paid for one father's peace.

A father who keeps the peace by refusing to confront isn't protecting his family. He's postponing the bill, and someone else usually pays it.

It's easier to correct a stranger, a church member or someone else's kid. But the people closest to us are the ones God has made us most responsible for. Confronting your own is the hardest courage there is, and it's the kind heaven honors.

Almost right: I keep the peace at home because I love my kids too much to fight.
Right: I love God first, so I love my kids enough to restrain them.

Peace at home bought with God's honor is a peace that will cost you everything.

FOR THE ROAD

Where are you choosing peace over correction with someone God has made you responsible for?

Father, forgive me for every time I've honored people above You. Give me the courage to love my own enough to confront them. Amen.

“I Already Said Something”

Week 49 • Follow-up Reflection for Day 242

Scripture: 1 Samuel 2:22–25; 3:13

Eli said something.

He heard about his sons’ conduct. He questioned them. He told them their actions were wrong.

From a distance, that might look like faithful leadership. He recognized the problem and expressed his disapproval.

Almost right.

God’s assessment addressed what remained unchanged: Eli knew what his sons were doing, yet he failed to restrain them.

There is a difference between expressing a conviction and accepting the cost of living by it.

We can mistake a difficult conversation for completed obedience. We feel relieved because we finally spoke. But if we possess the responsibility and authority to act, speaking may only be the beginning.

“I told them” does not always answer the question, “What did you do with the responsibility entrusted to you?”

This requires discernment. We cannot control another person’s heart, and we are not responsible for enforcing our preferences on everyone around us. But we are responsible for our own participation, the boundaries we establish, and the conduct we permit within our care.

Sometimes what we call patience is fear of confrontation. Sometimes what we call mercy is reluctance to accept an uncomfortable consequence ourselves.

Renewing the mind means allowing God to examine those labels.

The question is not simply whether my words sound loving. It is whether my response serves truth, restoration, and the well-being of those affected.

Reflect

Where have I confused expressing concern with fulfilling my responsibility?

What consequence have I repeatedly announced but never followed through on?

Am I being patient—or avoiding the cost of obedience?

Practice

Identify one unresolved situation within your responsibility. Choose a clear, fair next step, communicate it calmly, and follow through.

Prayer

Father, show me where fear has disguised itself as gentleness. Give me wisdom to recognize my responsibility, humility to examine myself, and courage to act in love. Amen.

DAY 243

Love Doesn’t Always Feel Good

Great fear gripped the entire church and everyone else who heard what had happened.

Acts 5:11

I grew up with heavy-handed physical discipline. For years I wondered whether spankings and punishment had any place in the Church or in God’s Kingdom at all.

Years later, I was reading the story of Ananias and Sapphira to my son, who was nine at the time. They lied to the Holy Spirit about an offering, and both of them fell dead. My son looked up at me and asked, “Dad, why would a loving God kill people for lying?”

It’s a fair question. And it sent me back to rethink how I saw discipline, correction and consequences, especially for my own kids.

Here’s what I came to see. A loving God still brings real consequences for sin, sometimes public and severe, so that the fear of the Lord and holiness can be restored to His people. “The LORD corrects those he loves, just as a father corrects a child in whom he delights” (Proverbs 3:12). His discipline isn’t merely punishment. It’s meant to turn hearts back to Him.

That realization didn’t erase what happened in my childhood. Excessive discipline is real, and it does real damage. But it helped me see that the opposite extreme does damage too. When love never brings a consequence, children never learn that you reap what you sow. They never learn to reflect, never learn to repent, and they never see how their sin hurts other people.

I wonder if we've neglected the truth that discipline is part of biblical love. And I wonder if that's why so many of us now hear any correction as an attack.

Real love holds both. It doesn't crush, and it doesn't shrug. It brings a consequence with a heart that is aiming at restoration.

Almost right: If I really love them, I won't let them face consequences.
Right: Because I love them, I'll let consequences teach them what my words couldn't.

We've birthed a generation that sees accountability as accusation and consequences as condemnation.

FOR THE ROAD

Did you grow up with too much discipline, too little, or both? How is that shaping the way you correct others now?

Father, You discipline me because You love me. Heal what harsh hands did in my past, and teach me to correct others with a heart that wants to restore. Amen.

DAY 244

Liked or Trusted?

> *Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger by the way you treat them. Rather, bring them up with the discipline and instruction that comes from the Lord.*
>
> **Ephesians 6:4**

An old proverb says, “The child who is not embraced by the village will burn it down to feel its warmth.”

Paul warned fathers not to provoke their children to anger. When I think about that verse, I keep coming back to three ways we do it.

The first is abuse. It’s treating a child who holds tremendous value with cruelty, through hands or words. Jesus “will not crush the weakest reed or put out a flickering candle” (Matthew 12:20). Abuse does both.

The second is enablement. It’s worshiping a child because he bears your image. No limits, no boundaries, no consequences. Eli’s sons are the picture of this, as we saw two days ago.

The third is abandonment. It’s laying your children on the altar of your own ambition: your career, your ministry, your needs. David’s son Absalom grew up in a palace, but when he came home from exile his father refused to see him for two full years (2 Samuel 14:28). That son eventually tried to take the kingdom by force.

Three very different paths. All of them produce angry children.

Underneath enablement especially is a temptation every parent understands. We want to be liked. Correction risks a slammed door, a cold silence, a child who says, “I hate you.” So we keep the peace and hope it works out.

But when fathers refuse to consistently correct, discipline and give consequences, they're choosing to be accepted and liked over being a source of authority. And children without loving authority don't turn out free. They turn out angry.

Your kids don't need another friend. They have friends. They need someone they can trust to tell them the truth, who keeps telling it, and who keeps loving them while he does.

Almost right: I want my kids to like me.
Right: I want my kids to trust me, even on the days they don't like me.

When we refuse to correct, we've chosen being liked over being trusted.

FOR THE ROAD

Of abuse, enablement and abandonment, which one are you most tempted toward, or which one shaped you?

Lord, make me a father or mother my children can trust. Give me the courage to correct and the tenderness to keep embracing. Amen.

DAY 245

He Washed Judas's Feet

Jesus knew that the Father had given him authority over everything and that he had come from God and would return to God. So he got up from the table, took off his robe, wrapped a towel around his waist, and poured water into a basin. Then he began to wash the disciples' feet, drying them with the towel he had around him.

John 13:3–5

Judas had the best pastor in history. The best leader, the best counselor, the best friend a man could ask for. He sat under the perfect teaching for three years and watched miracles up close. And he still betrayed Jesus.

That should comfort every parent and every spiritual father who has watched someone they poured into walk away.

We tend to measure our love by the results. If my kids turn out well, I must have been a good father. If the person I mentored stays faithful, I must have done it right. And if they don't, we assume we failed, or we quietly decide that loving them wasn't worth it.

But look at that upper room. Jesus knew exactly what Judas was about to do. "He knew who would betray him" (John 13:11). And still He knelt, took Judas's dusty feet in His hands, washed them and dried them with the towel around His waist.

He didn't skip him. He didn't wash him last with a cold look. He served the man who was about to sell Him.

Jesus wasn't loving for the outcome. He was loving because that's what love does. "Such love has no fear, because perfect love expels all fear" (1 John 4:18). Love that's afraid of the results will eventually protect itself. Love that isn't afraid keeps kneeling.

This week we've talked about correction and consequences. Here's the other half. You can do it right and still be disappointed. Keep loving anyway. You're responsible for the love you give. You're not responsible for every choice they make with it.

Almost right: I'll know I loved them well if they turn out well.
Right: I love them unafraid, because that's what love does, whatever they choose.

Jesus knew Judas's heart and still washed his feet.

FOR THE ROAD

Whose choices have made you afraid to keep loving them?

Jesus, You knelt before the one who would betray You. Free me from loving for results, and teach me to love unafraid. In Jesus' name, amen.

WEEK 49

Together

Meet once after Day 245. This week touches family wounds, so go gently, and let anyone pass who needs to.

1. **Open:** Read 1 Samuel 3:9 aloud. Why do you think God let Eli, of all people, be the one to help Samuel recognize His voice?
2. **Day 241:** Who helped you discern God's voice when you were young in faith? What did they do that helped most?
3. **Day 242:** Why is it so much harder to correct our own than to correct others? Where does "keeping the peace" become honoring people above God?
4. **Day 243:** How has your own experience of discipline, too much or too little, shaped the way you hear correction today?
5. **Day 244:** Talk about the difference between being liked and being trusted. Which do your kids, or the people you lead, need from you right now?
6. **Day 245:** Is anyone here carrying grief over someone who walked away despite your love? How does Jesus washing Judas's feet speak to that?

Practice together: Each person names one conversation they've been avoiding with someone they're responsible for. Talk through how to have it with both truth and tenderness, then agree to pray for each other before it happens.

Pray: Pray Ephesians 6:4 over the parents and spiritual parents in the group. Then pray for every son or daughter who has walked away, by name if you can.

WEEK 50

Sons Before Fathers

You can only pass on what you've received. Before we father anyone, we have to know we're adopted, at great cost, by the Father who came looking for us.

DAY 246

Through the Glass

God decided in advance to adopt us into his own family by bringing us to himself through Jesus Christ. This is what he wanted to do, and it gave him great pleasure.

Ephesians 1:5

What usually happens first when a baby is born? The doctor lays the baby on the mother's chest.

When my son was born, that didn't happen. His life was in danger, and he was rushed to the ICU. I remember standing at the glass, looking at him, wondering what he might be thinking. I wanted to hold him. I couldn't.

And standing there, the Lord showed me something. That's the story of every man and woman created in His image. He longed to hold us. But sin had come between us, and His holiness would have consumed us. We had been orphaned by Adam's sin, and there was glass between us and the Father.

But God didn't stand at the glass forever. He had a plan, and it wasn't a last-minute one. "God decided in advance to adopt us." The Cross is not a knee-jerk reaction to fallen humanity. Before the foundation of the world, the Father had already decided to bring us home through His Son.

So we aren't saved by moralism, humanitarianism or self-denial. We're saved by adoption. The Father reached through the glass in Jesus Christ and took us in His arms.

Here's the almost right that so many believers live in. You can be legally adopted into the Father's house and still feel like an orphan. You can be

saved and still live at the glass, still wondering if He really wants to hold you. He does. He planned it. And it gave Him great pleasure.

This season is about passing faith on to the next generation. But you can't give what you haven't received. Sons come before fathers.

Almost right: I'm saved because I've worked hard to become a good person.

Right: I'm saved because the Father planned to adopt me and brought me home through Jesus.

The Cross is not a knee-jerk reaction to fallen humanity.

FOR THE ROAD

Are you living inside the Father's arms, or still standing at the glass?

Abba, thank You that You planned to bring me home before I ever knew I was lost. Let me stop living at the glass and rest in Your arms. Amen.

DAY 247

Your Adoption Was Not Free

For you know that God paid a ransom to save you from the empty life you inherited from your ancestors. And it was not paid with mere gold or silver, which lose their value. It was the precious blood of Christ, the sinless, spotless Lamb of God.

1 Peter 1:18–19

When Paul wrote about adoption, his readers knew exactly what he meant, because Roman adoption was a serious legal act. Scholars describe at least four things that happened when a Roman was adopted.

First, he lost all rights in his old family and gained all the rights of a legitimate son in his new one. Second, he became an heir to his new father's estate, and if other sons were born later, it didn't change his share. Third, his old life was wiped out. His debts were cancelled. Legally, he was a new person, and his past had nothing to do with him. Fourth, in the eyes of the law, he was absolutely the son of his new father.

Read those again and think about what Jesus did for you. The old family line, with its patterns and curses, no longer has the final claim on you. The inheritance is full. The debt is gone. And you are absolutely His. "Now you are no longer a slave but God's own child. And since you are his child, God has made you his heir" (Galatians 4:7).

Adoption today is expensive too. A private adoption can easily cost tens of thousands of dollars.

Your spiritual adoption was not free. It cost heaven its Son. The Father gave Jesus to die for our sins, and He bought our adoption with His blood and His body.

That's why sonship is not a sentiment. It's not a nice feeling about God that comes and goes. It's a legal, costly, settled reality. Dudley Hall, in *Orphans No More*, says, "Spiritual orphans spend their lives longing to belong." Sons don't have to long. They're already home.

Almost right: Being God's child is a beautiful feeling I hope to keep.
Right: Being God's child is a legal, costly fact He paid for in blood.

Your spiritual adoption was not free.

FOR THE ROAD

What old debt or family pattern are you still acting as if you owe?

Father, You paid everything to make me Yours. Let me live like a son who is already home, not an orphan still trying to belong. In Jesus' name, amen.

DAY 248

Which Father Would You Choose?

> *So he returned home to his father. And while he was still a long way off, his father saw him coming. Filled with love and compassion, he ran to his son, embraced him, and kissed him.*
>
> **Luke 15:20**

Picture three orphaned young men who each learn, one day, that their fathers are still alive.

The first is told his father is a billionaire. If he comes home and performs well in the family businesses, his father will restore him to wealth and luxury.

The second is told his father is powerful and demands total control. Give up every decision, obey without question, and hope he accepts you back. If he doesn't, his force will ruin you.

The third grew up believing his father died in a house fire, saving him from a gang of thugs. He always thought his father had abandoned him. Now he learns his father survived, and that he was the one who walked away. His father has been searching for him for years. He wants only to love him unconditionally, protect him with wise and compassionate rules, and have a son again.

Which father would you choose?

The answer seems obvious. But many of us live as if God were one of the first two. We relate to Him as the performance father (*If I do well enough, He'll bless me*) or the control father (*If I step out of line, He'll crush me*). Both are almost right. God does call us to faithfulness, and He is Lord. But neither is the Father Jesus revealed.

Jesus showed us the third father. The one who didn't just nearly die for us, but did. The one we thought had abandoned us, when really we had walked away from Him. The one who has been watching the road, and who runs.

"You received God's Spirit when he adopted you as his own children. Now we call him, 'Abba, Father'" (Romans 8:15).

How you see the Father will shape the father you become.

Almost right: God is a father I have to perform for or obey out of fear.
Right: God is the Father who gave Himself to save me and has been searching for me all along.

Which Father would you choose?

FOR THE ROAD

Which of the first two fathers have you been relating to, and what would change if you believed in the third?

Father, forgive me for picturing You as a boss or a tyrant. You've been watching the road for me. I'm coming home. Amen.

DAY 249

“I Had Good Parents”

For I was born a sinner—yes, from the moment my mother conceived me.

Psalm 51:5

Picture a warm, likable pastor preaching on healing the “orphan heart.” He talks about hope and belonging. He gives practical steps: join a community group, see a counselor, think positively, tell your story. “We can create family here,” he says, and people clap.

But he skips the deeper part. He never mentions original sin or our need for Christ’s redemption.

After the service, a woman in the foyer tells a friend, “I had good parents, so that sermon wasn’t for me.” And she walks away reassured that she has nothing to be set free from.

That’s what happens when we treat the orphan mindset as a purely emotional problem. If it’s only about bad parenting, then people with good parents don’t need the cure. If it’s only about trauma, then therapy and support groups can fix it. Those things can help, and I’m grateful for good counselors. But they can’t touch the root.

The orphan mindset is less about who our parents are, or the home we grew up in, and more about what original sin does to human nature. David didn’t blame his upbringing in Psalm 51. He went deeper: “I was born a sinner.” Every one of us inherited Adam’s separation from the Father. Great parents can’t fix that. Bad parents didn’t cause it.

That’s actually good news. It means the cure isn’t finding the right group or the right technique. It’s the gospel. We don’t become God’s children by natural descent, but by receiving Jesus and trusting Him.

While our legal right to be His children is secured by Christ's blood, it's the Holy Spirit who gives us a new heart and renews our minds to reflect the Father.

If you had good parents, thank God for them. But you still need a Father.

Almost right: The orphan heart is healed by community, counseling and positive thinking.

Right: The orphan nature I inherited from Adam is healed by adoption through Jesus.

The orphan mindset is less about who your parents are and more about what sin did to the human heart.

FOR THE ROAD

Have you ever thought, "That message isn't for me"? What might you have missed?

Father, I was born needing You, no matter how I was raised. Thank You for adopting me through Jesus. Let Your Spirit renew what my family never could. Amen.

DAY 250

One Father, Many Fathers

For even if you had ten thousand others to teach you about Christ, you have only one spiritual father. For I became your father in Christ Jesus when I preached the Good News to you.

1 Corinthians 4:15

Here's something that looks like a contradiction. Paul told the Corinthians, "I became your father in Christ Jesus." But Jesus said, "Don't address anyone here on earth as 'Father,' for only God in heaven is your Father" (Matthew 23:9).

Which is it? Both are true, and holding them together will protect you.

Paul knew the church in Corinth had plenty of teachers. Ten thousand of them. What they didn't have was enough fathers: people who would sacrifice for them, correct them, stay with them and love them like their own. Paul was saying, *I'm not just one more voice. I'm the one who brought you to life in Christ, and I'm not going anywhere.* That's a gift. Everyone needs people like that.

Jesus was guarding something else. The religious leaders of His day loved titles and the honor that came with them. He was warning against putting any human being in the place that belongs to God alone.

There is but one Heavenly Father, yet many people are called to embody the essence of His love. It's good, and biblical, to be fathered by those who reflect His heart. Honor them. Thank them. Learn from them.

But don't idolize them. Don't pledge unwavering loyalty to them. They're vessels God works through, and every one of them has limits and flaws. When a spiritual father becomes a pedestal, two things happen. You stop hearing God for yourself, and when that father fails, as

every human eventually does in some way, your faith goes down with him.

Keep your deepest allegiance where it belongs. Let mentors point you to the Father. Never let them replace Him.

Almost right: My spiritual father has earned my complete and unquestioning loyalty.
Right: I honor those who father me well, and my ultimate allegiance stays with God.

There is one Heavenly Father, yet many are called to embody His love.

FOR THE ROAD

Who has fathered you in the faith, and have you ever placed one of them where only God belongs?

Father, thank You for the people who have reflected Your heart to me. Help me honor them well and never put them in Your place. Amen.

WEEK 50

Together

Meet once after Day 250. This week is about receiving before giving. Let people talk about their own fathers, and about how they see the Father.

1. **Open:** Read Luke 15:20 aloud. What stands out to you about the father in that verse?
2. **Day 246:** Have you ever felt saved but still "at the glass," unsure whether God really wants to hold you? What helped, or what might?
3. **Day 247:** Which of the four Roman adoption rights means the most to you right now, and why?
4. **Day 248:** Of the three fathers in the story, which one did you grow up picturing God as? How has that shaped your faith?
5. **Day 249:** Why is it important that the orphan mindset comes from original sin and not only from our upbringing? How is that good news?
6. **Day 250:** Who has been a spiritual father or mother to you? How do we honor people like that without putting them on a pedestal?

Practice together: Each person writes a short thank-you note this week to someone who fathered or mothered them in the faith. Before you send it, read it to the group and talk about what that person reflected of the Father's heart.

Pray: Pray Ephesians 1:5 over one another, by name: "Father, thank You that You decided in advance to adopt ___ into Your family, and that it gave You great pleasure."

WEEK 51

The Home Is the First Pulpit

The cycle breaks or repeats at home. Marriage, not ministry, is the first place the Kingdom looks like family, and the place where the next generation learns what love is.

DAY 251

The Devil Showed Up When Eve Did

As the Scriptures say, "A man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife, and the two are united into one." This is a great mystery, but it is an illustration of the way Christ and the church are one.

Ephesians 5:31–32

Read the creation story slowly and notice who isn't there. Day after day, God creates, and there's no devil in the story.

Then God creates Eve. He brings her to Adam, and they become one flesh. And very soon, the serpent shows up.

I don't think that's an accident. The enemy didn't make his move against the animals or the garden. He moved against the marriage. Marriage was a threat to him, because marriage was a picture of something he hates: God's covenant love, Christ and His Bride, made visible on earth.

Think about what Eden had and didn't have. There were no pastors in the garden. No apostles, no prophets, no worship leaders, no buildings, no programs. But there was a marriage.

Jesus taught us to pray, "May your Kingdom come soon. May your will be done on earth, as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:10). So what does the Kingdom look like? It looks like family. In heaven there's a Father, and a Son who is also a Bridegroom coming back for His Bride, and a Father's house waiting for His adopted children.

Now ask what the Church is known for in the world today. Big buildings. Megachurches. Political positions. Signs and wonders. The size of the crowd. Some of those things aren't wrong. But Jesus said

there was one thing that would prove we belong to Him: “Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples” (John 13:35).

The world should be able to look at a Christian home and see the Kingdom. That’s why the enemy fights so hard there. He’s more afraid of what happens around your kitchen table than what happens on a stage.

Almost right: The Kingdom advances through big ministries and visible influence.
Right: The Kingdom looks like family, and it starts with a healthy marriage.

The enemy is more afraid of a healthy marriage than an influential ministry.

FOR THE ROAD

If someone watched your home for a week, what would they learn about the Kingdom?

Lord, let Your Kingdom come in my house first. Guard my marriage and my family, and let our love point people to You. Amen.

DAY 252

Husbands, Love Your Wives

For husbands, this means love your wives, just as Christ loved the church. He gave up his life for her.

Ephesians 5:25

Notice what this verse says, and what it doesn't. It says, "Husbands, love your wives." It doesn't say, "Husbands, love your children."

Of course God calls fathers to love their children. Scripture is full of that. But here, God needed to declare a priority, because He knew our flesh would get it backward. The natural pull of a parent is to put the kids first. Their schedules. Their happiness. Their every need. And slowly, without anyone deciding it, the marriage becomes a support system for the children instead of the center of the home.

It looks like love. It feels like sacrifice. That's what makes it almost right.

But here's what happens. A child-centered home produces entitled children, because they learn the world revolves around them. A marriage-centered home models servanthood and unconditional love, because children watch two people lay down their lives for each other every day.

Kids don't need to be the center of the universe. They need to see what covenant looks like. And a husband who loves his wife the way Christ loves the Church is the clearest picture of the gospel most children will ever see.

That kind of love isn't always comfortable. Christ "gave up his life" for His Bride. Marriage is meant to be a covenant and a crucible, a place where God refines us by asking us to die to ourselves. Many of us want

the comfort and convenience of marriage without the crucible. But that's not the marriage God designed.

So put her first. Not because the kids don't matter, but because they matter so much. The best gift you can give your children is a father who visibly, faithfully loves their mother.

Almost right: I put my kids first because that's what good parents do.
Right: I put my marriage first, because that's how my kids learn what love is.

God is more concerned about the covenant and crucible of marriage than the comfort and convenience of marriage.

FOR THE ROAD

Is your home centered on your marriage or on your children? What would one small shift look like this week?

Lord Jesus, You gave Yourself for Your Bride. Teach me to love my spouse that way, and let my children learn love by watching us. Amen.

DAY 253

The Favorite Wife's Children

Your wife will be like a fruitful grapevine, flourishing within your home. Your children will be like vigorous young olive trees as they sit around your table. That is the LORD's blessing for those who fear him.

Psalm 128:3–4

On a trip to Africa years ago, I saw homes where a man had more than one wife. A couple of years later I met a man from Uganda who helped me understand what I'd seen. He told me that in families with multiple wives, it's usually easy to tell which wife is the husband's favorite.

How? You look at the children. The favorite wife's children are the most confident.

It's a striking observation. We tend to assume children get their confidence from the attention and gifts we give them. Praise them enough, provide for them enough, sign them up for enough, and they'll grow up secure. But his observation pointed to a different source. The children's confidence came from watching how their father loved their mother.

You don't create healthy kids by metaphorically dipping them in gold. You get healthy, confident kids by letting them see unconditional love between Dad and Mom. That love shapes a child's picture of love more than anything else.

Psalm 128 paints the picture: a wife flourishing in the home, children like strong young olive trees around the table. Notice the order. The children flourish around a marriage that flourishes.

That’s why the breakdown of the family is so costly. Where family has no value, preparation for the future has no value. If we want a generation that can carry the faith, it starts with what they see at the table.

Some of us didn’t see that growing up. Some of us aren’t modeling it now. It’s not too late. When I think about the brokenness in our generation, my prayer is simple: *Lord, let the change begin with me.*

Almost right: My kids will be confident if I give them enough attention and gifts.
Right: My kids will be confident when they see me love their mother unconditionally.

You don’t create healthy kids by dipping them in gold.

FOR THE ROAD

What are your children, or the young people around you, learning about love by watching your closest relationships?

Father, let the change begin with me. Let the love in my home be the kind that makes the next generation secure. Amen.

DAY 254

Entrusted with His Bride

For if a man cannot manage his own household, how can he take care of God's church?

1 Timothy 3:5

In his book *Prophetic Pitfalls*, Bill Hamon tells of a pastor who was struggling in his marriage. He believed his wife was holding back his ministry. She didn't share his zeal, and he wanted out. He even quoted Scripture about laying aside every weight. When he sought counsel, he was told plainly that a divorce like that would be against God's will.

Later, in prayer, he begged God to free him from his marriage so he could focus on the Church. And God answered him with a question: "Do you really think I'm going to entrust My Bride to you when you can't even take care of your own bride?"

That turned him around. He went home and worked on his marriage.

Paul made the same point to Timothy. A leader who can't care for his own household has no business caring for God's. The home isn't a distraction from the call. It's the proving ground for it.

Look at John the Baptist. He spoke fearlessly against the hypocrisy of the religious leaders. But what finally cost him his head was confronting Herod over an unlawful marriage (Mark 6:17–18). He came in the spirit of Elijah, and he laid down his life defending the covenant of marriage, not growing a ministry.

Ministry, money and marriage all demand sacrifice. All three bring criticism and require endurance. But ministry and money bring public recognition, while marriage involves private surrender. No one applauds

you for coming home early, listening well or apologizing first. That's why it's so easy to pour ourselves into the work that gets noticed.

If you place more significance in building your ministry or your net worth than in nurturing your marriage, you're overlooking the true substance of revival. The fire on the platform starts with the faithfulness at home.

Almost right: My calling is so important that my marriage has to come second.

Right: My marriage is part of my calling, and it comes first.

Ministry and money bring public recognition, while marriage involves private surrender.

FOR THE ROAD

Where has your work, ministry or ambition been getting the best of you while your home gets what's left?

Lord, I don't want to build Your house and neglect my own. Make me faithful in private first, and trust me with whatever You choose after that. Amen.

DAY 255

Looking for One Man

Run to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem, look and take note! Search her squares to see if you can find a man, one who does justice and seeks truth, that I may pardon her.

Jeremiah 5:1 (ESV)

Imagine God searching a whole city, not for an army or a crowd, but for one man who does justice and seeks truth. And He can't find him.

Ezekiel heard the same heartbreak: "I looked for someone who might rebuild the wall of righteousness that guards the land. I searched for someone to stand in the gap" (Ezekiel 22:30). God still looks for men who will stand in the gap for their families and their communities.

The trouble is, we've been measuring manhood on the wrong scoreboard. "People judge by outward appearance," and so the world measures a man by success, by sexual conquest, by athletic strength and by wealth. I spent years in a world that measures men by speed, size and stats, and I can tell you those numbers fade fast. None of them can stand in a gap.

Scripture offers a different measure. A man after God's heart is four things.

He's a protector, a watchman. "I am making you a watchman for the people of Israel" (Ezekiel 33:7). He stays alert to what threatens his family, physically and spiritually.

He's a provider, a steward. He meets more than financial needs. He makes sure his home is cared for emotionally and spiritually too.

He's a priest, an intercessor. Like Job, who prayed for his children regularly (Job 1:5), he carries his family before God.

He’s a prophet, an ambassador. He represents Christ’s truth and love in his words and in his actions (2 Corinthians 5:20).

None of those show up on a highlight reel. All of them show up at home. And the world is still waiting for men like that.

Almost right: A real man is successful, strong, desirable and wealthy.

Right: A real man protects, provides, prays and represents Christ.

God isn’t looking for a crowd. He’s looking for one man to stand in the gap.

FOR THE ROAD

Of the four, protector, provider, priest and prophet, which one do you most need to grow in? If you’re not a man, which one do you most need to pray for in the men around you?

Father, You are still searching for someone to stand in the gap. Make me that one, in my home and in my city. Amen.

WEEK 51

Together

Meet once after Day 255. This week touches marriages and homes. Be honest and gentle, and remember that single, divorced and widowed members have a place at this table too.

1. **Open:** Read Ephesians 5:31–32 aloud. Why do you think God chose marriage as the picture of Christ and the Church?
2. **Day 251:** Why would the enemy be more afraid of a healthy marriage than an influential ministry? What is the Church known for where you live?
3. **Day 252:** What's the difference between a child-centered home and a marriage-centered home? What did you grow up in?
4. **Day 253:** What did you learn about love by watching the adults in your home? What do you want the next generation to learn from you?
5. **Day 254:** Where are ministry, work or money competing with home in your life right now?
6. **Day 255:** Talk through protector, provider, priest and prophet. Which roles do the men here most need encouragement in?

Practice together: Married members, plan one specific way this week to put your spouse first in front of your children. Single members, pick one family you can encourage or pray for by name. Share how it went next time.

Pray: Pray Matthew 6:10 over every home represented: "May your Kingdom come soon. May your will be done in this home, as it is in heaven."

WEEK 52

A Generation You Will Not See

Finishing well means living for people you'll never meet. You defend and build what lasts, choose destiny over legacy, and serve your own generation by handing the faith on.

DAY 256

The Hezekiah Syndrome

Then Hezekiah said to Isaiah, "This message you have given me from the LORD is good." For the king was thinking, "At least there will be peace and security during my lifetime."

2 Kings 20:19

As it is often told, the founder of Dubai, Sheikh Rashid, was once asked about his country's future. He answered, "My grandfather rode a camel, my father rode a camel, I ride a Mercedes, my son rides a Land Rover, and my grandson is going to ride a Land Rover, but my great-grandson is going to have to ride a camel again." When asked why, he said that hard times create strong men, and easy times create weak ones.

Whatever the exact words, the pattern is real: comfort tends to undo what hardship built.

King Hezekiah is a sobering example. He was a good king in many ways. But late in his life, the prophet Isaiah told him that everything in his palace would one day be carried off to Babylon, and that some of his own descendants would serve in a foreign king's palace (2 Kings 20:17–18). Hezekiah's response is chilling. "This message is good," he said. Why? Because it wouldn't happen on his watch.

That's the Hezekiah syndrome: *As long as there's peace in my lifetime, I'm satisfied.* It's almost right, because peace is a gift. But it stops at the edge of your own life. It never asks what your children's children will inherit.

Scripture calls us higher. "Good people leave an inheritance to their grandchildren" (Proverbs 13:22). That inheritance isn't mainly money. It's faith, character, and the strength to carry what God has given.

There's a scene near the end of *Man of Steel* that pictures this well. Jonathan Kent has spent Clark's whole childhood shaping his compassion, responsibility and integrity, preparing him to steward a power meant to protect people. He's preparing a son for a future he himself will never see.

That's what godly fathers do. They live for a generation they won't meet.

Almost right: At least there will be peace in my lifetime.
Right: I'm living so my grandchildren inherit a faith that's strong.

Live for a generation you will not see.

FOR THE ROAD

What are you building that will still matter three generations from now?

Father, deliver me from the Hezekiah syndrome. Let me care about the faith of children I'll never meet, and live today in a way that prepares them. Amen.

DAY 257

A Father Who Defends

Father to the fatherless, defender of widows—this is God, whose dwelling is holy.

Psalm 68:5

At my son's championship game, a referee began making unfair calls against him and saying things about him that weren't true. I stepped in to defend my son. Not out of anger, but to protect him from injustice, the way any parent would shield a child.

Afterward, I thought, *If an earthly father knows how to guard his own, how much more does our Heavenly Father watch over and defend us?*

Then a harder question came. Many of us don't feel protected by God as our defender. Could it be because we've never seen a parent's fierce protection turned toward our enemies? Too many of us have only seen a parent's anger aimed at us.

Psalm 68 says God is "father to the fatherless, defender of widows." His anger is real, but it burns against what harms His children, not against the children themselves. "If God is for us, who can ever be against us?" (Romans 8:31).

Here's the challenge for parents. If we only ever direct our anger at our kids and never toward the things that threaten them, maybe it's because we're walking in the fear of man and not the fear of God. We're more worried about what the coach, the teacher or the other parents think than about whether our child is being treated justly.

This isn't permission to fight every battle for our children or to defend their wrong. Discipline still matters, as we saw earlier. But our kids should know, deep down, that we're on their side, and that when

something comes against them unjustly, we'll stand between them and it.

That's how they'll learn what God is like.

Almost right: I'm a strong parent, so my anger keeps my kids in line.
Right: I'm a righteous parent, so my strength stands between my kids and what would harm them.

Have our children experienced the Righteous Judge through our parenting, or only a wrathful parent?

FOR THE ROAD

When you picture God's anger, is it aimed at you, or at what's trying to destroy you?

Father, You are my defender. Heal the places where I only knew anger aimed at me. Make me a parent who shields, not just one who scolds. Amen.

DAY 258

Build Low and Slow

So Noah did everything exactly as God had commanded him.

Genesis 6:22

Here's a detail we tend to skip in Noah's story. When the boat was finished, God said, "Go into the boat with all your family" (Genesis 7:1). The ark wasn't built for an audience. It was built for a household.

And it took years. Picture Noah's sons growing up around that work, watching their father pour his best years into something that drew no crowd and earned no applause, only because God said so. Scripture sums it up in one plain line: "Noah did everything exactly as God had commanded him."

I see in Noah a picture of the inheritance that matters most. What he passed on to his sons wasn't material wealth. It was the wisdom to use God-given resources, talents and provision to build an ark of intimacy with God instead of a monument to man. When the rain came, that wisdom was the only thing that floated.

Nate Johnson has written about builders like this. He calls it "a call to build low and slow while the rest of the ministry world is building fast and publicly." It's building the family over the organization. It's putting down roots that reach beyond your own lifetime. Most of it happens underground, so few people notice.

If that's where God has you, it can feel like going backward, or like you've lost favor. You haven't. You're building what lasts.

Wealth without wisdom tends to disappear within a generation or two. Fame fades even faster. But children who watched their parents obey God when it was slow and unseen carry something that can't be spent.

Build what will carry your family through the flood.

Almost right: Building something impressive, fast and in public.
Right: Building what will carry my family, low and slow, with roots deeper than my lifetime.

Noah's inheritance to his sons was not wealth. It was the wisdom to build an ark.

FOR THE ROAD

Where are you tempted to build fast and publicly when God is asking you to build low and slow?

Lord, I want to do everything You've commanded, even when it's slow and no one sees. Help me build what will carry my family through. Amen.

DAY 259

Legacy or Destiny?

In the same way, let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father.

Matthew 5:16

Most of us think about legacy at some point. How will I be remembered? What will people say at my funeral? What will last after I'm gone?

There's nothing wrong with wanting to be remembered well. But legacy, at its core, is about us. It focuses on our accomplishments, our reputation, our name. And even the greatest legacies fade as the generations pass.

Destiny asks a different question. Not "How will I be remembered?" but "What will people say about Jesus because of how I lived?"

Jesus told us to let our good deeds shine, not so people would praise us, but so they would praise our Father. That's the shift from legacy to destiny. John the Baptist understood it: "He must become greater and greater, and I must become less and less" (John 3:30).

Legacy can also become a trap. When you care more about your reputation than about the truth, you start hiding things. A good reputation builds trust, and that matters. But the need to protect your image can make it very hard to confess hidden sin, because confession might cost you the way people see you. Many have kept up a spotless public legacy while something rotted underneath.

So the real question isn't who people think you are. It's who you are when no one is watching.

Reputation is who others think you are. Perception is who you think you are. Character is what God knows you are.

You can leave a long legacy on the earth and still miss what matters most to God. It's a sobering thought, and it should make all of us examine our hearts. Am I living for people's approval and my own name, or for God's approval and eternity?

Almost right: Living so that I'll leave a lasting legacy and a good name.

Right: Living so that people talk about Jesus because of how I lived.

You can fool others, you can even fool yourself, but you cannot fool God.

FOR THE ROAD

If people talked about your life after you were gone, would they mostly talk about you, or about Jesus?

Lord Jesus, You must become greater and I must become less. Let my life point to You, and let my character in secret match my name in public. Amen.

DAY 260

He Served His Own Generation

> *You have heard me teach things that have been confirmed by many reliable witnesses. Now teach these truths to other trustworthy people who will be able to pass them on to others.*
>
> **2 Timothy 2:2**

Count the generations in that one verse. Paul. Timothy. Trustworthy people. Others. Four generations of faith, handed from one life to the next, and Paul wouldn't meet most of them.

When Paul preached about David, he summed up his whole life in a sentence: David "served God's purpose in his own generation" and then fell asleep (Acts 13:36, NIV). Not every generation. His own. He did what God gave him to do, in his time, and then he handed it on.

That's where this book ends, and where your next season begins.

Fifty-two weeks ago, we started with one skill: telling right from almost right. Then we walked through the seasons. Refinement, where God crushes what's false and makes us like gold. Repentance, where orphans come home. Revival, where we count the cost. Reformation, where His Word tears down our traditions. Recalculate, the long way around we never had to take. Revolution, where eternity becomes real. Release, where we let go. Reward, where influence tests us. And now Repeat, where we take everything we've learned and give it away.

In every season, the almost right looked spiritual, and the right thing was closer to Jesus.

Here's the last almost right: finishing your own race well and stopping there. Paul could say, "I have finished the race" (2 Timothy 4:7). But Paul also left a Timothy behind.

Remember Moses' second forty years? Someone has to take the young believer in the wilderness by the hand and show them the way through. That someone is you.

You don't need a platform. You need one person. Then another. Then keep pushing the plow.

Almost right: Finishing my own race well.
Right: Finishing by handing the faith on, so it reaches people I'll never meet.

Serve God's purpose in your own generation, and hand it to the next.

FOR THE ROAD

Who is your Timothy? Write a name down, and call them this week.

Heavenly Father, we come to You in humility, asking for wisdom to understand the reason for our seasons. Make us a sons of Issachar generation who understand the times. Help us carry the weight of this Repeat season: renewing our minds, investing in others and sharing the truths You have shown us, so we can break the cycle of generational spiritual bankruptcy. In Jesus' name, amen.

WEEK 52

Together

Meet once after Day 260. This is your last gathering for this book. Leave time to remember the year and to send one another out.

1. **Open:** Read 2 Timothy 2:2 aloud. Who were the “reliable witnesses” who handed the faith to you?
2. **Day 256:** Where do you see the Hezekiah syndrome in yourself, being content as long as things are fine in your own lifetime?
3. **Day 257:** Did you grow up seeing a parent’s anger aimed at you, or aimed at what threatened you? How has that shaped the way you see God?
4. **Day 258:** What are you building “low and slow” that may not show above the surface for years?
5. **Day 259:** What’s the difference between legacy and destiny for you? Where is reputation competing with character?
6. **Day 260:** Look back over the nine seasons. Which “almost right” did God expose most clearly in you this year?

Practice together: Each person names their Timothy out loud: one person they’ll invest in over the next year. Then decide together whether to begin this book again with them, as their guide this time. That’s how the cycle repeats.

Pray: Lay hands on one another and pray Acts 13:36 over each person: “Lord, let ___ serve Your purpose in this generation, and hand the faith on to the next.”

EPILOGUE

Keep Your Lamp Burning

> *Then the other five, who were foolish, asked the others, "Please give us some of your oil because our lamps are going out." But the others replied, "We don't have enough for all of us. Go to a shop and buy some for yourselves."*
>
> **Matthew 25:8–9**

Jesus told a story about ten bridesmaids. All ten were invited. All ten had lamps. All ten fell asleep while they waited. From across the room, you couldn't tell them apart.

Then, at midnight, the cry went out: "Look, the bridegroom is coming! Come out and meet him!" (Matthew 25:6). And in that moment the difference showed. Five had oil. Five had almost enough.

That is the last "almost right" in this book, and it may be the most important one. Five of those women were almost ready. They knew the Bridegroom was coming. They had the right lamp and the right clothes and showed up at the right house. But oil can't be borrowed. The wise weren't being selfish. They were telling the truth: no one can lend you their intimacy with God. No one can carry your oil for you.

For a year now you've practiced telling right from almost right, one day at a time. That training doesn't end on the last page. The seasons will come around again. You'll be refined again, called to repent again, stirred again, sent again. Every time, the almost right will be waiting, dressed in Bible words.

So keep buying oil. Buy it in the secret place. Buy it in the Word. Buy it when you obey in small things no one sees. Buy it with the friends who read these pages with you.

The oil no one can lend you is the oil you bought in secret.

FOR THE ROAD

If the cry went out tonight, would you have oil, or almost enough?

Jesus, my Bridegroom, I want to be ready when You come. Keep me close, keep me burning, and keep me telling the difference between right and almost right until I see You face to face. Amen.

Keep your lamp burning.

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