To our Grace Church Kelseyville family, a popular web designer has the slogan, “designed with you in mind.” I’m not sure why that stuck with me, but it truly captures my heart for you as you go through this devotional. It has been designed and written specifically with you, Grace Church, in mind.

Our hope is that you will be as challenged as we were while writing it. God is holy and full of grace, and sometimes those two truths can feel like they collide. It was observing this collision in our own understanding of God that provoked us to write and instruct on this topic.

Which side comes most naturally to you? Do you default to "God's holiness"? Or is your default "God's grace"? Whichever it is, your view will be both challenged and blessed by this venture.

My prayer is that you will experience the fruit of being stretched by this study. I also pray that the Holy Spirit will clarify any hindrances to fully knowing and understanding God’s heart for you and for His other children.
Paul Mollett

What began as a conversation between Paul and me in the summer of 2024 has grown into the devotional you now hold in your hands. We realized that so often, the habitual errors in our daily lives stem from a root cause: an improper understanding of God’s holiness and a reliance on a "counterfeit grace."

This is not a struggle unique to one group. I have witnessed this in our own church and in congregations far and wide. Regardless of our economic status, our education, our culture, or our past mistakes, we all share the same struggle in understanding the depth of God’s almighty holiness.

My prayer is that this study gives you a taste of the majestic glory of God that leaves you hungry for more. Through the process of writing, studying, and reflecting, I have found my own faith and reverence deepened. I am confident that if you fully engage with these pages, you will experience that same growth.
Brent Smith

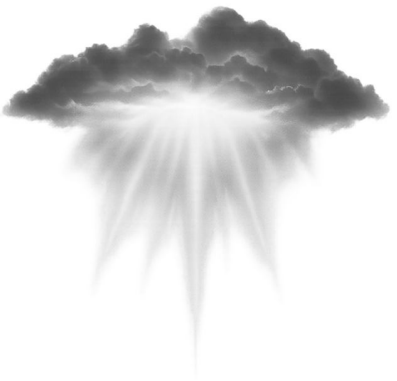
To the Church in Kelseyville

"... for you are a chosen people. You are royal priests, a holy nation, God's very own possession. As a result, you can show others the goodness of God, for he called you out of the darkness into his wonderful light."

—1 Peter 2:9

Set Apart

By Grace



GraceChurch
KELSEYVILLE

Set Apart By Grace
2025

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Except where otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations in this book are taken from the New Living Translation (NLT), Carol Stream, Illinois; Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2015.

Why use the NLT translation? The NLT offers clear everyday use of the English language which makes it easier to grasp the meaning of Scripture for personal reading, new believers, or teaching those who are unfamiliar with biblical terms. Please reference other translations like the New American Standard Bible (NASB) to gain a more word-for-word understanding.

Details in stories are possibly fictional to be used as illustrations or may have been changed to protect the identities of the people involved.

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CONTENTS

Progress Checklist 7
How to Use This Book 9
Commitment 11
What is Fasting? 13
Introduction 15
Day Zero —Analysis 17

WEEK ONE 23

Day One —Created for Holiness 27
Day Two —Distorted Design 30
Day Three —Problematic Condition 34
Day Four —Holiness In Christ 38
Day Five —Battlegrounds 41
Day Six ——Victorious Glory 44
Day Seven —Devoted People 48
Partnership and Small Group Discussion 51

WEEK TWO 55

Day Eight —Unseen Perfection 59
Day Nine —Beyond Limits 63
Day Ten —Balanced Scale 66
Day Eleven —Majestic Light 70
Day Twelve —Mysterious Wisdom 73
Day Thirteen —Overwhelming Beauty 77
Day Fourteen —All Bow Before Him 80
Partnership and Small Group Discussion 85

WEEK THREE 89

Day Fifteen —Place of Sacrifice 92
Day Sixteen —As It Is In Heaven 96
Day Seventeen —Citizens of a Holy City 99
Day Eighteen —Eden's Peace 103
Day Nineteen —Encountering God 106
Day Twenty —Tent of Meeting 109
Day Twenty One —Radiant Reflection 112
Partnership and Small Group Discussion 115

WEEK FOUR **119**

DAY TWENTY TWO —UNTOUCHABLE GLORY 123
DAY TWENTY THREE —HOLY LAND 127
DAY TWENTY FOUR —STRANGE FIRE 130
DAY TWENTY FIVE —GOD'S PRESENCE MAKES IT HOLY 133
DAY TWENTY SIX —THE TEMPLE 136
DAY TWENTY SEVEN —GLORY ON THE MOUNTAIN 139
DAY TWENTY EIGHT —VEIL TORN 142
PARTNERSHIP AND SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION 146

WEEK FIVE **149**

DAY TWENTY NINE —TRUE FREEDOM 153
DAY THIRTY —GRACE FOR ALL 157
DAY THIRTY ONE —THE WAY OF GRACE 160
DAY THIRTY TWO —LAW FULFILLED 163
DAY THIRTY THREE —TURNING AND TRUSTING 167
DAY THIRTY FOUR —DIVINE PROVISION 170
DAY THIRTY FIVE —THE GENTLE GOD 173
PARTNERSHIP AND SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION 177

WEEK SIX **181**

DAY THIRTY SIX —HOLINESS RESTORED 185
DAY THIRTY SEVEN —THE SURRENDERED LIFE 189
DAY THIRTY EIGHT —BE HOLY 192
DAY THIRTY NINE —FAITHFUL IN THE FIRE 195
DAY FORTY —WHOLE WORSHIP 199
DAY FORTY ONE —DAY BY DAY 202
DAY FORTY TWO —EYES ON ETERNITY 206
PARTNERSHIP AND SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION 209

FINAL COMMISSION: MY NEXT STEPS **213**

SPIRITUAL INVENTORY **217**
ESSENTIAL BELIEFS **220**
THE GOOD NEWS **223**
DISCIPLESHIP COMMITMENT **224**
ACCOUNTABILITY QUESTIONS **226**
HELP FOR A DISCIPLER **227**

Progress Checklist

Devotions Completed

- ☐ Week One: Days One — Seven
- ☐ Week Two: Days Eight — Fourteen
- ☐ Week Three: Days Fifteen — Twenty One
- ☐ Week Four: Days Twenty Two — Twenty Eight
- ☐ Week Five: Days Twenty Nine — Thirty Five
- ☐ Week Six: Days Thirty Six — Forty Two

Fasting Diligence

- ☐ Week One: Days One – Seven
  Fasting from: _____
- ☐ Week Two: Days Eight – Fourteen
  Fasting from: _____
- ☐ Week Three: Days Fifteen – Twenty-One
  Fasting from: _____
- ☐ Week Four: Days Twenty-Two – Twenty-Eight
  Fasting from: _____
- ☐ Week Five: Days Twenty-Nine – Thirty-Five
  Fasting from: _____
- ☐ Week Six: Days Thirty-Six – Forty-Two
  Fasting from: _____
- ☐ Week Seven: Days Forty-Three – Fifty
  Fasting from: _____

How to Use This Book

Welcome to this 42-day study. To get the most out of the next six weeks, we recommend utilizing the following tools and practices.

1. The Power of Partnership
While this devotional is written so that it can be completed in the quiet of your own personal time with God, we deeply believe in the power of community. Faith is personal, but it was never meant to be entirely private.

- **Grow Together:** We strongly encourage you to partner with others while completing this book. This could be a spouse, a friend, a mentor, a small group, or a Bible study.
- **Accountability:** Sharing your daily takeaways with a partner helps solidify what you have learned. Knowing someone else is walking this path with you provides the encouragement needed to stay consistent when life gets busy (and it will!).
- **The Weekly Check-In:** At the end of every seven days, you will find a section titled **"Partnership and Small Group Discussion."** This section provides specific prompts and questions designed to spark conversation. If you are in a small group, use this time to review the week's themes. If you have a single accountability partner, grab coffee or hop on a call to discuss how God has been challenging you through the week's reading.

2. Evaluation: The Spiritual Inventory
Growth is often difficult to see day-to-day. To help you track your progress, we have included a **Spiritual Inventory** located in the back of this book.

- **When to Take It:** We encourage you to complete this assessment periodically. Perhaps at the start of the study, at the halfway mark (Day 21), and upon completion (Day 42).
- **Understanding Your Score:** This assessment is designed to highlight signs of spiritual health. Please remember that these scores are a snapshot, not a permanent label. Spiritual health will fluctuate from season to season or even day to day.
- **The "Truth Teller" Challenge:** We all have blind spots. For a truly courageous step in your growth, ask a truth teller whether they agree with your assessment. This is someone who knows you well and loves you enough to be honest.

Commitment

This devotional is an invitation to draw closer to God and experience a deeper Spirit-driven daily life. It's designed to challenge you, inspire you, and equip you to live out your faith in tangible ways. But like any meaningful journey, it requires commitment.

We encourage you to set aside dedicated time each day for this devotional. Find a quiet space, open your Bible, and come ready to pray and be challenged by God's Word. Don't rush through the pages; instead, take notes, reflect on what you're reading, and consider how you can apply these truths to your life. Remember, knowledge without practice is knowledge wasted.

We also believe in the power of community. Consider partnering with others for accountability and sharing your daily takeaways. And as you engage with this devotional, we also invite you to explore the discipline of fasting.

While you don't have to commit to every single suggestion perfectly, our deepest desire is for you to commit to completing this book and intentionally challenging yourself along the way. This isn't about us; this is for you and your spiritual growth. Writing down your commitments helps solidify your goals and may inspire you to achieve them.

So, are you ready?

My Commitment:

I commit to engaging with this devotional daily and challenging myself to grow in my faith. I will strive to:

- ☐ Read each day and set aside a specific time and place.
- ☐ Open my Bible, pray, and be ready to be challenged.
- ☐ Take notes and do not rush.
- ☐ Talk to others about my daily takeaways.
- ☐ Look for ways to apply what I am learning.
- ☐ Partner with others for accountability (highly recommended!).
- ☐ Explore fasting dedication (optional).

Signed: _____

Date: _____

What is Fasting?

Fasting is a spiritual discipline where you intentionally set aside physical needs for a deeper connection with God. It's not about showing off your sacrifices or appearing righteous to others, nor is it a quick way to lose weight (though a 40-day fast like Jesus's might have that side effect!).

Instead, biblical fasting is a humble act of seeking God in the privacy of your heart. It reminds us that we don't live by bread alone (*Deut. 8:3, Matt. 4:4*). When you feel physical hunger, let it serve as a reminder of your spiritual hunger for God's presence. Our ultimate goal is to bring God glory, and our true sustenance comes from His very breath. God is our life, energy, and passion.
It's important to remember that fasting and prayer aren't about earning God's favor, but about deepening your relationship with Him. When you fast with a sincere and humble heart, God sees your efforts in secret and will reward you (*Matt. 6:4-6*). This reward might be a spiritual breakthrough, answers to your prayers, increased intimacy with God, or a renewed sense of purpose.

While often associated with petitioning God for something specific and then ending once the prayer is answered, fasting can also be a continuous discipline. This can look different for everyone. It might involve a full day of fasting, skipping a particular meal, or giving up specific foods like sugar or caffeine. You can even fast from things that consume your time and attention, such as turning off your phone for set periods or limiting social media use.

Some people even use activity trackers to help schedule dedicated time for engaging with God. As you fast, focus on prayer and reflection, pouring out your heart's desires to God. Seek His guidance, confess your sins, and express your gratitude. Ultimately, fasting redeems time that might otherwise be lost or wasted, dedicating it to a godly purpose.

What will you fast from during this study?

Introduction

In a world constantly pulling us in countless directions, reminding us of traditional theories, pushing new philosophies, demanding our attention and shaping our identities, it's easy to lose sight of what truly matters. We live in an age of overwhelming access to information and fast-paced lives. Everyone has an opinion and a new method that will finally make us complete. We strive, we achieve, we consume, yet often, there remains a persistent whisper of longing, a desire for something more, something deeper, something eternal. This book, ***Set Apart by Grace***, is designed by the pastors at Grace Church to illuminate the awe-inspiring character of God and, in turn, reveal who we are in His glorious presence.

The concept of God's holiness can often feel abstract, a distant and perhaps even intimidating truth. How can finite beings like us comprehend the infinite purity and perfection of the Almighty? Yet, it is precisely in grappling with this attribute that we can grasp a clearer understanding of ourselves and the boundless grace extended to us. When we begin to truly grasp God's unblemished holiness and His fervent desire for us to be *"set apart"* – **distinct from the world even as we live within it** – our perspective on sin shifts dramatically. No longer a trivial misstep, sin becomes a serious affront to the One who is utterly pure.

Why does this matter? Without a foundational understanding of God's perfect standards, the deceptive nature of sin can become normalized, and its destructive power minimized. We risk falling into one of two dangerous traps: an endless striving to earn God's favor through our own imperfect works, or a careless justification of our shortcomings because we fail to grasp their true gravity. But when we come face to face with the impossibility of achieving perfection on our own, the brilliance of God's abundant grace shines on us. It is in the chasm between our fallen state and His perfect holiness that the bridge of grace appears, breathtaking in its beauty and entirely undeserved.

Our Own Image

It's challenging to connect with a God we can't see, touch, or even hear. Yet, our understanding of God comes not just from what's visible, but from what's unseen and deeply known.

The modern Church has, regrettably, lost sight of the true God. We've molded Him into our own image, and frankly, people don't need an amplified version of themselves. They desperately need God.

Our fundamental error has been reducing God to a more "manageable" size, mistakenly believing our diluted version would be more palatable and less confrontational than a God who gives commands and judges sin. We've shifted the narrative from God's glory to a focus on human convenience, effectively downgrading God's commandments to mere suggestions.

One of the greatest dangers facing the Church today is the risk that professing believers will replace the God of the Bible with a lesser deity of their own making. This is idolatry! Even those who genuinely love God can slip down this path, emphasizing God's more appealing traits while conveniently ignoring those that challenge or convict. As we've observed, many believers have lost all sense of the fear of God, imagining Him in overly casual, friendly terms. If we are to truly worship the Lord, we must correct this theological imbalance.

And Yet God Is So Gracious

God's grace is boundless. The very reason you and I draw breath is because of His immense mercy. Rather than instantly punishing every sin with the penalty we justly deserve, death, God extends His grace and goodness. This incredible kindness should naturally lead us to repentance, just as Romans 2:4 asks:

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?

Tragically, our hearts are often so wicked and corrupt that instead of receiving God's mercy with gratitude and deep remorse for our sins, we begin to take His grace for granted. As a result, when God does bring punishment for sin, we mistakenly perceive Him as unjust.

Why Take The Time For This Devotional?

Our hope for this devotional is to guide you toward a balanced and redemptive truth. We pray that this will help you walk daily in the Spirit, learn to be humble before God, equip you to put your faith and understanding into actions, and grow into a mature, faithful disciple of Jesus.

May your daily reflections help you navigate the historical tension between works-based righteousness and a casual approach to sin. May you also discover the joy and freedom that come from understanding God's holiness, embracing His radical grace, and living a life truly *set apart*, not by your efforts, but by His boundless love.

Day Zero —Analysis

Have you ever found yourself wrestling with questions about God, feeling a disconnect between what you believe and what you observe in the world or even in your own life? We all bring pre-conceived notions about who God is, and these often shape our decisions and actions in different ways.

Read the **seven distinct scenarios**, each illustrating a common misunderstanding of God's character. As you read, consider if you see glimpses of yourself or someone you know in each story. After reflecting on these stories, you'll have the opportunity to answer questions that address the errors described, moving towards a clearer understanding of who God truly is. This analysis will help you begin shaping your understanding of God's character and your position before Him.

#1 Why Worship?

Arthur's wife, Sarah, suggests they go to church. Arthur sighs. "Why bother?" he asks. "All that singing and praising... it feels so forced. If God is all-powerful, doesn't He already know how great He is? It seems a bit arrogant and prideful for God to want us to constantly say these things. I'd rather just stay home and have a relaxing morning."

Because Arthur doesn't grasp the immense and unique holiness of God, His total separateness and perfection, Arthur views worship as a human construct for an insecure deity. Adoration of this unseen Spirit seems so distant and unnatural for Arther because he misses the point that worship is not for God's benefit but for his own. Worship is an opportunity to acknowledge and respond to God's glorious nature, to direct our hearts towards truth and awe, and to experience communion with the ultimate divine, which fulfills our deepest desires. Unlike imperfect humans, God really is holy and is the only being who deserves praise. Not because He needs it, but because His holiness demands it. Arthur's choice to skip church stems from a fundamental misunderstanding of who God is, what worship truly entails, and ultimately a broken relationship with God and the body of Christ.

#2 Does It Matter?

Violet spends her evenings lost in the endless scroll of social media, her eyes grazing over a steady stream of sexually suggestive content, gossip, violence, insecurities, and profanity.

When her friend Carol gently suggests she might be more mindful of what she consumes, Violet shrugs it off. "It's just entertainment," she dismisses. "Everyone does it. What's the big deal? God is love, right? He understands we're not perfect. Besides, I'm saved by grace! Jesus died for my sins—past, present, and future. I'm going to Heaven no matter what, so I might as well enjoy life. God's grace covers it all." Unfazed, Violet continues to indulge these habits, her mind rarely dwelling on anything pure or edifying.

Violet's casual attitude toward her online habits stems from an essential misunderstanding of God's "Holy, Holy, Holy" nature. She minimizes the seriousness of sin because she hasn't grasped that God's holiness demands a transformative response from those He saves. She's fixated on the forgiveness aspect of grace, completely overlooking its empowering aspect, the very power that enables us to live differently. Because Violet doesn't comprehend the vast chasm between God's perfect holiness and her own brokenness, she fails to see the inherent damage and separation sin causes. Her decisions are driven by immediate gratification and the acceptance of worldly norms, lacking any true conviction or a desire to flee from what defiles. Her choices reflect a "cheap" or "counterfeit" grace that fails to ignite a genuine desire to honor God with her life.

#3 Am I Ever Going to Be Good Enough?

Ethan is trapped in a spiritual paradox, constantly striving for a righteousness he believes he can earn. He meticulously follows a strict set of self-imposed rules: fasting for days, shunning all forms of entertainment, and constantly berating himself for any perceived failing. His life is a perpetual tightrope walk, each step a desperate attempt to avoid anything he perceives as sinful, adhering strictly to biblical commands and church doctrines. He's convinced that by perfectly adhering to these practices, he'll become more righteous and, therefore, more acceptable to God.

Ethan is trapped in a cycle of fear and anxiety, constantly striving to earn God's approval through rigid self-discipline and meticulous rule-following. He judges others harshly and never feels like he's "holy enough" because he sees God's holiness as something to be achieved through his own efforts rather than a divine attribute that is freely given by Christ. This works-based righteousness blinds him to the finished work of Christ. He fails to grasp that true obedience flows from a place of love and gratitude, empowered by God's grace and the gift of Jesus' righteousness, not from a desperate attempt to appease a demanding God.

#4 Fear of Man and Not God

David presents himself as the mature Christian, a vibrant voice in worship and a tireless volunteer. On Sunday mornings, he's often the first to offer help, teach Bible study, and impress everyone by quoting scripture and delving into the intricacies of Greek and Hebrew. David carefully cultivates this image of devout faith, ensuring he's seen praying before meals and consistently offering spiritual insights, leading many in the congregation to view him as a prime example of a committed believer.

However, David's public facade crumbles when he is alone. Behind the locked doors of his study or late at night with his phone, he secretly indulges in pornography, his mind consumed by lustful fantasies. He justifies these actions by telling himself it's "just looking," a private struggle no one needs to know about, believing his outward service somehow balances it. Throughout the week, he harbors bitter resentments against those he feels have wronged him, while publicly offering them smiles. He's quick to judge the perceived sins of others, especially those he considers less "knowledgeable," yet he rarely applies the same rigorous scrutiny to his own hidden life, revealing a great misunderstanding of God's holiness and transforming grace. His hypocrisy stems from valuing human commendation more than the purifying gaze of a truly holy God.

#5 Doesn’t God Want Me to Be Happy?

Liam had been praying fervently for a promotion at work. When the promotion was given to a colleague instead, Liam became angry and disillusioned. "I don't understand," he confided in his friend. "I prayed so hard. If God is real and holy and powerful, why wouldn't He give me what I asked for? Maybe there's no God at all, or if there is, He doesn't care about me." Feeling abandoned, he stopped praying and attending church.

Liam's limited understanding of God's holiness led him to believe God existed solely to fulfill his desires. He failed to grasp that God's holiness encompasses His perfect wisdom, justice, and sovereign plan, which may not always align with Liams' immediate wants. His questioning of God's existence stemmed from a transactional view of their relationship, rather than an understanding of God's ultimate goodness and purpose, which transcends his personal aspirations.

#6 If God Is So Holy, Why Does He Not Stop Evil?

Isabella watches the news with growing despair, witnessing acts of violence and injustice around the world. She wrestles with the question: "If God is truly holy, pure, righteous, and all-powerful, then why does He allow so much evil to exist? Why doesn't He just step in and stop it all? His holiness should compel Him to eradicate suffering." This question leads to doubt and a struggle for her to reconcile God's nature with the reality of a fallen world.

Isabella's question arises from a limited human perspective of God's holiness and His ways. While God's holiness certainly opposes evil, His plan for dealing with it is complex and unfolds within the context of human choices and His ultimate purposes for redemption and judgment. Isabella's struggle stems from not fully understanding the scope of God's plan, the nature of His sovereignty, and the mystery of why He allows evil to persist for a time, ultimately to demonstrate His justice and grace in ways we may not fully comprehend in this life.

#7 Why Would Good People Go to Hell?

Olivia stared out the window, the pastor's words about God's wrath on sin jarring her peace. "How can a good God send *good* people to hell?" she asked her husband, Mark. She couldn't reconcile a loving God with eternal punishment for anyone but the truly monstrous. For Olivia, she felt that hell should be reserved for the exceptionally evil, not ordinary people who simply made mistakes. She believed a loving God would surely allow most into heaven, unable to fathom divine goodness coexisting with such widespread, severe judgment.

Olivia's misunderstanding stems from a common misconception of God's nature and the true extent of sin. She views God's goodness primarily through the lens of human compassion and empathy, struggling to grasp that His perfect justice is an equally essential part of His character. In her mind, "good people" inherently deserve salvation, overlooking the biblical teaching that *all* have fallen short of God's perfect standard and that even seemingly small sins are an offense against a holy God. She believes God's mercy would override His justice for most, failing to recognize that His holiness necessitates a response to sin, and that true goodness *must* be just, not merely permissive.

Questions:
As you read through the **seven scenarios**, which one, if any, resonated with you the most, or reminded you of your own thoughts or experiences? Why?

Consider the initial reaction or thought process of each character. How do their misunderstandings about God's nature (e.g., His holiness, justice, love, sovereignty, grace) directly influence their attitudes, decisions, or actions?

After reading these scenarios, what is one new insight you gained about a specific attribute of God (e.g., His holiness, justice, grace, sovereignty) that you might have previously misunderstood or overlooked?

Moving forward, how might a more accurate understanding of God's character impact your own daily decisions, reactions to life's challenges, or approach to your faith?

WEEK ONE

DAY ONE —CREATED FOR HOLINESS
DAY TWO —DISTORTED DESIGN
DAY THREE —PROBLEMATIC CONDITION
DAY FOUR —HOLINESS IN CHRIST
DAY FIVE —BATTLEGROUNDS
DAY SIX ——VICTORIOUS GLORY
DAY SEVEN —DEVOTED PEOPLE

Week One

Who am I? What is my purpose? What is the meaning of life? Where did life come from? These are some of the most important questions to consider in this life. Why? Because the Truth draws us to God and our identity before Him.

This week, let's dive into the greatest story ever told! God has spoken throughout the generations, explaining the answers to these questions. Yes, you will find the simple Gospel and the glorious story of hope in the next seven days, but you will also find powerful reminders and insights of God's precious creation: **YOU**.

Helpful tips: Please do not rush through these lessons, and do not quit even if you feel as though you are not learning anything new. Each daily devotion will build upon the last to attempt to grasp one of the deepest and practically useful topics a person could ever endeavor to study.

Pray daily! Ask the Spirit to enlighten your mind to understand the most profound mysteries of our great God.

Day One —Created for Holiness

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth…
So God created human beings in his own image. In the image of God he created them; male and female he created them…
Then God looked over all he had made, and he saw that it was very good!
-Genesis 1:1, 27, 31

What happened to the "WOW" factor?
It's easy to lose our sense of awe. Has the wonder faded from your life? For many longtime churchgoers, the biblical creation story is so familiar that its majesty gets lost. When we hear the story of creation time and time again, the sheer wonder of it can become commonplace. We call this the "WOW" factor. The thunderous declaration of God's power can become a quiet fact, filed away and stripped of the very majesty that is meant to define our understanding of life itself.

When I was growing up, I never felt special, unique, or even that I had much value. I believe this is a fairly normal mindset for most people. I had given my life to Jesus Christ at a young age, but still did not fully comprehend my Designer, and therefore did not understand the design -me. It wasn't until I started to understand the flawless blueprints that God used to create life that the realization of my purpose, identity, and life's grand beauty finally penetrated my ignorant and thick skull. I was made for a purpose, and that purpose is not for my personal comfort or even my happiness. My purpose is to glorify my Father in Heaven, who provides me peace and joy, knowing that my value is found in belonging to Him. –Brent Smith

There is no preamble to God. He arrives on the first page of existence not with an introduction, but with a declaration: "In the beginning, God!" With a single word, the eternal Maker and majestic Lord of all called forth life from the void. In this stunning act of self-revelation, He sets the stage for everything, inviting us to find our meaning, our purpose, and the truth of who we are to Him.

Being made in His image we have within us,
the capacity to know Him.
-A. W. Tozer, *The Pursuit of God* (15)

It is important to discuss meaning and identity in this confusing era. Perhaps this did not need to be an emphasis for generations past, but as the world's wickedness increases, the deceptive distortion of humanity's purpose spreads.

We forget the Beginning, *Genesis*. We forget the meaning of life. That God created all things, and it was perfect in all ways. Humans were made special, in God's own image and likeness, both male and female. We are all sons and daughters of Adam and Eve. Although distant, we are all related to each other as brothers and sisters.

A clear understanding of God's original design helps us understand what He desires for us, for our family, and for our enemies. We are to love God and love others who were created to be image bearers for the Almighty King of kings.

This is why we must value life. God says that whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image (Gen. 9:6). Not only are we not to murder each other, but we are to treat each other as valuable instruments of God's design. Because of God's view of mankind, we are to love, serve, show honor, build up, and treat others as we would want to be treated (Lev. 19:18, Matt. 7:12, Gal. 5:14, Phil. 2:3).

As we pursue Christ and He transforms us closer to His image, we are being reconstructed into the original design that God intended for humanity before we rejected His laws. *Colossians 3:10* reminds us, "And have put on the new self, which is being renewed in the knowledge after the image of its creator." This is a purposeful, ongoing, deliberate act of pursuing Christ, shedding the old self, and moving forward into obedience and unity with our heavenly Father.

We were created for holiness. We were created for God's purposes. You have intrinsic value before the Everlasting God, and so do the people you encounter every day. Grasping this truth is what allows us to see that when we care for the most overlooked and seemingly unlovable people around us, we are ministering directly to God (Matt. 25:40).

Questions:
According to modern culture, what is the meaning of life, and what goals does society tell us to chase?

In what ways do worldly values conflict with God's design for humanity, especially concerning our life's priorities and how we treat others?

How does the belief that humans are made in God's image shape your perspective on today's ethical and moral issues?

Given that we are created for holiness, what are the essential characteristics that define a holy life, beyond just outward appearances?

Reflection: Today, take some time to intentionally read the creation account in Genesis 1-2. Don't just skim it. Read it slowly, as if for the first time, and let yourself be reminded of God's awesome majesty, His limitless power, and His perfect, original design.

After reading, spend a few moments in prayer. Move beyond your usual requests and simply praise God for who He is as the Creator of the universe. Thank Him for His incredible power and for the unique way He designed you with purpose and value.

Application: So, what now? As you move through the week, let this idea be your anchor. “When you look into another person’s face and see the face of God, your behavior towards that person changes.” –Paul David Tripp, Do You Believe? (245)

To be human is to bear the image of God.
-Anthony A. Hoekema, *Created in God’s Image* (18)

Want to study further? Recommended book to add to your reading list: *The Pursuit of Holiness*, Jerry Bridges

Day Two —Distorted Design

Then the LORD God said, "Look, the human beings have become like us, knowing both good and evil.
-Genesis 3:22

It happened so fast! Only a few pages into the Bible, we learn about the historical account of the fall. You probably already know the story, but it is essential to the overarching theme of Scripture and God's redemptive Gospel story.

The story begins with God, His perfect creation, and the humans He charged with dominion over the earth. In chapter three, however, the narrative pivots. We are introduced to the serpent in the Garden of Eden, a creature described as more cunning and crafty than any other. This is our first glimpse into the nature and goals of the one later identified as Satan. He is a deceiver, a tempter, a liar, the accuser of humanity, and an adversary to God (Job 1-2, Zech. 3, John 8:44, Rev. 12:9).

Other scriptures indicate this adversary was once a beautiful, high-ranking cherub who was cast down due to pride in his own splendor (Ezekiel 28:11-19; Isaiah 14:12-15). Satan was once in the presence of God, created to worship Him, but wanted the worship for Himself. This backstory adds weight to the Apostle Paul's warning that Satan still "masquerades as an angel of light" (2 Corinthians 11:14).

Reflecting his own desire to be like God, the serpent approaches Eve. His strategy begins not with force, but with a subtle question designed to sow doubt: "Did God really say...?" He masterfully introduces a technicality, hoping to make Eve question God's goodness and become curious about the one restriction placed upon her.

Though Eve initially responds correctly, the serpent moves from insinuation to open defiance. He directly contradicts God's decree with a lie—"You will not surely die"—and redefines reality, suggesting that disobedience leads not to death, but to a higher state of being.

There are times when you cannot understand why you cannot do what you want to do.
-Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost for His Highest* (4)

Children must be taught everything. Lacking an innate sense of danger, their curiosity might lead them to run into the street, touch a hot flame, or eat the mushroom on the lawn. They also test social rules, sometimes trying out offensive gestures just to see what will happen. They don't understand the "why" behind a loving parent's "no"; they only feel the restriction.

Our relationship with our Heavenly Father is often the same. We may not immediately grasp the wisdom behind His commands to pursue certain things while refraining from others. Like a child who only understands the danger after a close call, we often recognize the protective love behind God's boundaries only after we have strayed from them and felt the consequences.

God's warning of death proved true, though not in the way Eve might have expected. Humanity did not die physically in that instant, but they immediately suffered a spiritual separation from God and received the curse of eventual physical death.

Satan's lure was more insidious than a simple promise of life. His promise was the most enticing idea conceivable, the chance to be like God, possessing the knowledge of good and evil. This was the desire that lit up Eve's eyes as she reached for the fruit, yearning for a wisdom that was not hers to take.

Ultimately, Satan did not cause the fall; humanity did. The temptation to be like God was powerful, but the choice was their own. Genesis 3:22 reveals the cunning nature of the adversary: he often mixes truth with his lies. God Himself confirms that humans had, in a sense, "become like one of us, knowing good and evil." This shows Satan's goal isn't always to lie outright, but to use truth for his own destructive purposes, never for our good or God's glory. Eve wasn't forced; she chose to disobey.

Satan's tactics haven't changed

He still disguises his true intentions. He rarely appears as an obvious monster but instead looks and sounds like something beautiful. He lures us with the promise of power, wealth, success, popularity, and even comfort. He preys on our pride.

Satan distracts us with the anxieties of daily life until we begin to question God's goodness. He loves to foster new philosophies and redefine truth, creating division and turning us against one another. This is why the Bible warns us to beware of a "prowling lion seeking someone to devour." The call is to resist him, firm in your faith, and to trust that Christ will restore you in the end (1 Pet. 5:9-11).

Questions:
In what ways does sin today promise fulfillment or freedom, only to deliver the opposite? Can you think of a personal example?

In a world full of conflicting messages, what practical steps or standards can we use to discern God's truth from deception?

From your experience, what are some of the tangible consequences, both personal and relational, that result from straying from God's design?

Beyond simple obedience, what do God's instructions and boundaries reveal about His character and His ultimate motivation for humanity?

In what practical ways does sin damage our relationship with God, creating a sense of distance, shame, or separation?

While outside influences and temptations certainly exist, why is it essential to take personal ownership of our choices? Who is ultimately responsible when we sin? *Hint:* It is not Satan, your parents, friends, neighbors, or enemies.

Reflection: Today, read Genesis 3 and notice how the serpent's ancient strategy, questioning God's goodness and appealing to our desires, is still at work. Reflect on how these same tactics appear as temptations in your own life. Afterward, bring those specific areas to God in prayer, asking Him to "lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one" (Matthew 6:13).

Application: Your challenge today is simple: go encourage someone. Remind them that despite the devastation of sin, they are special because they are made in God's image. Your words could be exactly what they need to stay strong on the path that leads to righteousness.

Want to study further? Is it possible to go through the motions of pleasing God while our hearts are far from Him? The account of Cain in Genesis 4:1-16 offers a sobering case study. As you read the passage, look beyond the surface-level events. What was the true, deep-seated reason for Cain's anger, and what does it reveal about what God values most?

Day Three —Problematic Condition

When Adam sinned, sin entered the world. Adam's sin brought death, so death spread to everyone, for everyone sinned. Yes, people sinned even before the law was given. But it was not counted as sin because there was not yet any law to break. Still, everyone died—from the time of Adam to the time of Moses—even those who did not disobey an explicit commandment of God, as Adam did.
-Romans 5:12-14

How can a good God send good people to hell?
Did you read the story of Olivia in the **Day Zero -Analysis**? Perhaps you have struggled with this question or know someone who is. As humans, our definition of what is good or bad falls short when compared to a perfectly holy God. Romans reminds us that because of Adam's sin, the effect of sin, the nature of death, and the broken relationship between God and mankind exists.

Christian theology paints a sobering picture of the human condition: every person is born with a deep problem, sin, a brokenness that traces all the way back to Adam. We all enter life with the same struggle, unable to measure up to God's perfect standard. The Apostle Paul makes this crystal clear in Romans 3, declaring that "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." King David echoes this truth in Psalm 14, lamenting that no one consistently does what is right. Even the prophet Isaiah joins the chorus, describing humanity as sheep who have wandered off, each choosing our own way (Isaiah 53:6). Together, these voices remind us that from God's perspective, no one is truly righteous. We are all in desperate need of rescue.

If we say that we have no sin, we are lying to ourselves
1 John 1:8

The astounding nature of God's grace only becomes clear when contrasted with His perfect holiness. God, as the Creator, is the sole judge of good and evil, and He is completely devoid of unrighteousness (Psalm 92:15). Against this flawless standard, all human attempts at "goodness" fall short. Jesus illustrates this by declaring that unless our righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, we will not enter the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 5:20). In essence, heaven demands a level of perfection that is humanly unattainable; it requires the very righteousness of Christ Himself.

So, where is the hope?

Thank the Lord that this is not where the story ends. The timeless hope for humanity's sin problem has always been faith in God alone. This foundational truth is powerfully demonstrated in the life of Abram, long before he was renamed Abraham. Genesis 15:6 reveals that Abram simply believed in the Lord, and for that act of faith, God declared him righteous. This pivotal moment serves as the blueprint for salvation, a point the Apostle Paul emphasizes in his letter to the Romans (Romans 4:1-3).

There's a common saying that in Sunday School, the safest answer to any question is "Jesus." While often said with a smile, this simple answer actually points to the most important truth of Christianity. To save us, God sent His Son, Jesus, to perform an amazing exchange. Even though Jesus was completely without sin, He took our sin upon Himself so that we could receive the perfect righteousness of God (2 Corinthians 5:21), all because of His great love for us (John 3:16).

This is our great hope: The very God who judges sin also provides the solution. Through repentance and belief in Jesus Christ, God offers forgiveness, new life, and a way back to Himself. For those who turn to Him in faith, He promises not only to declare them justified but also to wipe their sins away completely (Acts 3:19, Romans 3:30).

Paul goes on to proclaim that we are “justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (Romans 3:24). In other words, the God who sees our brokenness also steps in to heal it. The bad news of sin only makes the good news of salvation shine brighter. We are not left wandering; we are invited to come home.

A man by his sin may waste himself, which is to waste that which on earth is most like God. This is man’s greatest tragedy and God’s heaviest grief.
-A. W. Tozer

This may be a helpful insight for you, or maybe you are tempted to hit the snooze button. Please don’t! No matter where you find yourself in your faith journey, the message of living a life that honors God is vitally important. At our core, you and I need Jesus. He is our rescuer from the power of sin and our sole hope for eternal life.

You and I need Christ
Without Him, we are trapped in the slavery of sin and death, but through Him we can have eternal life. Once we testify to Jesus as our Savior, our work isn't finished; it's just getting started. This isn't work that earns our salvation, as only God's amazing grace can do that. Instead, it's the joyful and purposeful work of living a life that brings glory to God and reflects His love to the world (1 John 3:7).

Everything else in your spiritual life will flow from this one truth: God must be on the throne of your heart. We desperately need His grace not only for the moment we are saved, but for every moment of every day as we continue to strive, stumble, and seek to live righteously.

Questions:
According to Romans 5:12-14, how did sin and death enter the world, and what effect does that have on all humanity?

What is the "great exchange" described in 2 Corinthians 5:21, and why is it central to the gospel message?

How does understanding the weight of sin make God's grace more amazing to you personally?

Why is it important to recognize that God, not humanity, defines what is truly "good"?

In what ways do you sometimes minimize or redefine sin, rather than seeing it from God's holy perspective?

Provide an example of how you may rely on your own "goodness" instead of the righteousness of Christ?

Reflection: Today, read Romans 3 and consider how sin affects the way you see yourself and others. Does being justified freely by His grace change your gratitude, worship, and the way you live daily?

Application: Take time today to confess specific areas of sin to God, acknowledging your dependence on His grace (1 John 1:8-9).

Note: Confession is meant to trade your heaviness for His peace. If you are still struggling with shame or feel like God is distant, remember that He intends to move you from "low to high." Don't just acknowledge the sin; leave it at His feet so you can walk away free rather than captive.

Want to study further? Recommended book to add to your reading list: *God's Pursuit of Man,* A. W. Tozer.

Day Four —Holiness In Christ

Now Adam is a symbol, a representation of Christ, who was yet to come. But there is a great difference between Adam's sin and God's gracious gift. For the sin of this one man, Adam, brought death to many. But even greater is God's wonderful grace and his gift of forgiveness to many through this other man, Jesus Christ. And the result of God's gracious gift is very different from the result of that one man's sin. For Adam's sin led to condemnation, but God's free gift leads to our being made right with God, even though we are guilty of many sins. For the sin of this one man, Adam, caused death to rule over many. But even greater is God's wonderful grace and his gift of righteousness, for all who receive it will live in triumph over sin and death through this one man, Jesus Christ.
-Romans 5:15-17

Hey Man!
Did you know that Adam's name literally means "man" or "mankind"? Fittingly, the Hebrew term for all human beings is "the children of Adam." As the first man, Adam represented all of humanity. Eve was created from his rib, "taken out of the man" (Genesis 2:21-23), and became "the mother of all living" (Genesis 3:20). Therefore, we cannot escape the truth that all people are sons and daughters descended from Adam and Eve.

Adam took on the responsibility of all humanity, and his choices had a worldwide, long-lasting, devastating effect. Adam's actions plunged humanity into sin, earning a guilty verdict before a holy God. Jesus came to reverse that verdict. He offers a free gift: forgiveness for our debt and a righteousness that makes us right with God. As the old hymn reminds us, this is "Amazing Grace!" A gift we receive despite being guilty of many sins.

Whoever receives this gift will live in triumph over sin and death. Have you truly grasped the weight of that promise? It's a core biblical truth that changes everything, no matter how many times you've heard it.

Whoever receives Jesus' gift of grace, forgiveness, and righteousness will have victory over sin, death, and be in right standing before the holy Judge.

Can you let that resonate within your mind and heart for a minute? Often, we live our lives with an inaccurate perspective that, although we are bound to Christ that we are also captives of sin and death with an obligation to prove our righteousness continually before God.

Here's the rub: You cannot prove that you are righteous before God on your own. So, stop evaluating life by your own merits. It will never be enough. Only God's gracious and precious gift of grace through Jesus can cover the multitude of sins and allow us to stand as holy and righteous before God.

Set Apart

The Hebrew root word for "holiness" literally means "to cut." To be holy, therefore, is to be cut off or separated from everything else, especially what is unclean. This is the very essence of being "**Set Apart**," the title of this devotional. This separation implies being in a class of your own, entirely distinct, and completely morally pure in every possible way.

Can you achieve this kind of holiness on your own? Can you be morally pure in every way, every single day of your life? The obvious answer is no. This is precisely why we need the grace of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. He is the very righteousness of God, sent to earth and received by faith. This was done to display God's merciful forgiveness of sin and to show that He is both perfectly just and the one who makes us right with Him (Romans 3:21-26).

Our ways are not God's ways. That's why we need Christ. Not just to forgive us, but to transform us. To redirect us. To make us new

-Craig Groeschel, *Dangerous Prayers* (33)

According to Scripture, God's forgiveness is ready for those who confess. He is faithful and just to forgive our sins and cleanse us completely (1 John 1:9, Acts 2:38). So while our righteous verdict in Christ is final, our battle with the flesh is not. The good news is that we have been given a way to win that battle and know that God's forgiveness is always near.

Questions:
Often, we live as if we are "captives of sin" even after receiving the grace of God. In what specific ways have you recently acted as if your sin has more power than Christ's gift of righteousness?

God's gift leads to being "made right with God, even though we are guilty of many sins." If this is true, why do we sometimes hesitate or feel unworthy to confess a specific sin to Him or others? What fear or pride holds us back?

If being "set apart" means being made holy by Christ's work, how does the act of regular confession reinforce that identity rather than undermine it?

Reflection: The next few days, we will focus the devotionals on certain passages in the book of Romans. We encourage you to continue to read through Romans chapters 5-8 to gain a deeper understanding of this critical topic. What are some main themes you uncover in these chapters?

Application: For the remainder of this week, let's practice daily confession. If you have already implemented this habit in your life, this will be an easy application. If you have never done this, this practice will be foundational to your spiritual and physical wellbeing and establishment of your faith and trust in God.

Make a conscious effort to confess your sins immediately. The moment the Holy Spirit convicts you of a prideful thought, a sharp word, or a selfish action, don't let it linger. Immediately and simply pray: "God, that was sin. Please forgive me. Thank you for forgiving me through Jesus and cleansing me from all unrighteousness, just as you promised."

Day Five —Battlegrounds

So the trouble is not with the law, for it is spiritual and good. The trouble is with me, for I am all too human, a slave to sin. I don't really understand myself, for I want to do what is right, but I don't do it. Instead, I do what I hate. But if I know that what I am doing is wrong, this shows that I agree that the law is good. So I am not the one doing wrong; it is sin living in me that does it. And I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. I want to do what is right, but I can't. I want to do what is good, but I don't. I don't want to do what is wrong, but I do it anyway.
-Romans 7:15-19

As we saw in **Day One**, when God made all things, it was good. Not just the way you or I may classify as good. This is God's definition of what is good, right, pure, holy, and perfect. Humans were created to desire God's presence and desire holiness. We were made to worship and reflect our Maker. If holiness is so important, then why do we not experience it more in daily living? Why do we get crushed and defeated by sin?

Maya began her day with a sincere prayer for patience, resolving to meet the day's frustrations with grace. But in a mid-morning meeting, a coworker publicly dismissed her idea with a condescending remark. Instantly, a hot, familiar rage consumed her, and before she could stop herself, a sharp, sarcastic reply shot from her mouth. The momentary satisfaction of seeing him taken aback was immediately swallowed by a wave of bitter shame. She was trapped in a frustrating war with herself, desperately wanting to be a person of peace but finding she was powerless against these sudden explosions of anger. Back at her desk, the morning's hope was gone, replaced by the exhaustion of her own failure, leaving her feeling utterly defeated by a cycle of rage she couldn't break.

War!
The Christian life is a battlefield. We're at war with our old selves, sinful desires, and the powers of this world. In this fight, it's easy to lose perspective and feel hopeless. But this is precisely why the power of the Gospel and the Holy Spirit is so essential. Paul's honest description of this conflict isn't a sign of defeat. It's a reality we must face. Yes, struggle exists. Yes, temptations will come. Yes, trials and tribulations are ahead. But victory can be found in Christ Jesus!

A “wartime lifestyle” is not being fought along geographical lines. It is being fought first along the line between good and evil in every human heart, especially the hearts of Christians where Christ has staked his claim, and where he means to be totally triumphant.
-John Piper, *Don’t Waste Your Life* (131)

Don't get tired of doing what's right. Galatians 6 urges us not to grow weary in doing good, promising that if we persevere, we will reap a harvest. This is a call to serve others, gently restore the fallen, and carefully examine our own lives. While pursuing the flesh leads to destruction, pursuing the Spirit leads to eternal life. We must remain faithful through every season, holding onto the promise of 1 Corinthians 10:13: God is faithful and will not let us be tempted beyond our ability, always providing a way of escape so we can endure.

Stay faithful
whether life feels like a victory or a struggle. Victory in these daily battles strengthens us. Without friction, we remain unprepared for life's pressures. God shapes our character and faith in Him in these challenges, so the fight is worth it. Since we are in a battle, we must think like soldiers. A soldier alone is vulnerable, so surround yourself with godly allies who can help carry you through the difficult times.

As believers, we are not lost in the waves of today's turmoil because our hope is secure. We look forward to a future with God and know that He will one day remove the curse at His final judgment. Until then, creation groans in the pains of childbirth with eager longing for the return of Christ (John Frame, Systematic Theology, 283).

Questions:
Romans 7 describes a pretty frustrating reality of the Christian life. What types of recurring struggles do you feel like you’re in a battle with?

In what ways have you been treating your spiritual life more like a time of peace rather than an active battlefield? How does viewing it as a "wartime lifestyle" change your daily approach?

Who are the godly allies in your life you can be truly honest about your struggles? Are you actively connected with them?

Thinking about a recent temptation you faced, can you identify what the "way of escape" (1 Corinthians 10:13) might have been? Did you take it, or what prevented you from taking it?

Reflection: Read the rest of Romans 7, if you haven't already, as Paul describes the struggle with sin in his own life. Paul recognizes his wretchedness and asks, "Who will free me from this life that is dominated by sin and death?" Reflect today on what or who you rely on for this feeling of freedom. Do you experience freedom found in Jesus Christ?

Want to study further? Check out this sermon by John Piper as he discusses this important topic from Galatians 5:16-18 *"The War Within-Flesh Versus Spirit."*
desiringgod.org/messages/the-war-within-flesh-versus-spirit

Day Six ——Victorious Glory

So now there is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus. And because you belong to him, the power of the life-giving Spirit has freed you from the power of sin that leads to death. The law of Moses was unable to save us because of the weakness of our sinful nature. So God did what the law could not do. He sent his own Son in a body like the bodies we sinners have. And in that body God declared an end to sin's control over us by giving his Son as a sacrifice for our sins. He did this so that the just requirement of the law would be fully satisfied for us, who no longer follow our sinful nature but instead follow the Spirit.
-Romans 8:1-4

No Condemnation. Now What?
Have you ever felt the heavy cloak of "not enough"? Not good enough, not trying hard enough, not spiritual enough. It's a weight we all carry at times. Perhaps you remember the story of Ethan from the **Day Zero -Analyses**. The truth that the Apostle Paul speaks here is so massive that it may shatter your perspective.

Read that verse above again. It's not "less condemnation" or "condemnation on hold." It's *no condemnation*. This isn't a reward for our good behavior. It is a declaration of our new reality. Why? Because the "power of the life-giving Spirit has freed you from the power of sin that leads to death." God did what we and the law could never do. He sent His Son, in a body just like ours, to be the final sacrifice for sin, breaking its control over us. In Jesus, the just requirements of the law are fully satisfied.

The Choice
This freedom brings us to a timeless crossroads, the same one Moses laid before Israel many centuries ago. He told them the command to follow God wasn't some impossible riddle hidden in the heavens. It was right here, in their mouths and hearts. Then he made the options clear:

Now listen! Today I am giving you a choice between life and death, between prosperity and disaster... Today I have given you the choice between life and death, between blessings and curses... Oh, that you would choose life, so that you and your descendants might live!
- Deuteronomy 30:15,19

God has always set this choice before His people: life or death. Obedience or rebellion. Blessing or curse. The tragedy described in Scripture is that, in our own strength, humans kept choosing death even when they wanted life. But now, in Romans 8, the game has changed. We are no longer just staring at two options. We have the power of the Spirit inside us, guiding us to "choose life." Victorious glory is found in the path of eternal life.

Sadly, many people die while living selfishly. They are lured away to worship other things other than God. They are enticed by their own desires and stray away from their faith. They believe the lie that tells them that they can be self-sufficient and do not need the strength of God. This lifestyle breeds further sin and death. If we do not have a God centered focus, our sins do not look all that bad, and we forget the devastation that sin really is.

The water Jesus gives is the Holy Spirit. The presence of God's Spirit in your life takes away the frustrated soul-thirst and turns you into a fountain where others can find life.
-John Piper, *Desiring God* (63)

A Holy Thirst
This new ability to choose life isn't just about following rules better. It awakens a deeper, truer desire within us. We were chosen by God, set apart for His purposes. Being chosen instills a longing, not for a system, but for a person. The Psalmist captured it perfectly:

As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, my God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.
- Psalm 42:1-2

A longing for the living God is the mark of a person freed from condemnation. Our focus shifts from merely escaping death to desperately thirsting for God Himself. As He becomes our ultimate desire, everything else is put into its proper perspective. This is why we can find true contentment with very little. The God of the universe becomes our everything, the living water that satisfies our souls.

So today, walk in freedom. Not as someone constantly trying to escape judgment, but as a chosen child who gets to follow the Spirit. The choice is still before you, life and death. But now, because of Jesus, you are free to truly choose life, a life defined not by the absence of failure, but by a relentless, soul-satisfying thirst for God himself.

Questions:
How would your daily decisions and prayers change if you fully operated from a position of "no condemnation" rather than a fear of it?

Since the Holy Spirit helps you "choose life," in what daily situations do you still try to handle things on your own, in your old, destructive ways? What stops you from relying on His help in those moments?

Our natural attitude toward sin is "self-centered" rather than "God-centered." How can this cause you to underestimate the true devastation of your sin?

When you feel restless or dissatisfied, what are the first things you "drink" from (e.g., social media, work, food, entertainment) before you turn to God?

What does it practically look like to "walk by the Spirit" (Galatians 5:16) during a normal, busy day?

How can we learn to distinguish the Spirit's leading (Romans 8:14) from our own impulses, so that we produce His "fruit" (Galatians 5:22-23) instead of ours?

Reflection: Be honest. Do you thirst for God above all else? Reflect on one specific area in your life where you are trying to find satisfaction, contentment, or "life" in something other than God (e.g., your career, a relationship, financial security, or your own self-image).

What would it look like to redirect that deep thirst toward Him alone?

Want to study further? Read Psalm 42 to gain a better understanding of how to fight for faith in the midst of overwhelming sadness, depression, and turmoil. The best response in these times is to seek satisfaction from God.
Recommended book to add to your reading list regarding the role and walking with the Spirit: *Forgotten God*, Francis Chan.

Day Seven —Devoted People

Therefore, dear brothers and sisters, you have no obligation to do what your sinful nature urges you to do. For if you live by its dictates, you will die. But if through the power of the Spirit you put to death the deeds of your sinful nature, you will live. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God.
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. And since we are his children, we are his heirs. In fact, together with Christ we are heirs of God's glory. But if we are to share his glory, we must also share his suffering.
-Romans 8:12-17

A Battle for the Throne
We all feel a sense of obligation. We are obligated to our families, our jobs, and our finances. But Paul makes it clear that our one, overriding obligation is to reject our sinful nature, not to serve it.

Let's be honest. Every time we choose to live by the "flesh", every time we feed our pride, our anger, our anxiety, or our selfish desires, we are performing a quiet overthrow of God's kingdom, a coup. We are attempting to pull God off the rightful throne of our hearts and place ourselves there instead. We declare ourselves as king, but the kingdom of "self" always leads to death.

From kings to Children of the King
The Christian life is a constant battle for the throne. But the good news is that we were never meant to be the king. We were meant to be children.

Paul says that *"For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God."* When we finally get tired of the disastrous results of our own reign, we can resign. When we put God back on His throne and submit to His will, everything changes. We acknowledge that this is His kingdom, not ours. And when the rightful King is in charge, He begins to guide our steps. We stop living in the chaos of our own decisions and start walking in the peace of His.

This submission isn't a return to fearful slavery. Look at verse 15! We didn't receive a spirit of fear. We received a spirit of adoption. How cool is that? We get to call the Creator of the universe "Abba, Father," an intimate term. Devoted people aren't slaves cowering before a master. They are beloved children trusting a perfect Father in reverence to His holiness.

Devotion in the Ashes
But what happens when that perfect Father allows our world to fall apart? What is our devotion worth then?

This is the story of Job. Here was a man who lost everything. His possessions were stolen. His children were killed. His health was compromised, leaving him in agony. He was left completely alone and misunderstood by his friends. By the world's standards, Job had every right to dethrone God, to curse Him, and declare his own suffering as the new king of his life. Even Job's wife told him to curse God. But Job, in his darkest moment, remained faithful. He understood a truth that we often forget:

God is God, whether we are on the mountaintop or in the ashes.

Heirs of Glory
Our devotion isn't based on our circumstances. It is based on His character. Verse 17 calls us "co-heirs with Christ," but it comes with a condition. If we want to share in the glory, then we must share in the sufferings. True devotion, true sonship, is proven in the fire.

He will always work *in* you before He works *through* you.
-Henry Blackaby, *Experiencing God* (43)

Why would we endure this? Because we are heirs. Our devotion isn't for nothing. We aren't just subjects in His kingdom. We are His children. We have an inheritance of glory waiting for us.

Let's stop the coup. Let's willingly, joyfully, and faithfully place God back on the throne of our lives. Surrender your will, trust His guidance, and remain devoted. Even when you feel lonely, or sick, or empty… the King is still on His throne, and He still calls you His child.

Questions:
In what specific, practical area of your life (e.g., your finances, your schedule, a relationship) are you currently acting like the king instead of letting God rule?

Paul says we received a "Spirit of adoption," not a "spirit of fear." How would your daily prayers and your reaction to failure look different if you truly lived as a secure, beloved child ("Abba, Father") instead of a fearful slave trying to earn approval?

If you lost your worldly comforts (like Job did), would your devotion to God remain?

What does your current devotion rest on, God’s blessings or His character?

Reflection: Take a minute to honestly identify the throne of your heart. When you make decisions out of fear, anxiety, or pride, what is the kingdom you are trying to build or protect for yourself? Reflect on the one area where you are most resistant to submitting to God's will. What do you fear will happen if you resign and let Him take full control of that area?

Pause and verbally pray: "God, this is Your kingdom, not mine. You are on the throne. I submit this situation to You and will follow the Spirit's leading."

Application Checkup: On **Day 4**, we challenged you to practice daily, immediate confession. How did you do or did you forget right away? If you did not start, start today! As you continue working through this study record the many sins that you have confessed and that God has forgiven.

Want to study further? You may have already read Romans 8, but specifically look at verses 26-30 today. When we are in trouble, the Spirit can help us in our weakness. Even when we do not know what to pray, He can help us. All things, not just some, all things work together for good to those who love God. As you devote yourself to God, you will be further conformed into the image of Christ.

Partnership and Small Group Discussion

Congratulations on completing the first week of *Set Apart by Grace*. Whether you are meeting with a small group, a spouse, or a friend over coffee, this section is designed to help you process what you have read.

How to Format Your Meeting
If you are leading a group or initiating a conversation with a partner, here is a simple structure to keep the time focused and fruitful:

1. **Check-In (10 Minutes):** Start by catching up. Simply ask: *"Did anything stand out to you or challenge you from this week's lessons?"* Encourage this time to be brief, with comments being short, which allows participants to express their engagement. It will also highlight areas to potentially discuss further later on.
2. **Review (5 Minutes):** Briefly skim through the titles of the last seven days (Created for Holiness, Distorted Design, Problematic Condition, etc.) to refresh everyone's memory on the topics covered. During this review, provide one takeaway or challenge that you had during the week.
3. **Discussion (30-45 Minutes):** Use the questions below to guide your conversation. You do not need to answer every single one. Focus on the questions that generate the most honest dialogue. Note: Feel free to create your own questions from the content or select specific questions based on your own personal challenge.
4. **Prayer (10-15 Minutes):** Do not skip this. This is where the battle is often won (see below for specific prayer prompts).
5. **Worship in Song (10-15 Minutes):** Feel free to add this powerful element before or after any of your meetings to sing out glory to God!

Discussion Questions
1. Recovering the "WOW" Factor (Day 1) We discussed how the majesty of God's creation can become commonplace to us.

- When was the last time you truly felt a sense of awe toward God? What distracts you from seeing His majesty in your daily routine?

- *"When you look into another person's face and see the face of God, your behavior towards that person changes."* Did you try this during the week? How did it change your interactions?

2. The Tactics of the Enemy (Day 2 & 5) We looked at how Satan used the question, "Did God really say?" to introduce doubt, and how we are currently living in a wartime lifestyle.

- In your own life, what does the enemy's bait usually look like? Does he tempt you with comfort, control, or security?

- Day Five challenged us to create a battle strategy or a way of escape for recurring sins. Without getting too specific, if you aren't comfortable, share what your strategy is. How can this group help you stick to it?

3. The Struggle with Goodness (Day 3 & 4) We learned that our own definition of "good" falls short of God's holiness and that we need the righteousness of Christ.

- Be honest, do you tend to base your spiritual confidence on how "good" you've been behaving lately, or on what Jesus did for you?

4. Living Without Condemnation (Day 6 & 7) Romans 8 tells us there is "no condemnation" and that we are adopted as children ("Abba, Father").

- If you truly believed, 100%, that there is no condemnation left for you, how would that change the way you confess your sins to God? Would you run *to* Him or hide *from* Him?

- Day Seven asked if we are acting like the King of our own lives or the Child of God. In what specific area (finances, family, career) is it hardest for you to resign from the throne and let God rule?

Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and produces wonderful results.
-James 5:16

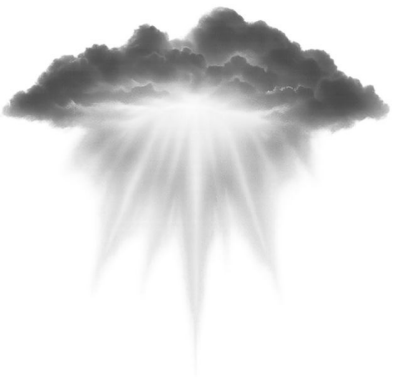
Prayer and Application
This week we have been practicing daily and immediate confession. End your time by taking prayer requests, but try to go deeper than just physical needs (health, travel, etc.).

- **Share a Battle:** Ask each person to share one specific spiritual battle they are facing.
- **Pray for Identity:** Pray that each person would understand the reality of their adoption as children of God.
- **Pray for Protection:** Pray against the specific lies or distorted designs that are taught by the evils of this world.

Encouragement: Remind one another: You are not fighting *for* victory; you are fighting *from* victory. Christ has already won. Go live as His heir!

Midpoint Evaluation

- **Reminder:** As mentioned in the "How to Use This Book" section, Day 21 is a recommended time to retake the **Spiritual Inventory** located in the back of the book. Encourage one another to complete this before the next meeting.



WEEK TWO

DAY EIGHT —UNSEEN PERFECTION
DAY NINE —BEYOND LIMITS
DAY TEN —BALANCED SCALE
DAY ELEVEN —MAJESTIC LIGHT
DAY TWELVE —MYSTERIOUS WISDOM
DAY THIRTEEN —OVERWHELMING BEAUTY
DAY FOURTEEN —ALL BOW BEFORE HIM

Week Two

Forget the stereotype of an old man on a cloud. Who is God, really? Can He actually see everything? What does He truly love, and what does He hate? These are the questions at the heart of "theology." And don't let that word intimidate you. It simply means "the study of God." This is the single most profound and life-altering subject we could ever explore.

So far, we've wrestled with our position and purpose in the world. Now, we pivot to the One who defines it all: **the God of the universe**. This isn't just academic. Knowing Him changes everything. It's the lens that brings our world, our purpose, and our relationships into sharp focus.

Are you feeling behind? Don't let that discourage you. This isn't a race, and there's no deadline. Take all the time you need. The only goal is to go deeper, not faster. We want you to grow in your love and knowledge of our great God and the grace He's given you.

A couple of reminders:

☐ Read each day and set aside a specific time and place.
☐ Open my Bible, pray, and be ready to be challenged.
☐ Take notes and do not rush.
☐ Talk to others about my daily takeaways.
☐ Look for ways to apply what I am learning.
☐ Partner with others for accountability (highly recommended!).
☐ Explore fasting dedication (optional).

Day Eight —Unseen Perfection

Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of Heaven's Armies!
The whole earth is filled with his glory!
-Isaiah 6:3

Our World of Imperfection
We are experts in imperfection. We see it everywhere, in projects we can't quite finish, in broken promises, in relationships, and most clearly, in the mirror. Our entire lives are spent navigating a world of flaws. Because of this, our idea of "perfection" is usually just "less flawed." We think of a perfect score, a perfect performance, or a perfect day.

But God's holiness is not "less flawed." It is something else entirely. It is "unseen perfection."

A Glimpse of the Throne Room
When the prophet Isaiah got a glimpse into God's throne room, he didn't just see a "good" or "powerful" king. He was overwhelmed by a reality he couldn't process. Angelic beings, the seraphim, were covering their faces and feet, unable to look, crying out to one another. Their song wasn't just "Holy." It was "Holy, holy, holy."

In Hebrew, repetition is the ultimate amplifier. It is not for rhythm. It is used to express an infinite, ultimate, and absolute holiness. It means God is in a category of His own, completely "**set apart**" from everything else.

The Perfect Standard
This perfection is terrifying. It's why the angels hide their faces. Have you considered that? Even the Seraphs, who were created for this purpose, covered their faces and feet from God. It's why the foundations of the temple shook at the sound. And it's why Isaiah's first words weren't, "Wow, this is amazing!" They were, " It's all over! I am doomed, for I am a sinful man."

God's unseen perfection instantly exposed Isaiah's all-too-visible imperfection. This is the heart of holiness. It's not just that God is morally pure. It is that He is the source of purity. He is the standard by which all things are measured. This is why 1 Samuel 2:2 can declare, "No one is holy like the LORD! There is no one besides you; there is no Rock like our God."

Holiness Made Visible
The angels' song has a second half: "The whole earth is filled with his glory!"

What is glory? Glory is what happens when God's unseen holiness is made visible. We can't see His perfect essence directly, but we can see the evidence of it everywhere. We see His glory in the raw power of a thunderstorm, the intricate design of a snowflake, the complexity of life, the beauty of the various landscapes, and the "glorious deeds" He performs. As Exodus 15:11 asks, "Who is like you among the gods, O LORD—glorious in holiness, awesome in splendor, performing great wonders?"

Perfect and Present
Here is the most staggering truth: this perfectly holy God does not remain separate from us. In the very next moment of Isaiah's vision, this holy God, whose presence made Isaiah feel "undone," reached out and made him clean.

The unseen perfection of God isn't meant to just crush us with our unworthiness. It is meant to fill us with awe, to recalibrate our worship, and to assure us that the One in charge is absolutely, perfectly, and purely good. We can trust His plans because they are perfect. We can trust His love because it is pure. We can trust His justice, because it is true.

Do you remember Arthur from the **Day Zero-Analysis**? He struggled with why we worship God. This struggle is because we are surrounded by imperfection, but we worship a God who is not.

The word 'majesty', when applied to God, is always a declaration of His greatness and an invitation to worship.
-J.I. Packer, *Knowing God* (73)

Questions:
How does our limited view of "perfection" affect the way you pray or confess?

Do you tend to ask God just to make you "better" rather than asking Him to make you truly "holy"?

Isaiah’s immediate reaction to God's holiness was to feel "doomed" and aware of his sin. Why is our modern tendency often the opposite by focusing on our own worthiness before approaching God?

If "glory" is God's unseen holiness made visible, where did you see the evidence of His glory in the last few days? (Think beyond a sunset, perhaps in a moment of perfect timing, an act of sacrificial love, or a sudden, unexplainable peace).

The angels, who are perfect, cover their faces in God's presence. What does this tell us about the sheer intensity of His holiness, and what should it teach us about our own attitude in worship?

Reflection: Read the full encounter in Isaiah 6:1-8. Spend a few minutes placing yourself in the scene. Imagine the sound of the seraphim's voices shaking the temple, the smoke filling the room, and the blinding light of God's holiness. What is your honest, gut-level emotional reaction? Is it fear? Awe? Shame? Gratitude? Reflect on why you feel that way and what it reveals about how you truly see God versus how you see yourself.

Our attitude toward sin is more self-centered than God-centered.
-Jerry Bridges, *The Pursuit of Holiness* (20)

Application: Going forward, each week we will have a new challenge and will have a checkup near the end of the week. The application challenge **this week** is two parts.

Part 1: In your daily prayers, practice praising God through **Adoration**. What does this mean? Each day, you will learn a new character quality of God. Praise Him for it! Tell Him how perfect, limitless, good, just, glorious, beautiful, and wise, etc. Adoration is not about *you,* it is entirely about *Him*.

Part 2: Practice *holiness awareness*. Since God's holiness is the standard, it exposes our sins and how we miss the mark.

1. Identify one unholy pattern you've accepted as normal (e.g., casual gossip, complaining, numbing your mind with media, turning to food for comfort, or an irritable attitude).
2. Rename it. Instead of calling it "just how I am," and excusing the sin, call it what it is in the light of God's perfection: **unholy**.
3. When you do it, pause and respond. Don't just feel guilty. Use it as a reminder to say, *"God, you are holy. Forgive me. Thank you for making me clean (like Isaiah) so I can be set apart for You."* This turns your failures into reminders of His perfection and grace.

Want to study further? First read, Luke 5:1-8 and see how Peter has a reaction similar to Isaiah's when he witnesses Jesus's power ("Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!"). Then read Revelation 4:1-11, where you can get another glimpse into the heavenly throne room, where the "Holy, holy, holy" cry from Isaiah 6 is echoed eternally.

Day Nine —Beyond Limits

O LORD, you have examined my heart and know everything about me. You know when I sit down or stand up. You know my thoughts even when I'm far away. You see me when I travel and when I rest at home. You know everything I do. You know what I am going to say even before I say it, LORD… I can never escape from your Spirit! I can never get away from your presence! If I go up to heaven, you are there; if I go down to the grave, you are there. If I ride the wings of the morning, if I dwell by the farthest oceans, even there your hand will guide me, and your strength will support me.

-Psalm 139:1–4, 7–10

A God Without Walls

We are creatures of limits. Our phone batteries die. Our energy runs out, and we need sleep. Our knowledge hits a wall. We are dependent on others. We can only be in one place at one time. We are defined by our boundaries. But the God we worship is **infinite**. He has no boundaries. He is, in every sense of the word, "Beyond Limits." He is not made for us, we were made for Him.

Don't we live instead as though God is created for *us*, to do *our* bidding, to bless *us,* and to take care of *our* loved ones*?*
-Francis Chan, *Crazy Love* (35)

The psalmist David opens this beautiful song with an incredible thought: God is **all-knowing**. He doesn't just know about us. He has "examined" our hearts. He is **all-seeing**. Nothing is hidden from Him. He knows our thoughts before we've fully formed them. He knows the words on our tongue before we even speak.

In our world, this sounds like surveillance. We often live our lives attempting to hide our flaws and live behind filters. The idea of someone knowing everything, every secret motive, every foolish thought, can be terrifying.

But to David, it's comforting. Why? Because the God who knows every flaw, every failure, and every hidden corner of our hearts is the same God who is near to help us. God is **self-sufficient**. He doesn't need us to be perfect to love us. He loves us because He is love. He knows the absolute worst of us and has not turned away.

Nowhere to Run
After investigating the depths of God's knowledge, David explores the breadth of His presence. He is **everywhere**. David's imagination soars to the extremes of the universe. If he goes to the highest heaven, God is there. If he goes to the deepest grave, God is there. If he could ride the light of the sunrise to the east or dwell in the farthest western sea, God is already there.

This isn't the panicked anxiety of a person who is attempting to run or hide. It's the amazed discovery of a child who realizes he can never, ever get lost. You cannot go so high in success that God isn't with you. You cannot sink so low in despair that you fall out of His reach. You cannot run to a place so dark or so distant that His presence isn't already there, waiting for you.

And notice why He is there: "...even there your hand will **guide** me, and your strength will **support** me." He isn't there to condemn. He is there to hold and help.

The Great "I AM"
This is our God. He is **all-powerful**, so the hand that guides us is strong enough to save us. No power and authority can overcome His might. God is **eternal**. He did not have a start and does not have an end. His presence isn't temporary but permanent. God is also **infinite**, so His love, grace, and mercy never, ever run out.

We live with limits. We get tired, we make mistakes, and we can feel small. But we are loved by a God who is "Beyond Limits." And because He is all-knowing, we are fully known. And because He is everywhere, we are never, ever alone.

Questions:
How does it comfort you to know you are fully known, and how does it challenge you?

In what specific ways have you been frustrated by your own human limits (of energy, knowledge, or influence) this past week?

David describes God being in heaven (our highs) and the grave (our lows). In which of those two places do you find it harder to remember His presence? Why?

If you truly believed you could "never escape" God's presence, how would that change the way you act when you are completely alone?

Application Checkup: Don't forget to praise God in a prayer of adoration!

Reflection: *"You see me when I travel and when I rest at home. You know everything I do."* Honestly identify the one part of your day (or your heart) that you are least proud of, the part you would normally hide. Reflect on the fact that God was not only there, but He knew it was coming "even before I say it." Instead of feeling condemnation, reflect on what it means that He knows the absolute worst of you... and His hand is still there to guide and support you.

Want to study further? If you want to study God's limitless attributes more deeply, here are some key passages:

- God is All-Knowing (Omniscient): Hebrews 4:12-13; Matthew 10:29-30, 1 John 3:19-20
- God is Everywhere (Omnipresent): Jeremiah 23:23-24; Proverbs 15:3, Hebrews 4:14-16
- God is All-Powerful (Omnipotent): Isaiah 55:11, Jeremiah 32:27, and don't forget the Genesis account of creation!
- God is Eternal: Psalm 90:2; Revelation 1:8
- God is Self-Sufficient: Acts 17:24-25

This only scratches the surface of these limitless attributes of God. Feel free to also check out the following website for a summary of these doctrines. www.thegospelcoalition.org/essay/omnipotence-omniscience-omnipresence-god/

Day Ten —Balanced Scale

He is the Rock; his deeds are perfect. Everything he does is just and fair. He is a faithful God who does no wrong; how just and upright he is!
-Deuteronomy 32:4

Are you seeing the pattern this week? It's a constant theme: We are flawed, but God is perfect. We run into our limits, but He is limitless. Don't be surprised that this contrast continues. In fact, everything we experience in this fallen world is meant to point us to the One who is whole, complete, and is worthy of our worship.

The Tilted Scales
We live in a world of unbalanced scales. We see it every day. The dishonest person gets the promotion. The person who works the hardest is overlooked. Injustice seems to get a free pass, while true integrity often feels like a liability. We've become so accustomed to unfairness that we are almost surprised when things do work out in a just way. We know, deep in our hearts, that our world is tilted.

Because we are so familiar with flawed justice, we tend to project that onto God. We treat Him like a powerful politician, hoping He'll bend the rules for us. We pray for Him to "tip the scales" in our favor, to overlook our wrongs while punishing the wrongs of others. But our God is not like us.

The Foundation of the Throne
Today's verse reveals God's character as "the Rock." This rock is a stable summit where we can find safety and protection. He is unmoving and permanent. The bedrock of His character is the absolute, and in the foundation of who He is, He is just and fair.

God is Righteous. This means He is the standard for what is right. He doesn't consult a rulebook. He is the rulebook. God is Just. This means He always acts in perfect alignment with His righteous character. God is Blameless. As the verse says, He "does no wrong." He doesn't choose not to sin. He can't sin. His Divine and Sacred nature is too just to tolerate evil (Habakkuk 1:13). He is unable to condone wrongdoing.

The Bible tells us that the God of love is also a God of judgment who will put all things in the world to rights in the end.
-Timothy Keller, *The Reason for God* (85)

This perfect justice is not just one of His attributes. It is a foundational characteristic of who He is. As the psalmist says, "Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne" (Psalm 89:14). His authority rests on the fact that He is perfectly, completely, and eternally fair. He "does not show favoritism" (Acts 10:34) and "will judge or reward you according to what you do" (1 Peter 1:17).

The Terrifying and Beautiful Truth
This should stop us in our tracks. If God's scales are perfectly balanced, if He is a faithful God who "does no wrong", what happens when He weighs us?

His perfect justice is terrifying news for people who are perfectly unjust. We have all tilted the scales through sin. We have all chosen wrong. A just God cannot simply ignore sin. Otherwise, He would not be perfectly just! His Righteous character demands that wrong be made right. He can't just wave his hand and pretend it didn't happen, or He would cease to be "the Rock." He would be unfaithful. Here is the most beautiful truth of the gospel:

God's justice was not set aside. It was satisfied.

At the cross, God demonstrated that He is both "just and the justifier" (Romans 3:26). His perfect justice demanded a payment for our sin. His infinite love provided that payment Himself. He didn't tilt the scales. He balanced them. The full weight of our sin was placed on Christ, so that we could receive the full weight of His righteousness.

We don't have to fear the balanced scale. Because of Jesus, when God looks at us, He sees the perfect deeds of His Son. We stand secure on the Rock, loved by a God who is both perfectly fair and perfectly faithful.

Questions:
When you personally witness injustice, is your first, honest reaction to doubt God's goodness and believe that He is unfair, or to trust that His perfect justice will prevail?

Read Habakkuk 1:12-17. Habakkuk was distraught, asking God how He could possibly use the wicked, evil Babylonians to punish His own people. It seemed completely unfair. When you see evil people prospering, do you feel this same frustration?

How does the truth that God is patient and "does not want anyone to be destroyed, but wants everyone to repent" (2 Peter 3:9) challenge your desire for immediate judgment?

Consider the words in **1 Peter 1:17** that God "will judge or reward you according to what you do." Since you were ransomed... "with the precious blood of Christ" (1 Peter 1:19), how does this truth *simultaneously* motivate you to live a holy life and comfort you that your failures are already paid for?

In what specific relationship or situation are you currently asking God to overlook *your* sin while demanding He judge someone else's?

Reflection: Read **1 Peter 1:17-21**. Peter commands us to live in "reverent fear" because we know we were redeemed by the "precious blood of Christ," a perfect, blameless lamb. Take a minute today to hold these two truths in tension:

- The Judge is Impartial: Your actions, words, and thoughts will be judged perfectly.
- The Lamb was Perfect: Your redemption was paid perfectly.

Reflect on how these two truths should destroy both arrogance (thinking your sin doesn't matter) and despair (thinking your sin is too great). How does the "balanced scale" of the cross free you to live in joyful, reverent obedience?

Want to study further? We know that Scripture teaches that this world will one day end and that Christ will return as the judge of this world and everyone who has ever lived. In God's perfect timing, justice will happen. Read Acts 17:30-31 and Revelation 19:11-16 to see how God has set a day and how He will wage war against evil.

Day Eleven —Majestic Light

He alone can never die, and he lives in light so brilliant that no human can approach him. No human eye has ever seen him, nor ever will. All honor and power to him forever! Amen.
-1 Timothy 6:16

The Glare
We spend our lives chasing things that shine. The lure of sparkling riches is like a magnet to our flesh. We pursue the glare of a high-paying job, the approval of others, or the accumulation of possessions. We are drawn to what we can see, hold, and count, and hopefully count again. But Paul calls these pursuits "uncertain." They are a fading light. They rust, they break, and they ultimately bring nothing but death. Everything we chase will one day end, but God is the one constant in the universe.

Paul is writing to his protégé Timothy, warning him to "flee" from the love of money, calling it a "trap" and a "root of all kinds of evil" (1 Timothy 6:9-10). In contrast, he provides this description of who God is. He is more brilliant and bright than anything else we have ever seen. He does not fade and is **immortal**.

Instead of pursuing riches, we are to pursue God. But this presents a problem. How do you pursue a God who, by His very nature, is invisible and physically unapproachable?

The Unapproachable Radiance
God is **Radiant**. This isn't the soft glow of a candle, as maybe we are in this world. This is the **Majestic** light of a billion stars collected into one. Can you picture that? It is a brilliance so pure, so holy, and so unique that our human frailty cannot survive it. In this way, He is **Unapproachable**, not because He is unkind, but because His perfection would consume our imperfection.

This is the God who robed Himself in **majesty** (Psalm 93:1). This is the "God of glory" who is so **awesome** that when God appeared to Moses, His glory was so bright that the people were afraid to come near Moses as he reflected that radiance (Exodus 34:30). God is the one whose throne was flaming with fire (Daniel 7:9). No eye has seen Him, nor ever can, because to see Him as He truly is would be the end of us.

The holiness of God should frighten you, while at the same time it should give you rest. It should both blow your mind and form the basis of how you make sense of everything.
-Paul David Tripp, *Do You Believe?* (108)

The Light That Came Near
If this is who God is, an unapproachable, invisible, majestic light. then how can we possibly "pursue" Him? We are on the ground, and He is in a light we cannot enter. Here is the miracle of the gospel:

The unapproachable Light approached us.

The God "no human eye has ever seen" has been made known (John 1:18). Jesus Christ, His Son, radiates God's own glory and expresses the very character of God (Hebrews 1:3). In Jesus, the blinding light of God's majesty was manifested in human flesh. The light became approachable. The God no one could see, we have heard, seen with our own eyes, and touched Him with our own hands. The Word of Life was revealed, and now we can testify of Him (1 John 1:1-4).

This is why we "flee" the cheap glitter of this world. It is worth nothing in comparison to God. We are invited to pursue the one, true, **awesome**, and **Majestic Light**. God, who loved us so much He found a way to bridge the infinite distance that separated us, inviting us into His very presence through His Son, Jesus.

Questions:
What "glare" (money, approval, success, comfort, security, social media validation) do you find yourself pursuing most often?

Why do you think those tangible things often feel more "real" or urgent than the unseen God?

In what ways is it comforting to know God is so far beyond our human limits? In what ways is it challenging or even intimidating?

How does the tangible, historical person of Jesus (who "our hands have touched") help you connect with the infinite, invisible God? (Note: Don't forget the role of the Spirit and guidance of Scripture in understanding God)

Reflection: Read 1 Timothy 6:9-11. There is a list of things to flee from and things to pursue. Spend a few quiet moments honestly evaluating your heart's pursuit. Look at your daily habits, your anxieties, and where you spend your best energy.

Are you primarily chasing the uncertain riches of this world, or are you actively pursuing the character of God? Be specific and honest with yourself about what your actions say you truly value.

Want to study further? Take a look at Colossians 1:15-20 and Hebrews 1:1-4. In these passages, you will see how Jesus is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn, the partner in creation, the sustainer of all things, the ruler of all, and the head of the church.

Day Twelve —Mysterious Wisdom

Oh, how great are God's riches and wisdom and knowledge! How impossible it is for us to understand his decisions and his ways! For who can know the LORD's thoughts? Who knows enough to give him advice?
-Romans 11:33–34

We live in a "Why?" generation. We have instant access to the collection of human knowledge in our pockets. If we have a question, we Google it or we ask Siri. We want to understand. We want to see the blueprint, read the reviews, and know the reasoning behind statements. We crave information because information feels like control and allows us to live confidently in a world of chaos. But what happens when we come face-to-face with God?

The Unsearchable Mind
If you have read Romans in its entirety, you will understand that the Apostle Paul spends a lot of time explaining the "Pure Gospel" and God's plan for salvation. Although he uses a lot of words, he only scratches the surface of God's wonderful and sovereign plan. It's as if Paul is throwing up his hands in absolute awe. God is rich in wisdom and knowledge. His ways are unsearchable and impossible to understand fully.

As we discuss foundational aspects of God's character, we see that His wisdom is unlike anything else. He is not just "smarter" than us, like a child with a crayon trying to understand complex equations. His thoughts are not even on the same plane of existence.

"*My thoughts are nothing like your thoughts," says the LORD. "And my ways are far beyond anything you could imagine. 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 55:8–9

We are the created. He is the Creator. We are finite. He is infinite. This is why Paul asks the rhetorical questions. "Who can know the LORD's thoughts? Who knows enough to give him advice?" The very idea is absurd. We are in no position to be God's consultants. As God asked Job out of the whirlwind, "Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?" (Job 38:4). Hint: Job did not exist.

Human beings need truth from outside themselves to make sense out of life. We need God's perspective to interpret the facts of our existence. We were created to be worshipers.
-Paul David Tripp, *Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands* (45)

The Revealed Mind
This reality could be an overwhelming concept that you are loved and led by a God whose mind we can never fully know. But here is a puzzling concept of our faith. Paul asks the same question in another letter (1 Corinthians 2:16). He affirms that God's mind is unknowable to the natural man. The eternal answer to the question remains the same... But he doesn't stop there. He follows it with one of the most incredible statements in Scripture: "...But we understand these things, for we have the mind of Christ."

How can both be true? How can God's mind be totally unknowable, and yet we have the mind of Christ? **The answer is the Holy Spirit.** We cannot search the deep things of God on our own, but the Spirit "searches out everything and shows us God's deep secrets" (2:10). Only the Spirit knows God's thoughts, because He is God. As believers, we have received God's Spirit, so we can know the wonderful things that God has revealed to us (2:12).

The Spirit helps us know what to say and explain spiritual truths (2:13). Those who have not trusted in Jesus are still dead and blind, unable to see these truths. So we are to set our minds on Christ, on things above, being renewed by the knowledge of God. "Have your way with me, Jesus, and accomplish your will in my life." This is the mind of Christ as He will guide us forward in the wisdom of His Spirit (Col.3:1-11).

God, in His mysterious wisdom, chose to reveal His mind and plan, to a certain level, to us. He didn't give us a map of all His future decisions, but He gave us something infinitely better: His Spirit, His Son, and His Word. He has given us eyes to see the Truth. He has given us ears to understand the Hope. He has given us clarity to see light in the darkness. We are no longer dead, but alive in Christ.

We will never understand why God allows every specific thing to happen. His "ways" remain beyond us. But we are not left in the dark. We can know His character. We can know His promises. We can know His heart. His mysterious wisdom is not a puzzle designed to frustrate us. He desires that we have faith in Him and trust Him through all things.

Questions:
In what area of your life are you most frustrated by not knowing "why" God is doing (or not doing) something?

How does this lack of information challenge your sense of control?

When you pray about a difficult situation, do your prayers sound more like trusting God's wisdom or advising Him on the best way to fix your problem?

We're told God's thoughts are "higher than our thoughts." How does this truth comfort you in a confusing situation? How does it frustrate you?

What does it practically mean to "have the mind of Christ" (1 Corinthians 2:16) if we can't know God's "unsearchable decisions"? If it doesn't mean knowing the future, what does it mean for your life today?

Reflection: Read 1 Corinthians 2:10-16. Paul says the Spirit reveals to us what God has prepared, so that we can "understand what God has freely given us."

Reflect on a major uncertainty in your life right now. You cannot know the plan (God's unsearchable decision). But "you have the mind of Christ." This means you can know the Person. Instead of obsessing over the "why," reflect on what the Spirit has already revealed about God's character. How does knowing God's character (He is faithful, He is good, He is sovereign) give you peace, even when you don't know His plan?

Application Checkup: Don’t forget to praise God in a prayer of adoration!

Want to study further? *Note from Brent Smith:* If you have been around me for any amount of time, you know that I love the response God gives to Job when he begs Him for an answer to the “why” all these things were happening to him. This response personally brings me to a renewed sense of awe, wonder, and a response of worship to a God I cannot fully understand. Read Job 38-41 and Proverbs 3:5-6 as a reminder to lean on God’s wisdom and not our own.

Day Thirteen —Overwhelming Beauty

The one thing I ask of the LORD— the thing I seek most— is to live in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, delighting in the LORD's perfections and meditating in his Temple. For he will conceal me there when troubles come; he will hide me in his sanctuary. He will place me out of reach on a high rock. Then I will hold my head high above my enemies who surround me. At his sanctuary I will offer sacrifices with shouts of joy, singing and praising the LORD with music.
-Psalm 27:4-6

We are wired for awe. We will travel thousands of miles to stand on the edge of a canyon, climb to the top of a mountain, scuba dive to see a vibrant reef, or stay up late to watch a meteor shower. We stop to capture a perfect sunset on our phones. Why? Because we are drawn to **beauty**.

The Echo of Beauty
Think about the most mind-bendingly beautiful thing you've ever seen on this earth. The snow-capped majesty of a mountain range. The intricate, microscopic design of life. The bright colors of a tropical bird. The vastness and distance of the galaxy. If you take the time to stop and look, these things can take our breath away. But, even in the brilliance of beauty, they are only an echo, a shadow, or a silhouette of the Maker.

All the beauty we see in creation is just a fingerprint, a brushstroke, or a signature from the Artist. If the painting is this magnificent, what must the Painter look like? If the universe is this vast and wonderful, how much more beautiful and full of wonder must its Creator be?

God's beauty isn't just visual. It is also relational.

- God is **good**: "For the LORD is good. His unfailing love continues forever, and his faithfulness continues to each generation" (Psalm 100:5). God is fully good, not just some. He is the source of goodness, and His love for us does not end.

- God is **loving & gracious**: "The LORD is compassionate and merciful, slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love" (Psalm 103:8). God has compassion on the hurting, weak, and those struggling. He understands our condition and is patient and gracious even when we are rebellious.

- God is **merciful & faithful**: "The faithful love of the LORD never ends! His mercies never cease. Great is his faithfulness; his mercies begin afresh each morning" (Lamentations 3:22–23). God has an endless love and mercy towards us and provides forgiveness for sins when we are undeserving.

This is the beauty that truly satisfies the human soul. God overflows with a love that never fails, a mercy that never ends, and a faithfulness that never wavers.

This is the beauty of God

The "One Thing"
This is why David, a king who had everything, power, wealth, and success, was able to list his entire life's ambition down to one thing: "gaze at the splendor of the Lord" (NET).

He had tasted all the world had to offer, and he realized it was all just an echo. He wanted the source. Seeking God above everything else isn't about dutifully checking a box. It's about being so captivated by His worth and beauty that all other pursuits fade in comparison.

We were made to be awestruck. Don't settle for the echoes. Don't spend your life chasing the finite beauty of this world. Seek the one, true, infinite source. Seek the Lord. He is the only beauty that will ever satisfy your soul.

Amid all these pleasures we are wired to pursue, we must always remember that our deepest craving is not for something but for Someone. Our ultimate satisfaction is found not in the gifts we enjoy but in the Giver who provides them.
-David Platt, *Follow Me* (109)

Questions:
What is the "one thing" your daily actions and thoughts reveal you are truly seeking?

Do you seek God simply for who He is, or are you seeking Him for what He can do for you?

What's your first response when life gets hard and people are against you? Do you pray, sing, shout for joy, worship, or offer sacrifices? Or something else?

What "echoes" (e.g., a relationship, career, possessions) are you tempted to value more than the "Source" itself?

God's beauty is found in His character: His love, mercy, grace, faithfulness, and goodness. Which of these beautiful attributes do you find it easiest to gaze on? Which one do you find hardest to believe or trust in right now?

Reflection: Read Psalm 27 slowly and notice the contrast between David's deep awe of God's beauty ("one thing I ask") and his anxiety about his enemies ("Do not turn me over to my enemies"). Pay attention to how his confidence in God's faithfulness ("Yet I am confident I will see the LORD’s goodness while I am here in the land of the living.") acts as the bridge between his fear and his worship. This is a practical illustration of giving “all your worries and cares to God, for he cares about you” (1 Peter 5:7).

Want to study further? Read Psalm 19:1-4 and Isaiah 33:17. See how the heavens declare God’s glory and how we, who put our faith in Jesus, will see Him one day.

Day Fourteen —All Bow Before Him

Whenever the living beings give glory and honor and thanks to the one sitting on the throne (the one who lives forever and ever), the twenty-four elders fall down and worship the one sitting on the throne (the one who lives forever and ever). And they lay their crowns before the throne and say, "You are worthy, O Lord our God, to receive glory and honor and power. For you created all things, and they exist because you created what you pleased"
-Revelation 4:9-11

Bowing down feels unnatural for many of us, especially in American culture. We don't have kings or royalty. The idea of physically bowing before anyone feels distant and perhaps even a bit strange. But for the Christian, this cultural norm should be re-examined. We are not forced to cower before a cruel authority, but are instead compelled by the majesty, perfection, and wonder of God. In addition, the realization of His grace, unmerited, loving, and saving favor should be the be thing that draws us to our knees.

We need to learn how to truly and authentically worship. This isn't just about a single physical posture, but about a complete life-orientation. It's a worship expressed through joyful song, humble prayer, sacrificial giving, and a posture of surrender. The vision we see in heaven isn't just a future event. It is a present lesson in what worship really looks like.

The Posture of Heaven
The twenty-four elders, often seen as the ones representing God's redeemed people, the twelve tribes and the twelve Apostles (Rev. 21:12-13), are falling down and casting their crowns before God.

A Christian man once said to another, "That good deed is going to get you another jewel in your crown in heaven." His friend replied, "Good, then my crown will make a bigger splash than yours when I throw it into the crystal sea before the throne of God."

Of course, this is a humorous way to recognize that even in our victories, it is really all for God. When the elders are bowing down, it isn't just polite respect. Falling down is an act of total surrender, an acknowledgment that He is God and they are not. But the casting of crowns is significant. A crown is a symbol of authority, achievement, and power. By laying them at God's feet, the elders are making a declaration:

Every victory we won, every authority we held, every good thing we accomplished… it all came from You. You are the source. You are the goal. You are the only one worthy of these.

The Reason for Worship
Why do they do the elders do this? Their song gives us the answer: " You are worthy, O Lord our God, to receive glory and honor and power. For you created all things…"

This is the anchor of our worship. God is Sovereign. He is not just a ruler. He is the Ruler. He is worthy because He is the Creator. Everything that exists, from the grand endlessness of stars in the heavens to each individual grain of sand, exists for one reason:

Because God created what pleased Him

Here, we see the representation of the church bowing down and worshiping God, but they are not the only ones who will do this. The Apostle Paul echoes the prophet Isaiah, “every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God” (ESV) (Isa. 45:23, Rom. 14:11, Phil. 2:10-11). All people will give an account to God and stand in His presence to be judged for what they have done. Why? Because this is His universe.

If you think you can live any way you want on Monday through Saturday and then go to church on Sunday and worship, you’re dead wrong! Worship doesn’t occur in a vacuum, nor is it stimulated by artificial gimmickry. If you have to be in a church building, or hear a certain kind of mood music to worship, what you’re doing isn’t worship.
-John MacArthur, *True Worship* (36)

Our Response
The scene in Revelation is not just a glimpse of the future. It is an invitation to our present. We are called to join this eternal song. We worship Him by living lives that acknowledge His sovereignty (Rom. 12:1-2). This means that, like the elders, we must cast our "crowns" before Him.

What are our crowns? Our careers, our ambitions, our relationships, our successes, and even our failures. We lay them all at His feet. We surrender our claim to the throne of our own lives and joyfully declare: **You are worthy. This is Your kingdom. You are in control.**

Worship is what we will be doing for eternity, so we don't have to wait for heaven to begin. We can start practicing for forever, right now, by recognizing the One who is worthy of it all.

Questions:

In what ways do you resist the posture of full surrender to God, perhaps by keeping certain "crowns" (your career, your relationships, your personal time) for yourself?

How does remembering that God created everything, including you, change the way you view your problems and your possessions?

Since worship is our eternal destiny, what practical changes can you make this week to "start practicing now," moving your worship from a Sunday-only event to a daily posture of life?

What is the difference between saying God is "worthy" and living like He is "worthy"?

Reflection: Take a few minutes to identify the "crowns" you are currently wearing. These are your achievements, skills, reputation, and your successes, etc. Picture yourself in the throne room, one by one, prayerfully laying your crowns before the throne. As you surrender each one, reflect on this: "This was never mine. It was always a gift from You." What emotions come up as you do this (Relief, Fear, Joy)?

Application Checkup: Do you remember the holiness awareness challenge from **Day 8**, the beginning of this week? How did you do or did you forget it right away? Putting information into our minds is only part of the process. In order to realize real change, we must begin to apply these simple tools such as daily confession or not excusing our sin.

Having a mindset focused on the holy standards of God, helps us identify where we miss the mark. We don't stop there in shame, but we confess our sins and set our minds, hearts, and feet towards Christ, pursuing Him who is our righteousness.

Want to study further? Read Hebrews 12:28-13:16. This passage explains that "Since we are receiving a Kingdom that is unshakable, let us be thankful and please God by worshiping him with holy fear and awe. For our God is a devouring fire." It then goes on to explain how a person of God should live, which pleases God. Note the many ways you can please God through radically obedient living.

Partnership and Small Group Discussion

You have made it through Week Two! In Week One, we looked inward at our condition (created, fallen, redeemed). This week, we looked upward at God's character. We explored His holiness, justice, limitlessness, and His beauty.

How to Format Your Meeting
Use this structure to keep your time centered on worship and connection:

1. **Check-In (10 Minutes):** *"This week, did you find yourself running to God or to other things for satisfaction?"*
2. **Review (5 Minutes):** Briefly recall the attributes covered this week: Holiness, Omniscience (All-Knowing), Justice, Light, Wisdom, Beauty, and Worthiness.
3. **Discussion (30-45 Minutes):** Select a few questions below. Since this week was about theology (the study of God), focus on how these truths impact your heart and life.
4. **Prayer (10-15 Minutes):** This week's prayer time will look different. See the specific "Adoration" instructions at the end.

Discussion Questions
1. The Weight of Holiness (Day 8) We started the week with Isaiah's vision of God as "Holy, holy, holy," a standard of "unseen perfection" that made even angels cover their faces.

- We tend to view perfection as just getting a 100% score or making no mistakes. How is God's holiness different from just being good?

- When you approach God in prayer, do you approach Him casually, like a buddy, or with the reverence due to a King? How can you balance intimacy ("Abba") with reverence ("Holy")?

2. Fully Known, Fully Loved (Day 9 & 12) We discussed that God is Beyond Limits. He knows your thoughts before you think them (Psalm 139) and His wisdom is mysterious and higher than ours (Romans 11).

- Be honest: Is the thought that God knows *everything* you do and think comforting to you, or is it terrifying? Why?

- We live in a "Why?" generation. What is one situation in your life right now where you are struggling to trust God's higher thoughts because you can't see the plan?

3. The Balanced Scale (Day 10) We looked at how God is the Rock and His justice is perfect. We admitted that we often want God to "tip the scales" in our favor while balancing them for others.

- In what specific relationship or situation have you been demanding justice for someone else, while hoping God overlooks your own faults?

- How does the Cross, where Jesus satisfied the justice of God for us, change how you view the unfairness of life?

4. The Glare vs. The Glory (Day 11 & 13) We contrasted the glare of the world (money, approval, success) with the majestic light and overwhelming beauty of God.

- Day 11 challenged us to flee the glare. What was the brightest glare that distracted you this week? (e.g., social media approval, financial stress, the desire for comfort).

- David asked for one thing: to gaze at God's beauty. If you could ask God for only *one thing* right now, what would your honest answer be?

5. Casting Crowns (Day 14) We ended the week in the throne room of Revelation 4, watching the elders cast their crowns before God.

- A crown represents our achievement, authority, or pride. What is one crown you are holding onto tightly that you need to mentally lay at Jesus' feet this week?

You are worthy, O Lord our God, to receive glory and honor and power. For you created all things, and they exist because you created what you pleased.
-Revelation 4:11

Prayer and Application
This week we have been practicing praising God in prayer through **Adoration**. Instead of starting with requests for yourselves, spend the first half of your prayer time in adoration.

- **Pick an Attribute:** Go around the circle (or back and forth with your partner). Each person picks one attribute from the week (Holy, All-Knowing, Just, Beautiful, Wise).
- **Pray it to the Lord:** Pray a sentence thanking God for that specific quality. (e.g., *"God, I praise You because You are Just. I don't have to worry about fixing everything because You will make all things right."*)
- **Surrender:** End by praying for one another to release the specific crowns you discussed in Question 5.

Encouragement: You are fully known by the God of the universe, and yet, you are fully loved. Walk in that confidence this week!

WEEK THREE

DAY FIFTEEN —CROWNS CAST DOWN
DAY SIXTEEN —AS IT IS IN HEAVEN
DAY SEVENTEEN —CITIZENS OF A HOLY CITY
DAY EIGHTEEN —EDEN'S PEACE
DAY NINETEEN —ENCOUNTERING GOD
DAY TWENTY —TENT OF MEETING
DAY TWENTY ONE —RADIANT REFLECTION

Week Three

Have you ever gotten into line to order at a restaurant or a café, and you got behind someone who was impossible to please? They substitute almost every ingredient, and their order sounds like some sort of rocket scientist trying to launch a rocket into space with great precision and consequence if done incorrectly. Add to this the fact that all the changes mean that the end result will likely not meet the person's standards anyway.

A menu is a fairly simple concept. A menu tells you what the restaurant recommends and can help you anticipate what to expect when your food or drink arrives. I will admit that I am notorious for asking for items with no pickles…pickles are gross. The establishment thinks pickles are good and that the flavors mesh well with the other ingredients, and that most people would prefer to have them over the few who don't want them.

Now take this example and bring it to the church. God has told us how to live, how to worship Him, what obedience looks like, how to pray, etc. **Are we trying to order these things with our own spin?** Are we trying to tell God that what He has designed could be done better or could serve us by modifying it…just a little?

We should be reminded that His Word is perfect, His design is what is best, and that the things He has asked us for are not for us to fulfill us, but for Him and for His Glory. When we change them to edify us or to accommodate our style or preference, we should take great caution, because God has already ordained how certain things are to be done.

The next two weeks are a study of what we are calling Holy Spaces. Holy Spaces are sacred and important places, tasks, or practices that God has ordained in great detail for a specific purpose. We will see people try to change the menu to accommodate their own ideas.

Make sure you take notice of how that works out. We will see people take great attention to detail to make sure they follow the prescribed method or instruction, and we will see the outcome of that. What God has ordained in a certain way, let no man try to substitute what God has given for freedom of expression or artistic enhancement. Let man use the mind and talents that God has given them to make a beautiful monument to bring Him glory.

I (Paul Mollett) hope you enjoy and are challenged by these next couple of weeks as we dive into a study of **Holy Spaces**.

Day Fifteen —Place of Sacrifice

Sometime later, God tested Abraham's faith. "Abraham!" God called. "Yes," he replied. "Here I am." "Take your son, your only son—yes, Isaac, whom you love so much—and go to the land of Moriah. Go and sacrifice him as a burnt offering on one of the mountains, which I will show you."
-Genesis 22:1-2

The Test of Trust
It's tempting to read this story and see Abraham as a "robot" of the faith, marching up the mountain without a second thought. But imagine the potential internal battle. Imagine the whispers of doubt that must have filled his mind on that journey.

Maybe God didn't mean "my son"? Maybe He really meant "son of a sheep"? Maybe He meant I should sacrifice something that my son loves? Maybe God will accept something else, since He is loving and merciful. Regardless, won't He just forgive me anyways if I repent after disobeying?

This battle of trust is where faith is truly tested. It's not just about obeying the command. It's about trusting the character of the Commander, even when the command makes no sense to us.

This struggle isn't unique to Abraham. When God called me (Brent Smith) into ministry, my mind was full of questions. Where? When? How? And even why me? I wanted the detailed plan, the packing list of sorts, and confirmation that it would be okay. What was happening internally was a battle of trust in God. I had a good job that could support my growing family. I had a good church with spiritual support and discipleship relationships. I had financial security. If I quit my job, would it be okay? Although intellectually I knew that God would provide, my inner being was struggling. One night, Jessica (my wife) and I prayed and dedicated ourselves to the Lord and committed that when the call came, we would respond, "Here I am." Two days later, I received the call and answered. I am a witness that trusting in God is better than trusting in yourself.

The Heart
Our response to God's call reveals the true nature of our hearts. Think of Cain and Abel. Abel brought an acceptable sacrifice to God with the right heart and motivation in obedience to God's request. Cain, on the other hand, did not. When God did not accept Cain's offering, he became angry, to the point of murdering his brother in a jealous rage. Cain's heart wasn't surrendered.

Cain wanted God's blessing, but on his own terms. Abraham's heart was different. He was willing to give up what was most precious to him, trusting that God is good, even when the situation looks bad.

A Place of Provision
Mount Moriah is a marvelous and special site, known as a place of sacrifice, testing, and divine provision. About a thousand years after Abraham, King David built an altar on this location (2 Sam. 24:18), which became the site where his son, Solomon, built the magnificent temple. This temple was later destroyed by King Nebuchadnezzar, and after being rebuilt, this second temple was ultimately destroyed in 70 A.D.

In the end, Abraham's faith was rewarded. He trusted that God had a plan and would provide, even when he didn't understand. At the last second, God intervened and provided a ram caught in the thicket. Because of Abraham's faith on Mount Moriah, his offspring would be blessed.

The Ultimate Sacrifice
The ultimate sacrifice for sin wasn't made in the temple. Jesus Christ, the fulfillment of the Law, became the greatest ram God provided. Just as the scapegoat in Leviticus 16 bore the sins of the Israelites, Jesus took on the sins of the world. He was led to that same mountain ridge, Golgotha, which shares the same ridge as Moriah, and was crucified outside the walls. There, God provided His own Son, His only Son, whom He loved, as the final sacrifice for us.

The Man who has God for his treasure has all things in One… if he must see them *(earthly treasures)* go, one after one, he will scarcely feel a sense of loss, for having the Source of all thing he has in One all satisfaction, all pleasure, all delight. Whatever he may lose he has actually lost nothing, for he now has it all in One, and he has it purely, legitimately and forever.
-A. W. Tozer, *The Pursuit of God* (228), italicized text added for clarification.

Gaining Everything
Yes, sometimes it feels like we are giving up a lot for God, but in reality, we give up very little for the promise of so much more. Whether it is our income, time, comfort, or energy, it is worth trusting and following God, knowing that He will provide exactly what we need, when we need it.

Questions:
When God asks you to do something that challenges your comfort or logic, what is your first internal reaction? What "whispers of doubt" do you most often hear?

What things in your life do you fear sacrificing in order to fully trust and obey God?

In what ways do you find yourself acting like Cain, possibly trying to negotiate with God or offering Him a partial surrender rather than a complete one? When God doesn't accept your offering, how do you react?

How does understanding that God "did not spare his own Son" (Romans 8:32) give you confidence when He asks you to sacrifice something precious to you?

Reflection: Reflect honestly on any earthly treasures that you use to *supplement* your joy in God, or as a *substitute* for God. What earthly treasures are you clinging to so tightly that they prevent you from experiencing God as your source of all things?

Application: The application challenge this week is to continue a daily habit or prayer through confession and adoration with an intent to draw near to the Lord.

1. Set a specific time or periodic times each day to spend quiet, undistracted, silent time before God.
2. Put away your phone (you can do it!), remove distractions and even set a timer to help you focus on praying to the Lord alone. This is not a time to plan your day, set a priority list, or worry about tomorrow. This is a time to seek the Lord's guidance and wisdom as you go throughout your day.
3. If you have not had a regular habit of prayer in your life, this could be a challenge. To help with this, set a timer for 10 minutes and dedicate this small amount of time drawing near to the Lord. If you have a regular habit or prayer, try increasing the time you spend praying to the Lord this week.
4. As the week progresses, evaluate whether spending devoted time with God as a residual effect on your interactions with others, your patience, your love, care, and outlook on life.

Want to study further? Read Hebrews 11. Yes, the entire chapter. This chapter provides a description of faithful people who were commended by God. It's important to note that these were not perfect people. Each had significant weaknesses. Yet, despite their flaws, God used them in mighty ways to fulfill His will on earth.

Day Sixteen —As It Is In Heaven

Pray like this: Our Father in heaven, may your name be kept holy. May your Kingdom come soon. May your will be done on earth, as it is in heaven. Give us today the food we need, and forgive us our sins, as we have forgiven those who sin against us. And don't let us yield to temptation, but rescue us from the evil one. "If you forgive those who sin against you, your heavenly Father will forgive you. But if you refuse to forgive others, your Father will not forgive your sins.
- Matthew 6:9-15

How many times have you prayed the Lord's Prayer? A hundred? A thousand? The words can become so familiar, like a well-worn sweater, that we barely register what we're saying. But what if we stopped and really thought about the power of this prayer?

Oh God, You are Holy, like no other, greater than all. You, Lord God, reign in Heaven and we call out to You, the Only True God. Let Your Kingdom come, and may your will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.

A Prayer of Submission
In heaven, there is perfect order and complete, joyful obedience to God's will. On earth, however, it is not this way. God's masterpiece, humanity, doesn't always follow Him. In fact, we often don't.

This is an invitation for God's perfect, heavenly purposes to completely overtake our own earthly goals. This is a prayer of submission. Are we truly prepared to trade our agenda for His? Today, we explore what it truly means to pray for heaven to invade earth, starting with our own hearts. We are asking: "Lord God, just as you command your Kingdom, the galaxies, and all celestial beings, the birds that fly, the animals in the deep oceans, and all the creeping things on the earth, please also have your will with me."

Good Intentions Aren't Good Enough
The gap between heaven's will and our actions is often wide. God has specific ways He wants things done. King Saul is a primary example of this. When the prophet Samuel was late, Saul decided to take matters into his own hands and make the sacrifice to God himself, hoping to secure victory in battle (1 Samuel 13). This did not please God. Why? Because God did not tell Saul to do this.

In another account, God told Saul to destroy everything in an enemy city. Instead, Saul kept the best sheep, intending to sacrifice them to God. While this may sound pious, it was not what God asked. Saul's "good intentions" were, in reality, direct disobedience. God's prophet confronted him with this question:

But Samuel replied, "What is more pleasing to the LORD: your burnt offerings and sacrifices or your obedience to his voice? Listen! Obedience is better than sacrifice, and submission is better than offering the fat of rams. Rebellion is as sinful as witchcraft, and stubbornness as bad as worshiping idols. So because you have rejected the command of the LORD, he has rejected you as king."
-1 Samuel 15:22-23

Heaven's Will on Earth
Unlike Saul's disobedient, self-motivated actions, Jesus Christ was the perfect embodiment of heaven's will on earth. He is the one who could say, "I am the living bread that came down from heaven" (John 6:51a). He didn't just do the will of God; His every action and motive were perfectly aligned with the Father.

It is possible for us to do the right action from a wrong motive, but this does not please God. Holiness has to do with more than mere acts. Our motives must be holy, that is, arising from a desire to do something simply because it is the will of God.
-Jerry Bridges, *The Pursuit of Holiness* (47)

So, what is God's will? What is God's way? It is not a complex, hidden mystery. The prayer itself gives us the answer: Love God, flee from sin, love others, and forgive them. We are to treat people with the same grace that God demonstrates for us.

This isn't a standard we can meet on our own. It requires God's power. That is why we pray, inviting His heavenly will into our earthly lives. We trust that "God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases him" (Philippians 2:13).

Questions:
If you were to pray this with complete honesty, what specific part of your life would you be most afraid of Him changing?

In what areas of your life do you offer God "good sacrifices" (like being busy with church activities or appearing religious) as a substitute for simple, direct obedience in a different area He's already shown you (like forgiving someone, stopping gossip, or being generous)?

How often do you check your own motives? What other, unholy motives, do you find competing with your desire to please God?

Refection: If "May your will be done on earth" truly happened in your home, your workplace, and your neighborhood today, what would be the most significant and immediate thing that would change?

Want to study further? We are over two weeks into this study, it is a good time to evaluate the topic of fasting. If you have not done so already, **"What is fasting?"** in the beginning of this book. Did you commit to a fast during this study? If not, please consider starting.

Continue reading the passage in Matthew 6:16-18 and consider how this discipline helps strip away our earthly motives, allowing us to focus more clearly on His heavenly will.

Day Seventeen —Citizens of a Holy City

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the old heaven and the old earth had disappeared. And the sea was also gone. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven like a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. 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. He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. All these things are gone forever."
-Revelation 21:1-4

Some people like to skip to the last page of a book to know if the ending is happy before they invest their time and emotions in the story. Are you one of those?

Well, either way, here in Revelation 21 we are given the ultimate "spoiler" as it is the final chapter in history, and it gives us a stunning snapshot of eternity in the presence of God.

The End of All Tears
We all feel the ache of this world. We feel the sting of loss, the frustration of limitations, and the weariness of a world groaning under the weight of sin. We cry, we hurt, and we grieve. But today's passage is not just a comfort and hope, but also the final display of the promise that the brokenness we see is temporary. There is a plan and it will one day all end.

John's vision of the "new heaven and a new earth" is the climax of the New Testament. It isn't just about a place, Heaven or the New Jerusalem, it's about God's presence reunited with humanity. The ultimate miracle of heaven is not the absence of death, but the **presence of God**.

Look, God's home is now among his people!

The intimacy lost in Eden is fully restored. God Himself will be our neighbor, our comforter, and our light. He will personally wipe every tear from our eyes, displaying His gentle care and compassion for each of us. This is the end of all pain, all sorrow, and all death.

The Criteria for Citizenship
But who gets to live in this holy city? The criteria to gain eternal life with God is holiness and righteousness and nothing impure will enter it (Matt. 5:20, Heb. 12:14, Rev. 21:27). This immediately presents a problem, for "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). If God and Jesus are the only ones truly righteous, how can "many" be there?

The answer is the miracle of the Gospel. We do not enter the holy city based on our own flimsy, chipped, and dented righteousness, but because we have been clothed in the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ. We are not holy in ourselves. **We are declared holy in Him.** Our citizenship was purchased for us, and our place is being prepared. As Jesus promised, “there is more than enough room in my Father’s home…I am going to prepare a place for you” (John 14:2).

A New Value System
Understanding the future hope of heaven should change our value system. In John's vision (later in Revelation 21), the streets of this city are paved with pure gold, like transparent glass, and its foundations are made of precious jewels. God will use the very things we kill for and protect in large bank vaults on earth as simple building materials to walk on. This is why Jesus urged us to sell our possessions and give to those in need, instead store up treasure in heaven that will not decay (Luke 12:33-34).

This is not an unclear hope, but a guaranteed and certain future that is beyond our comprehension. Although we get a small taste of it in this Scripture, it is far greater than we can fathom. As it is written, “No eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no mind has imagined what God has prepared for those who love him” (1 Corinthians 2:9).

Hope for Today, A Mission for Tomorrow
This vision also carries with it a warning. The same chapter that promises this new city also lists those who will be excluded. Revelation 21:8 makes it clear that those who reject God’s grace and choose to live for "the things of the world" will have their "part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone." Our eternal destination, our citizenship, is the most important choice and commitment we will ever make.

We are citizens of a heavenly city, even while we live on this earth. This changes our mission. We are not here to build a comfortable, private life, but to live as ambassadors of that coming city, right here in the midst of a broken world.

It is not simply to be taken for granted that the Christian has the privilege of living among other Christians. Jesus Christ lived in the midst of his enemies. At the end all his disciples deserted him. On the Cross he was utterly alone, surrounded by evildoers and mockers. For this cause he had come, to bring peace to the enemies of God. So the Christian, too, belongs not in the seclusion of a cloistered life but in the thick of foes. There is His commission, His work.

-Dietrick Bonhoeffer, *Life Together* (17)

Questions:

When you honestly picture heaven, do you find yourself focusing more on the relief of what will be removed (pain, sorrow, tears) or the joy of *Who* you will be with?

The world tells us to accumulate and protect. Heaven's value system is based on generosity and obedience to the Lord. Where in your life (your time, your money, your home) do these two value systems most clearly collide?

How does understanding heaven's value system change what you consider "rich" or "poor" here and now?

Why is it crucial for us to understand both the incredible hope of eternity with God and the sober warning of eternal separation at the same time? How does one affect the other?

If you truly believe your citizenship is in a "holy city" that is coming, how should that make you braver (not more fearful) to engage with the "foes" and brokenness of the world around you?

Reflection: Reflect on a specific sorrow, loss, or pain in your own life, maybe something that still brings a sting. Now, picture God Himself, not just dismissing that pain, but tenderly and personally addressing it. What does it mean to you that God doesn't just *end* the pain, but He *personally comforts* the one who was in pain? Rest in the hope that no tear you have cried is unnoticed, and none will be forgotten by Him.

Application Checkup: Don’t forget this the application challenge this week from **Day 15**. How have you been doing setting aside quiet, undistracted, meaningful time seeking to draw near to the Lord daily?

Want to study further? Open your Bible to Isaiah 65 and see what happens to those who forsake the Lord compared to those who have faith in Him alone. See how the reversal of death is accomplish and how God’s presence is clearly the reason.

Day Eighteen —Eden's Peace

Then the LORD God planted a garden in Eden in the east, and there he placed the man he had made. The LORD God made all sorts of trees grow up from the ground—trees that were beautiful and that produced delicious fruit. In the middle of the garden he placed the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.
-Genesis 2:8–9

BEEP, BEEP, BEEP!
Why do we set alarms that make this awful noise? Why does every electronic seem to create a relentless annoying and repetitive chime? Our alarms shriek before the sun is up. Our phones begin our days with buzzing notifications. We encounter packed schedules, noise, and demands that never end.

There's a reason we crave escape, isn't there? We leave our busy, hectic, and packed lives to go to a cabin in the woods, or camp by a lake, or a hotel free of clutter and dishes by the ocean. We're desperate to quiet the noise, to free our minds from the control of the urgent needs.

A Longing for Stillness
This deep-seated longing for peace isn't just a desire for a vacation. It's an echo of a home we've never known. It's a pull toward an original design, a place where our souls were not meant to be so cluttered and rushed. This longing points us all the way back to the beginning… to a garden.

When we picture the Garden of Eden, we often think of perfection. We imagine lush greenery, flawless fruit (and plenty of it), and pristine uncontaminated rivers. The text tells us God planted a garden that was both beautiful and produced delicious fruit. It was a place of total provision. It was a perfect home designed by a loving Creator for His children. It was a place where life flowed abundantly, like the river that ran through it.

The Heart of the Garden
Have you considered that the trees, the fruit, and the beauty were not the central feature of Eden?

The true "life" of the garden was
the unrestricted presence of God.

Genesis 3 describes God walking in the garden. He wasn't distant. He was intimate, physical and tangible. Adam and Eve had direct access to God's presence, His voice, His relationship, and His support in perfect fellowship. His full character was freely available to them. This is "shalom." Perfect peace and wholeness, found only in communion with our Maker. This is what we were created for.

This perfect communion was broken by sin, and humanity was exiled from the garden. Our souls though long for the wholeness and peace provided by God. The story of the Bible is God's relentless plan to bring us back into His presence.

At the end of the final book of the Bible... we see heaven *descending* into our world to unite with it and purify it of all its brokenness and imperfection. It will be a "new heavens and new earth." The prophet Isaiah depicts this as a new Garden of Eden, in which there is again absolute harmony.
-Timothy Keller, *The Reason for God* (232)

This is our great hope. The story doesn't end in exile. It ends in restoration. The book of Revelation reaffirms Genesis, describing a new city where the garden is restored. We see "the river of the water of life" and "the tree of life" once again (Revelation 22:1-2).

But this time, it's even better. The best promise of the new garden is not the restored scenery, but the restored relationship, secured forever through Christ. "They will see his face" (Revelation 22:4).

Living Between Gardens
We live between these two gardens. We no longer have the perfect presence of a special place like Eden, but we are not left without hope. Through Jesus, we have been given the Holy Spirit as a down payment of our inheritance. He is the foretaste of the restored garden to come and the reuniting with God. We can experience His presence, His guidance, and His peace even in a broken world.

Questions:
What are the specific sources of noise and clutter in your life that you find most draining? How do they compete with your soul's longing for stillness?

When you crave an escape (like a vacation), how much of that longing is just for the absence of stress versus the presence of "shalom" (God's peace)?

How might your view of rest change if you saw it as seeking communion, not just avoiding chaos?

Reflection: Take a moment to sit quietly. Silence the notifications on your phone and push aside your to-do list, even if just for a few minutes. Spend some time in prayer confessing your distractions to the Lord. Use the following sample prayer as a guide.

Father, my soul feels cluttered and rushed. I confess I chase temporary escapes from the noise instead of You. I see now that my ache for peace is really an ache for Your presence. I commit to setting You before all distractions. I choose Your presence over my phone and Your voice over my to-do list. Help me silence the clutter and find my true rest in You. Amen.

Want to study further? Read the account of the garden in Genesis 2:8-17. This passage details the original home God designed for humanity. As you read, consider the abundant provision, purpose, and vocation. What does this thoughtful design tell you about God's character and His original desire for His children? How does this God-given purpose before sin differ from the hectic and packed schedules we experience as a result of the fall?

Day Nineteen —Encountering God

"This is amazing," Moses said to himself. "Why isn't that bush burning up? I must go see it." When the LORD saw Moses coming to take a closer look, God called to him from the middle of the bush, "Moses! Moses!" "Here I am!" Moses replied. "Do not come any closer," the LORD warned. "Take off your sandals, for you are standing on holy ground. I am the God of your father—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." When Moses heard this, he covered his face because he was afraid to look at God.
- Exodus 3:3-6

Have you ever seen something you just can't take your eyes off? It's not always something you are proud of. Sometimes it's that rubberneck moment at a traffic accident, where you know you shouldn't look, but you do. Maybe it's catching someone doing something embarrassing, like a person humorously falling over in public, a person taking their goat for a walk down the road on a leash (this happens in Lake County by the way), or seeing a driver in the car next to you, totally in their own world, drumming on the steering wheel and singing at the top of their lungs... right before they catch you staring.

It's that awkward, magnetic pull of human curiosity.

Moses, a shepherd living a quiet, exiled life, has one of these moments. He's on a normal workday, in a desert, when he sees something that breaks the rules of nature. A bush is on fire, but it's not burning up. His curiosity is hooked.

A Holy Interruption
Moses is drawn in by the "what." God immediately turns the focus to the "Who." The moment Moses's curiosity turns into intentional action ("I must go see it"), God speaks.

The first command is a warning: "Do not come any closer." The second is a command: "Take off your sandals." The reason? "You are standing on holy ground."

Think about that. This wasn't a temple. It wasn't a designated holy site. It was just a random patch of desert on the side of a mountain. What made it holy? The bush? No. **God's presence made it holy.** God is so holy, so pure, that wherever He is becomes a hallowed space, a place to be revered, and a place of honor.

The Required Response
God's presence demands a response. For Moses, it meant stopping. It meant removing his dusty, dirty sandals which was an act of humility, respect, and vulnerability. He couldn't just casually stroll up to the God of the universe with his favorite kicks on his feet.

When God identifies Himself, Moses's curiosity instantly evaporates and is replaced by awe. He "covered his face because he was afraid to look at God." He went from "What is that?" to "Who are You?" This is the proper response to holiness. Not just curiosity, but reverence.

This encounter, however, was not just for Moses's education. It was a commission.

God's invitation for you to work with Him always leads you to a crisis of belief that requires faith and action.
-Henry & Richard Blackaby, *Experiencing God* (58)

This is exactly what happened to Moses. After this awesome, terrifying encounter, God gave him an impossible sounding Job. "I am sending you to Pharaoh. You must lead my people Israel out of Egypt." (Exod. 3:10).

This immediately triggered Moses's crisis of belief. He was not feeling up to the task at all. He experienced a legitimate doubt in his ability, immediately arguing with God. "Who am I to appear before Pharaoh?" he asked. He was a wanted man in Egypt for murder! He was a simple shepherd, not a diplomat. He even argued, "O Lord, I'm not very good with words. I never have been, and I'm not now, even though you have spoken to me. I get tongue-tied, and my words get tangled." (Exod. 4:10). He saw his own limitations, his past failures, and his current weaknesses. He felt completely inadequate for the assignment.

An encounter with the holy God is never just a "wow" moment that we walk away from. It's an invitation that demands a response. It stops us, it changes us, it often reveals our inadequacy, and then it sends us, not in our own strength, but in His.

Questions:
When you approach God (in prayer, Bible reading, or church attendance), are you more focused on getting information (the "what") or encountering Him (the "Who")?

Where in your normal life, do you need to be reminded that God's presence makes that space holy and deserving of reverence?

In our modern world, we often talk about God as a friend, which He is. But have we lost the "holy fear" and awe that comes from recognizing His absolute holiness?

When God calls you to do something, what are your "go-to" excuses? What inadequacies are you holding up as reasons not to obey?

Reflection: Reflect on your own "crisis of belief." God has given you a commission, to love your neighbor, to serve in the church, to share the gospel, to lead your family. What specific "impossible sounding job" has He given you? Be honest with yourself and with God. What are the excuses you are using? Are they rooted in your past failures, your current weaknesses, or your social standing? Spend a moment listing those inadequacies before God, just as Moses did.

Want to study further? Read 1 Corinthians 1:26-20, 2 Corinthians 11:30, 12:9-10. There are many excuses we may use to not pick up our cross daily and follow Jesus, because frankly it is a hard job. See how the Apostle Paul encourages us to find strength in Christ to complete the task.

Day Twenty —Tent of Meeting

The Israelites left Succoth and camped at Etham on the edge of the wilderness. The LORD went ahead of them. He guided them during the day with a pillar of cloud, and he provided light at night with a pillar of fire. This allowed them to travel by day or by night. And the LORD did not remove the pillar of cloud or pillar of fire from its place in front of the people.
-Exodus 13:20-22

How Far is Too Far?
How many miles away is too far for certain tasks? How far would you drive to go to your favorite dinner spot? How far will you drive to see a specific doctor? Have you ever dated someone long-distance? How far would you drive to commute to your dream job? If you missed family, how far is too far for a weekend visit? These are all questions of distance.

I (Paul Mollett) love to play a game with my kids. We are usually sitting out on our deck or are outside on an adventure, and we guess how far things are away from us. We each take a turn guessing, and then I use our range finder to find the exact distance. The one closest to the actual distance gets a point. It's really a silly game, but the kids seem to love it. One of the things we noticed is that when something is at a different elevation, the distance seems further than it actually is.

A Visible, Guiding Presence
Reading through Exodus 13, we see the presence of God in a very real way. Unlike a burning bush, God is guiding His people through the desert by the presence of a giant cloud during the daylight and by a pillar of fire by night.

How cool is that? I can only imagine that the closeness of the cloud and pillar of fire made God seem very real, present, and attentive to the needs of the people. I bet they felt safe knowing that God is guiding them, protecting them, and providing for them. His presence must have been comforting.

Shortly after leaving everything they knew behind in Egypt, they were chased to the edge of the sea where God parted it and allowed them to walk across on dry land. At the same time, He crushed their enemy in the same waters He parted. How is God going to care for them now? Read again the passage above to see how God was present with and for His people.

God Remained Close
Focus your attention on verse 22. God never abandoned His people. They had His presence and guidance every step of the way. God was close. He remained close.

- They needed food, He provided mana and quail.
- They needed water, He gave them water from a rock.
- They needed order from the chaos, He provided elders, a strong leader, and rules to live by.
- They needed protection from enemies, He provided them strength and victory.
- They needed to worship and commune with a worthy God, He gave them a Tabernacle and the Ark.

This entire time, God is present and is guiding His people. I guess you could say, with God, **they walked in Holy Spaces and on Holy Ground**.

You can **read Exodus 25** and see the specific leading God gave the Hebrew people for how they were to create some of these Holy Spaces and with what materials they were to build them. God was creating a space where He could be present for His people.

God has done the same for us. We don't need a Tabernacle, an Ark, or a Tent of Meeting. We can retreat and seek the face of God and commune with Him at any time or any place. If you found your heart was jealous of the closeness that the Hebrew people had with the presence of God, let me challenge you to understand that God can be even closer to you today than He was to them back in the time of the Exodus. We see God desiring to be close to His people, and His promise is that if we draw near to Him, He will draw near to us (James 4:8).

Questions:
How have you witnessed others draw close to God and seek His face? Did it work? Did they find Him?

How do you draw near to God and seek Him when you desperately need Him? Has it worked? Have you ever sought Him in this way? If not, why not?

What are you seeking God for, and who can you bring into this journey with you to seek Him with you on your behalf?

Will you be bold? Will you find a space? Time? Heart that seeks God today? If so, write down a plan below. If not, why not?

Reflection: Although God is near, sometimes He can seem far away. We sometimes go way out of our way to indulge in our interests or hobbies and yet we can't drop two feet to the ground to bow in prayer before God. What is one practical step that you can take this week to "close the distance" and draw near to God?

Want to study further? If you did not read Exodus 25, as mentioned above, please read it now. As you read God's detailed instructions for the Ark of the Covenant and the Tabernacle, consider why is God so incredibly specific about the materials and measurements? What do these precise plans tell you about the holiness of God and the reverence He required?

Day Twenty One —Radiant Reflection

When Moses came down Mount Sinai carrying the two stone tablets inscribed with the terms of the covenant, he wasn't aware that his face had become radiant because he had spoken to the LORD. So when Aaron and the people of Israel saw the radiance of Moses' face, they were afraid to come near him.
-Exodus 34:29–30

Have you ever had that feeling? People are looking at you funny, maybe smiling strangely, or trying not to look at you. You instinctively check your zipper or pat your hair. Maybe hours later, you finally pass a mirror, and you see it. A huge piece of spinach in your teeth, a smudge of food on your cheek, or pen ink across your nose. You had no idea it was there, but it was obvious to everyone else.

Moses had a "something on his face" moment after coming down from Mount Sinai. But it wasn't embarrassing, it was glorious. However, the glow did prompt Moses to cover his face with a veil.

The Afterglow of Glory
Moses's face shone for one simple reason. He had been with God. He had spent an extended time in the presence of the Creator of the universe, speaking with Him "as a man speaks to his friend" (Exodus 33:11). He was so saturated in the presence of God's pure glory that he began to reflect it, like a piece of metal that glows red hot after being in a fire.

Isn't it crazy to thing that Moses "wasn't aware" of it? Can you imagine walking around town and everyone is surprised that your face is glowing and you have no idea what they are looking at? This radiance wasn't something he produced, it was something he absorbed. It was the natural, unavoidable afterglow of genuine communion with the Almighty God.

He wasn't just near God. He was receiving the "terms of the covenant." These were God's laws. These weren't just a list of arbitrary rules. They were a gift, a perfect reflection of God's holy character. They are, at their core, a manual for love. The first commandments show us how to love God rightly, and the latter commandments show us how to love others well. If we truly have that kind of love in our hearts, these laws become our delight, not just our duty.

The Call to Reflect
This story isn't just a fascinating piece of history. It's a living metaphor for the Christian life. Jesus calls us the "light of the world" and the "salt of the earth" (Matthew 5:13-14). But here is the key:

We are not the light source. We are mirrors.

A mirror in a dark closet is just a cold piece of glass. But a mirror angled correctly in the sunlight is blinding. In the same way, we don't shine by trying harder to be "good." We shine because we reflect God. A radiant Christian life is simply the unavoidable afterglow of a life spent in His presence.

In order to reflect Him, we must be with Him. We must delight in His law (His Word), seek communion in prayer, and prioritize fellowship with Him. When we do, we will begin to reflect His character to the world around us, often without even being aware of it, just like Moses.

The Path to Radiance
This kind of reflection doesn't happen by accident. It requires intentionality and discipline. It means choosing God over our natural, self-centered tendencies.

The narrow road of becoming Christlike in your daily walk is the call to do the hard things with self-control: dying to what comes naturally-pride, sin, self-centeredness, appearing strong at all costs, relying on flesh more than on spirit, trusting in yourself-and training yourself to submit to God, body and soul.
-Ruth Chou Simons, *Beholding and Becoming* (57)

Questions:
How much of your Christian activity is a conscious effort to appear godly, versus an unconscious byproduct of genuinely being with God?

Are you willing to live a life that reflects God, even if it makes others uncomfortable?

What things are dulling the reflection of Christ in your life right now?

In what way does delighting in Scripture translate into a life that reflects God's character?

Reflection: Ask yourself: What am I reflecting? Does my life have the afterglow of time spent with God? We can't give away what we haven't received. Take a moment to set aside distractions and simply be in His presence, asking Him to align your heart with His.

Example Prayer: Father, thank You that You invite me into Your presence. I confess that I often try to shine in my own strength. Remind me that I am a mirror, not a light. Saturate me in Your presence today. As I spend time in Your Word and in prayer, transform me, so that I might reflect Your love and light to the world around me. Amen.

Application Checkup: Here is the reason for this week's application! Spending quality time with God causes change, both spiritually, physically and mentally. When we prioritize communion with the Lord it will result in residual effects on our interactions with others. Spending time seeking God changes our outlook on live, our love, care, and patience with others. Remember, change takes time. You can't change yourself and need God to change you from within.

Want to study further? Read 2 Corinthians 3:7-18 which talks about the glory of the New Covenant as compared to the old way that was etched in stone. Paul contrasts the fading glory of Moses (who wore a veil) with the transforming glory we have in Christ. If we have removed the veil and can now see, what happens then?

Partnership and Small Group Discussion

You have reached the halfway mark! Day 21 marks the midpoint. This week, we explored the concept of Holy Spaces. These are places where God meets with His people in Scripture. We traveled from the testing ground of Mount Moriah to the burning bush in the desert, and finally to the heights of Mount Sinai.

Prior to this meeting:

1. **Spiritual Inventory:** This is a perfect time to complete the Spiritual Inventory in the back of the book.
    - Plan that at the end of your meeting, by breaking down into 2 or 3 people, if you meet in a larger group, to discuss the results.

How to Format Your Meeting

1. **Check-In (10 Minutes):**
    - **Midpoint Check:** *"How are you doing with the daily rhythm of this study? Is it becoming a habit, or is it a struggle?"*
2. **Review (5 Minutes):** Briefly recall the spaces we visited this week: *Mount Moriah* (Abraham's sacrifice), *The Lord's Prayer* (Heaven on Earth), *The New Jerusalem* (The Holy City), *Eden* (The Garden of Peace), *The Burning Bush* (Holy Ground), *The Wilderness* (The Tent of Meeting), and *Mount Sinai* (Moses' Radiant Face)
3. **Discussion (30-45 Minutes):** Select the questions below that resonate most with your group.
4. **Breakdown and Prayer (10-15 Minutes):** Split the group into smaller groups of 2 or 3 (if you meet in a larger study group). Have each individual briefly summarize the results of their **Spiritual Inventory**. Help each other to identify areas of needed growth and affirm results.
    - **Prayer** Focus on drawing near to God.

Discussion Questions

1. The Menu and the Mandate (Day 16) We started the week with the analogy of trying to substitute ingredients on God's menu, and we looked at the Lord's Prayer ("Thy will be done").

- In your own life, where are you most tempted to tell God, *"I'll take the obedience, but hold the suffering,"* or *"I'll serve You, but only if it fits my schedule"*?

- We discussed how King Saul had good intentions but disobeyed God. Can you share a time when you did a good thing for the wrong reason (to look spiritual, to earn favor, etc.)?

2. The Trust Test (Day 15) We looked at Abraham offering Isaac on Mount Moriah.

- Abraham was asked to sacrifice the thing he loved most. What is the "Isaac" in your life right now? What is the one thing you are terrified God might ask you to give up?

- How does remembering that God provided the ultimate Ram (Jesus) help you loosen your grip on your earthly treasures?

3. The Noise (Day 18 & 20) We contrasted the noise of our alarms and schedules with the peace of Eden and the cloud guiding Israel in the wilderness.

- We learned that the life of the garden was the unrestricted presence of God. When you are stressed, do you typically try to escape *to* a vacation (numbing out) or *to* God (seeking Shalom)? What's the difference?

- Day 20 asked: "How far is too far?" Are you keeping God at a 'safe distance' right now, or are you drawing near to the pillar of fire?

4. Excuses (Day 19) Moses stood at the burning bush and offered God a list of inadequacies ("I'm not good with words," "Who am I?").

- God's call usually leads to a crisis of belief. When you feel nudged to serve or speak up, what is your go-to excuse? (e.g., "I'm too busy," "I'm not smart enough," "I have a messy past").

5. Mirrors (Day 21) We ended with Moses coming down the mountain with a radiant face because he had been *with* God.

- We discussed that we are not the light source. We are mirrors. Do you find yourself trying to *produce* light (striving to be good) or *reflect* light (spending time with Him)? What does this difference look like in your daily routine?

Come close to God, and God will come close to you. Wash your hands, you sinners; purify your hearts, for your loyalty is divided between God and the world.
-James 4:8

Prayer and Application
Holy Space practice: Before you begin praying, set a timer for **two minutes** of absolute silence (yes, you can do it!). Put phones away. Close your eyes. Don't pray lists yet. Sit in the awareness that you are about to pray before the Holy God.

Prayer Prompts:

- **Isaacs:** Pray for the courage to surrender the specific things you discussed in Question 2.
- **Reflection:** Pray for one another that your faces would shine this week, not because you are trying harder, but because you have been with Jesus.
- **Why?:** If anyone is in a season of waiting (like the wilderness), pray for them to see the Lord guiding them, even if they can't see the destination.

WEEK FOUR

DAY TWENTY TWO —UNTOUCHABLE GLORY
DAY TWENTY THREE —HOLY LAND
DAY TWENTY FOUR —STRANGE FIRE
DAY TWENTY FIVE —GOD'S PRESENCE MAKES IT HOLY
DAY TWENTY SIX —THE TEMPLE
DAY TWENTY SEVEN —GLORY ON THE MOUNTAIN
DAY TWENTY EIGHT —VEIL TORN

Week Four

*****WARNING***** Keep your distance and handle with extreme care!

You may see warnings like this on high voltage power lines, hazardous chemicals, or objects that could cause harm or death if used improperly. They signal that the item is powerful, different, and potentially dangerous to health or life. In many ways, this was the posture required when approaching God's holiness in the Old Testament. To be near God was to be near a consuming fire, a presence so pure that it demanded absolute reverence.

This week, we continue our exploration of **Holy Spaces**, and we'll see this warning up close. But the best part of this week's journey is seeing how the entire story of Scripture pivots. We'll see this theme, which begins with "Keep Out," shift to "Welcome In" when the veil is torn.

We want to encourage you: **don't rush this week**. These devotionals are not designed to be just checklists. Please, set aside adequate time each day to not just read the words, but to ponder them. Ask the Holy Spirit to show you the awe, the danger, and ultimately, the incredible privilege of His presence.

And **don't learn alone.** If you haven't done so already, find a mature believer to talk about what you are learning. Remember, "Iron sharpens iron" (Proverbs 27:17). We aren't meant to grow in isolation. We need each other in the church to wrestle with these big ideas, to challenge our assumptions, and to be equipped together to do God's work.

Get ready. This is a powerful week. Take off your "sandals" and let's step onto holy ground together.

Day Twenty Two —Untouchable Glory

They must remove the ashes from the altar for sacrifices and cover the altar with a purple cloth. All the altar utensils—the firepans, meat forks, shovels, basins, and all the containers—must be placed on the cloth, and a covering of fine goatskin leather must be spread over them. Finally, they must put the carrying poles in place. The camp will be ready to move when Aaron and his sons have finished covering the sanctuary and all the sacred articles. The Kohathites will come and carry these things to the next destination. But they must not touch the sacred objects, or they will die. So these are the things from the Tabernacle that the Kohathites must carry.
-Numbers 4:13-15

Why... But Why?
"Don't touch the stove." "Why?" "It's hot." "How hot?" "Hot enough to burn you." "What does a burn feel like?" "It hurts." "Why does it hurt?"

If you're a parent, you've lived this. It's the endless, exhausting "why" loop. Sometimes you just want your child to obey your instructions without a full dissertation on thermodynamics (which studies the relationship between heat and energy) and nerve endings. You know the danger, and even if you answered all their questions, they simply lack the life experience to fully grasp the devastating reality of a third-degree burn. You're not trying to be a tyrant. You are trying to be a good parent. Your command is for their protection.

This is, perhaps, a small glimpse into how God deals with us, His children. His commands aren't arbitrary rules to just test our loyalty.

A Job with No Room for Error
God is on the move, packing up His things, and moving His holy presence.

In Numbers 4, God gives meticulous instructions for this process, assigning one of the most prestigious and dangerous jobs to the Kohathites.

The Kohathites were tasked with carrying the most sacred furniture, including the Ark of the Covenant which contained the two tables of the law given to Moses by God (the building of the Ark is detailed in Exod. 37:1-9). This wasn't just a logistical task but was a spiritual responsibility. Only Levites from the Kohath family could transport it (Exod. 25:12-14, Num. 7:9).

Why such extreme, life-or-death precautions? Because the Ark was the epicenter of God's presence, His physical throne on earth. Its true significance was found in its lid which held the mercy seat. The Hebrew word for "mercy seat" meant "cover," "appeasement," or "place of atonement."

This was the one place where God's perfect holiness and humanity's sin could meet. Once a year on the Day of Atonement, the high priest would enter the Holy of Holies and sprinkle the blood of the sacrifice onto that mercy seat. This act atoned for his sins and the sins of the people, appeasing God's righteous wrath (Leviticus 16).

The Kohathites weren't just carrying a "box." They were carrying the very throne of God where mercy and justice met. It was a job with absolutely no room for error.

Good Intentions

Centuries later, King David decides to bring the Ark to Jerusalem (2 Samuel 6:6-7). Instead of following the specific command for the Kohathites to carry it, he puts it on a new ox cart. The oxen stumble, the Ark tips, and a man named Uzzah does what any of us would instinctively do, he reaches out to stop the sacred box from falling.

God strikes him dead on the spot.

This story is shocking. Uzzah's punishment seems extreme for what we would call a "good deed" or lending a helpful hand. But Uzzah's good intention was not the issue. The issue was that God's precise instructions had been ignored. Failing to follow God's instructions was seen as:

- Not revering God's words as absolute.
- An independent attitude that acted on a worldly perspective ("the box is falling!") rather than a spiritual one ("God's command is final").
- Direct disobedience.

Uzzah, an unrighteous man, dared to touch the "untouchable glory." His human help was an act of irreverence. He forgot that the God who is the Ark is perfectly capable of steadying it Himself.

The God Who Simply Is

We struggle with this because we try to make God manageable, safe, and logical by our standards. We forget that He is not just a bigger, better version of us. He is an entirely different category of being.

God announces Himself as the "great I AM"-the One who is completely and consistently Himself. He is: and it is because He is what He is that everything else is as it is. He is the reality behind all reality, the underlying self-existent, sovereign, and wholly free from constraint by, or dependence on, anything outside Himself.
-J.I. Packer, *Knowing God* (183)

Questions:
Where in your life might you be substituting your good intentions or what makes sense to you for God's clear, specific instructions in Scripture?

In what areas of your life are you still asking "Why?" and treating God's commands like mere suggestions rather than life-or-death warnings?

How does the story of Uzzah challenge our modern tendency to value a helping hand or a good heart over God's absolute holiness and specific commands?

Reflection: We live in an age that questions authority and prizes good intentions above all. God's holiness, however, is not up for negotiation. This story should fill us with a trembling awe. It should make us fall on our faces in gratitude for Jesus Christ, who, as our perfect High Priest, covers us so completely that we can enter God's presence and not be consumed by fire. Spend some time in prayer today, thanking God for this gift.

Application: This week our application is two parts. Don't worry! We are just adding small steps to previous week applications. We do not want these application prompts to be overwhelming but rewarding! If you dedicate yourself to spending this time with the Lord each day you will be ready to take on the challenges in the last two weeks.

1. **Part 1-Reverence:** Consider your poster while you pray. If you are able, consider kneeling, bowing before God. Raise your hands to Him and pray out loud. This simple act of humbling our bodies reminds us of our position before God. If you cannot physically kneel, that is okay! Perhaps forcing our bodies into a position of uncomforted (much like the hunger of fasting) reminds us of our weakness and how we require the strength of the Lord. This uncomfortable reminder helps us keep our eyes on God and our attention to stay awake.

2. **Part 2 -Thanksgiving:** Thanking God may be an easy task for you. But if we truly live a life of gratitude, our worries, anxieties, and entitlement for more fades away. If deep in our soul we understand the significance of Jesus' sacrifice on the cross and the peace we have with God, it will change our lives and perspective of this world.

Want to study further? Read 1 Chronicles 15:1-15 which describes David's second attempt to move the Ark after the death of Uzzah. Consider what was different this time? What did David and the priests learn about how to approach God and handle His commands?

Day Twenty Three —Holy Land

Therefore, be careful to obey every command I am giving you today, so you may have strength to go in and take over the land you are about to enter. If you obey, you will enjoy a long life in the land the LORD swore to give to your ancestors and to you, their descendants—a land flowing with milk and honey! For the land you are about to enter and take over is not like the land of Egypt from which you came, where you planted your seed and made irrigation ditches with your foot as in a vegetable garden. Rather, the land you will soon take over is a land of hills and valleys with plenty of rain—a land that the LORD your God cares for. He watches over it through each season of the year!
-Deuteronomy 11:8–12

God created the world with endless imagination. He packed it with so many flavors, colors, and textures. The Garden of Eden must have been an overwhelming masterpiece of intense beauty, filled with the sounds of unique creatures and the taste of endless variety. Our hearts, and even our taste buds, were made for this kind of rich, diverse experience.

The Israelites, however, had what you might call a bit of a dry spell. Forty years in the desert is a long time to eat the same thing. They had manna, which was a miracle, but it was still... manna. Every. Single. Day. They complained constantly, longing for the "good old days" of slavery, saying, "We remember the fish we ate in Egypt for free. And we had all the cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions and garlic we wanted. But now we have lost our appetite. We never see anything but this manna!" (Numbers 11:5-6).

You know the phrase, “the grass is always greener on the other side.” Well, for the Israelites, this was actually true! After four decades of wandering in a dry, brown desert, they were staring across the river at the Holy Land of Canaan. They were dreaming of a fruitful land, fertile soil, and endless variety.

A Land That's Different
But God explains that this new land requires a new way of living. It's not just "Egypt 2.0."

In Egypt, life was predictable. You could control your world. If your crops were dry, you just worked harder, dug another ditch, and forced the water to go where you wanted. It was a life of human effort and self-reliance.

The Promised Land was completely different. It was a land of hills and valleys, entirely dependent on rain, AKA God. You couldn't force it to be fruitful. You had to trust God for the rain. It was a land that the Lord cares for, one He watches over. God wasn't just giving them a new place, He was inviting them into a new, moment-by-moment dependency on Him.

The Restless Heart
The Israelites were foreigners, sojourners, and travelers for so long. They finally had a home. And yet, as the rest of their story shows, even the Promised Land was not the final destination. They got the land, but their hearts remained restless. They found new things to complain about.

Why? Because no earthly place, not even a "Holy Land" flowing with milk and honey, can satisfy the deepest longing of our hearts. That longing is not for a place, but for a Person.

When we do life's journey without Jesus, we will always find ourselves restless. We will hope, in vain, that once we get over the next hill, beyond the horizon, or reach the peak, we'll feel accomplished and satisfied. But the thrill we're waiting for will never come...because apart from Jesus, it can't.
-Ruth Chou Simons, *Pilgrim* (42)

The "greener grass" we are all looking for is not a new job, a new house, or a new relationship. The "Promised Land" our soul craves is the complete and total satisfaction found only in the presence of Jesus. He is the only one who can turn our restless wandering into true, satisfied rest.

Questions:
Where in your life are you overlooking God's faithful, daily provision because you are restlessly longing for the "greener grass" of what someone else has?

Does the idea of a life of total, moment-by-moment dependency on God feel freeing or frightening to you? Why?

What earthly "Promised Land" are you currently pursuing, hoping it will finally make you feel satisfied and accomplished (e.g., a promotion, a new home, a certain relationship, reaching a financial goal)?

If you were to get everything you are hoping for right now (the "greener grass"), but it meant having less of Jesus, would you still take it? What does your honest answer reveal about what your heart truly craves?

Reflection: Being stuck in the now, physical, and self-reliant world is a challenge for everyone. Spend some time today considering how you can live your life more dependent on God. Here is a sample prayer that might help you have the words to say.

Lord, thank You for the variety and beauty You've placed in this world. But forgive me for when I look to it to satisfy me in ways only You can. I am so often restless, looking for the "greener grass" in my life. Help me to stop my striving and self-reliance and to live in a state of joyful dependence on You. You are my true Promised Land. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Want to study further? Read the entire chapter of Deuteronomy 11. See how God continually says, "be careful" or "commit yourselves." This chapter is such a good reminder that we need to continually watch our steps and seek God daily.

Day Twenty Four —Strange fire

Aaron's sons Nadab and Abihu put coals of fire in their incense burners and sprinkled incense over them. In this way, they disobeyed the Lord by burning before him the wrong kind of fire, different than he had commanded. So fire blazed forth from the Lord's presence and burned them up, and they died there before the Lord. Then Moses said to Aaron, "This is what the Lord meant when he said, 'I will display my holiness through those who come near me. I will display my glory before all the people.'"

-Leviticus 10:1-3

Changing the Rules

Have you ever started to play a game with someone who is really young, and when you begin to win, the rules suddenly change to inhibit you?

This was my experience while I (Paul Mollett) was playing tetherball with my kids this past summer. We were playing, hitting the ball, laughing, and having fun. Of course, I am overcompetitive and was not going as easy on the kids as I should have been. The ball began wrapping around the pole, and the more progress I made, the more the rules changed. When we started the game, no one could touch the rope. By the time we had finished, I was the only one who couldn't touch the rope. At first, you couldn't hold the ball. The next thing I knew, everyone but me could hold the ball.

The rules kept changing, and there was no proper enforcement. I guess it's a good thing this simple game of tetherball is inconsequential because I could only kick the ball with my feet or use my head by the time the game was finished.

God's Unchanging Standard

God doesn't change the rules, but He is a proper enforcer. Just as we often desire something for ourselves that God has instructed us to reject or not participate in, so it went in biblical times.

God had specific people, specific tools, specific elements, and specific times for His ordinances and worship. Up to this point, most had chosen to follow those rules. (See Numbers 16 for another example of what happens when you don't listen to God's clearly understood instructions.)

Not too dissimilar to the passage from Numbers, we find Aaron's sons testing the holiness of God and not revering a sacred place and action. They offered different elements than what was prescribed, at a different time than was prescribed, and in a different way than was prescribed. They wanted to try worshipping God in their own way and with an improper, irreverent heart.

Our Way vs. God's Way
How have we changed what God has prescribed for our worship and reverence? What does this look like today? We sing songs that focus on the wrong things. We make worship about us. We justify sinful things as "not being as bad" as others. We hate those whom God has called us to love. We hold on to unforgiveness instead of finding freedom in letting go. We compare ourselves to others instead of being challenged to rise to the Holy standard that God has put before us in Jesus.

Simply put, we are like Nadab and Abihu in that we change the rules. We want it our way instead of God's way.

A Holy and Appropriate Fear
A Holy God creates Holy Spaces to fellowship with man. One of those spaces was the Tent of Meeting, and its Holiness was tested by Aaron's sons. God took just and serious action to teach the people of His holiness.

It must have been a moment of great grief for those who loved Nadab and Abihu, but a great lesson was learned about reverence and obedience to God. This lesson helps us to understand that God sees and knows all things, including the attitude and posture of our hearts.

This helps us to have a holy and appropriate fear of God, but also helps us to come to Him for the things we need. I don't think we need to walk in fear that every sin will bring the same result of the fire of God consuming every sinner, but it should force us to take a good look at our worship and lifestyle to see if we are in alignment with what God has instructed us to do.

Questions:
What has God instructed us to do and what has He commanded us to avoid?

What does God truly desire from us?

After reflecting, discuss your answers with a trusted and mature believer.

How can we guard our minds from getting off track and offering God something different from what He has asked for?

If you were getting off track, how would you want others to approach you?

Do you currently invite others to observe your life and give you honest feedback? If not, who is one person you could ask to do this?

Reflection: Take an honest moment to reflect in what specific area of your life are you currently "changing the rules" and prioritizing your own preferences, comforts, or logic over God's clear commands? What would it look like to bring that specific area back into alignment with His standard, with a "holy and appropriate fear" (awe) for who He is?

Want to study further? Do you remember **Day Twenty Two** and the Kohathites who were tasked with carrying the Ark of the Covenant? Well, read Numbers 16 and see how Korah a descendent of Kohath was tasked with such a great responsibility but died due to his rebellion.

Day Twenty Five —God's Presence Makes It Holy

When Joshua was near the town of Jericho, he looked up and saw a man standing in front of him with sword in hand. Joshua went up to him and demanded, "Are you friend or foe?" "Neither one," he replied. "I am the commander of the LORD's army." At this, Joshua fell with his face to the ground in reverence. "I am at your command," Joshua said. "What do you want your servant to do?" The commander of the LORD's army replied, "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy."
And Joshua did as he was told.
-Joshua 5:13-15

I (Paul Mollet) was blessed to be part of a home group filled with young families. When we met, the house rule was simple. Take your shoes off at the door. With so many families, this meant about 30 pairs of shoes piled up in the entryway. This wasn't a rule to be difficult. It was a simple way to respect the owner and keep their home clean. Defying this rule wouldn't have gotten anyone kicked out, but obeying it was a clear action of respect for the one who invited us into their space.

Whose Side Are You On?
I can only imagine the commander of the Lord's army instructing Joshua to take off his sandals. I don't think Joshua questioned it for a second. What's fascinating is Joshua's first response to question whether this commander was an enemy or an ally. It's pretty easy to understand that you don't want to be fighting against anything the Lord is doing.

The commander's answer is absolutely beautiful: "Neither, but as commander of the army of the LORD I have now come." It was as if he said, "I'm not on your side or their side. I am on the Lord's side. If you follow the Lord's instructions, I fight with you. If you oppose them, I fight against you."

Surrender Before Strategy
If ever there was a time to listen carefully and obey, this was it. Joshua had the correct heart, asking, "What is it that you desire from me, Lord?"

How often do we have the wrong heart or attitude when the Lord speaks? What if He says something we don't like? What if He wants us to do something uncomfortable? What if He asks us to be still and "take off our sandals" instead of running off to fight the enemy in our own strength?

What is your response when the Lord declares the ground you are on as holy and asks for your complete surrender? Joshua models true respect for a Holy God. We see in the next chapters that this holy ground, the place of surrender, is the exact place where God gives him the instructions to defeat Jericho.

The Consequence of Our Choice
Joshua's reverence and obedience led to him receiving instructions for a nontraditional battle plan. Let's be honest. If I had to fight an enemy, trumpets and priests aren't my first recruits!

How we respond when God gives us an opportunity to partner with His strength is critical.

Jericho is a stunning example of what obedience looks like. But fast forward two chapters, and you see what disobedience looks like at Ai, where some chose not to obey God's command about the valuables. The blessings of God come when we align with His army and do what He asks. The consequences for doing what we desire can be devastating, not just for us but for those close to us.

After the loss at Ai, Joshua inspected the people to find fault and anything that the Lord would take issue with. Once he found the issue, he resolved it before God. One potential application of this devotion on Holy Spaces is to evaluate what God declares holy and honor those spaces.

Questions:
Is there any area in your life that feels like compromise? How can you repent of that and walk in freedom?

Is there an area of your life where defeat doesn't just seem possible, but likely, what can you do to turn an area of weakness into accountability and victory?

Understanding that marching around a city with the Ark and blowing horns and not attacking an enemy is not a typical way to win a battle, what not so typical things has God called us to do to remain in Him?

Reflection: Reflect on your first instinct. Are you asking God to bless your strategy? Or are you, like Joshua, willing to fall on your face in reverence and ask, "What do you want your servant to do?" What would it look like for you to "take off your sandals" in this specific situation, to stop, surrender your own plans, and trust His, even if it's unconventional?

Application Checkup: How have you been doing with this week's application challenge of reverence and thanksgiving?

Want to study further? Read the entire story that this devotion covers, from Joshua's encounter with the commander (end of chapter 5) through the battle of Jericho (chapter 6) and the devastating story of Ai (chapter 7). As you read consider the difference of the victory at Jericho and the defeat at Ai. What does the defeat at Ai teach you about the effect of one person's "hidden" sin on the entire community?

Day Twenty Six —The Temple

So Solomon finished all his work on the Temple of the LORD. Then he brought all the gifts his father, David, had dedicated—the silver, the gold, and the various articles—and he stored them in the treasuries of the Temple of God. Solomon then summoned to Jerusalem the elders of Israel and all the heads of tribes—the leaders of the ancestral families of Israel. They were to bring the Ark of the LORD's Covenant to the Temple from its location in the City of David, also known as Zion. So all the men of Israel assembled before the king at the annual Festival of Shelters, which is held in early autumn. When all the elders of Israel arrived, the Levites picked up the Ark. The priests and Levites brought up the Ark along with the special tent and all the sacred items that had been in it. There, before the Ark, King Solomon and the entire community of Israel sacrificed so many sheep, goats, and cattle that no one could keep count! Then the priests carried the Ark of the LORD's Covenant into the inner sanctuary of the Temple—the Most Holy Place—and placed it beneath the wings of the cherubim. The cherubim spread their wings over the Ark, forming a canopy over the Ark and its carrying poles. These poles were so long that their ends could be seen from the Holy Place, which is in front of the Most Holy Place, but not from the outside. They are still there to this day. Nothing was in the Ark except the two stone tablets that Moses had placed in it at Mount Sinai, where the LORD made a covenant with the people of Israel when they left Egypt. Then the priests left the Holy Place. All the priests who were present had purified themselves, whether or not they were on duty that day. And the Levites who were musicians—Asaph, Heman, Jeduthun, and all their sons and brothers—were dressed in fine linen robes and stood at the east side of the altar playing cymbals, lyres, and harps. They were joined by 120 priests who were playing trumpets. The trumpeters and singers performed together in unison to praise and give thanks to the LORD. Accompanied by trumpets, cymbals, and other instruments, they raised their voices and praised the LORD with these words: "He is good! His faithful love endures forever!" At that moment a thick cloud filled the Temple of the LORD. The priests could not continue their service because of the cloud, for the glorious presence of the LORD filled the Temple of God.

-2 Chronicles 5:1-14

A Home Worthy of God

For seven years, the Israelites labored under King Solomon's leadership. Their goal was to take a bare mountain and build a home worthy of God's presence, establishing a permanent place of worship.

Today, we have many churches, but they are not "temples" in this same, specific sense. While other religions may use the title "temple," they do not contain the very presence of the Holy Spirit.

Imagine the disappointment if, after seven years of labor, God had deemed Solomon's Temple unsuitable. What a sigh of relief it must have been when the Spirit finally filled the place with a cloud of Glory.

A Place Set Apart
I (Paul Mollett) laugh a little whenever someone cusses at church or in front of me. Not because foul language is funny, but because most feel a level of discomfort doing that in front of me and apologetic that they would say those things in church. What is it about a place that makes an action we might do elsewhere seem so inappropriate?

There is no doubt that the Temple was a Holy Space, a place designated for the very presence of God and committed to His worship.

Today, a Muslim mosque sits on that same spot. The closest original location for Jewish people to seek God is the Western Wall, a remnant of the Temple's foundation. It has become a holy site where people write down their prayers and tuck them into the cracks of the stone, longing to be near the place where the presence of God once dwelled.

The Presence Makes it Holy
When the cloud filled the Holy of Holies, it was God's validation. It was His approval stamp, confirming the Temple as a place for His glory to dwell. Without that cloud, the building was just like our church buildings today, an impressive structure of rock, wood, and gold. It was the presence of God that made the Temple a special, holy place. It was built so the people could offer sacrifices, teach from His Word, pray, and praise Him in the immediate vicinity of His glory.

Forgetting the Purpose
This holiness is what makes Jesus's actions in the New Testament so powerful. He rebukes the people for making a mockery of His Father's house, which had been turned from a place of worship into a place of business. On the day of its consecration, when the cloud of glory affirmed it, no one would have dreamt of using the space for personal gain.

Yet by the time of Jesus, the sacred Temple had become like a bank or a marketplace. Worst of all, it was the religious leaders, the very people ordained to help others spiritually, who were taking advantage of the people for their own personal and financial gain.

Questions:
Building the temple was work, it took years. It required valuable materials. It had such specific instructions. What are some specific instructions that God gives us when we worship? Some examples: communion, marriage vows, possessions, and children.

The temple did not go from the accepted dwelling space for the Holy Spirit to a business overnight, how can we set up systems in our life to keep from slowly drifting from what God desires from us?

If you find your life chaotic, how do you come back from that? What is the route? Who can help? Is there someone that God has placed in your life that is off track and can use some loving support?

Reflection: Reflect on this: In what ways do you treat your body as a "holy space," set apart for God's presence? And in what areas are you, like the money changers, using His temple for your own personal gain, prioritizing your own selfish desires, ambitions, or habits over His glory?

Want to study further? Continue reading the story 2 Chronicles 6-7 and see how Solomon praises God, prays a dedication for the Temple and the people, committing themselves to the Lord, and finally God's response to him. Note that God's "If" and "then" statements. Why are these significant?

Day Twenty Seven —Glory on the Mountain

Six days later Jesus took Peter and the two brothers, James and John, and led them up a high mountain to be alone. As the men watched, Jesus' appearance was transformed so that his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as light. Suddenly, Moses and Elijah appeared and began talking with Jesus. Peter exclaimed, "Lord, it's wonderful for us to be here! If you want, I'll make three shelters as memorials—one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." But even as he spoke, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my dearly loved Son, who brings me great joy. Listen to him." The disciples were terrified and fell face down on the ground. Then Jesus came over and touched them. "Get up," he said. "Don't be afraid." And when they looked up, Moses and Elijah were gone, and they saw only Jesus. As they went back down the mountain, Jesus commanded them, "Don't tell anyone what you have seen until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead."

-Matthew 17:1-9

Don't Tell Anyone

Has anyone ever shared a secret with you and then told you not to tell? Perhaps it wasn't a secret, but maybe you saw something and were asked not to share it. The Transfiguration on the mountain is certainly one of the most difficult things a person could be asked to witness and keep quiet about.

When asked what moment in Scripture they would want to see in person, many people would choose this very event. In grade school, secrets are relatively harmless, typically revolving around who "likes" whom. But if it was difficult for a child to keep that quiet, imagine the challenge for the disciples. They went up a mountain with their teacher and watched some of the Bible's most elite figures appear. Keeping that quiet would be infinitely harder.

The disciples had already witnessed Jesus's testimony and heard who He said He was. They had seen His miracles of healing the sick, restoring sight to the blind, casting out demons, and raising the dead. He had displayed power and authority the world had never seen. It's hard to imagine what more they would need to validate their rabbi's message. The Transfiguration must have erased any final inklings of doubt they held about the authenticity of their Savior and the worthiness of their sacrifice to leave everything to follow Him.

The Climb
Can you picture the climb up the mountain? Jesus selected just three: Peter, James, and John. Did they feel honored to be chosen, or annoyed at the climb while the others remained? Did they enjoy the hike like it was a hobby, or were they cursing every step, preferring to rest? What did they anticipate at the top? A special lesson? A beautiful view? I am sure whatever they were struggling with or hoping for on the way up was completely blown away by what they experienced.

The Encounter
The space was so divine, they didn't know if they should remain. They didn't want to look away, but the brightness was overwhelming. They didn't want it to end or be forgotten, so they offered to set up tents. To cap it all off, a voice from the Father in Heaven proclaimed, "*This is my dearly loved Son, who brings me great joy. Listen to him*."

How could you not tell people about this? If so many other incredible things hadn't happened, I am sure that after Jesus ascended, the three of them would have sat everyone down and said, "You are never going to believe this!"

A Holy Space
One of the blessed parts about Holy Spaces is that not all are meant to instill fear. Some are informative and transformative. When the three disciples saw Moses, Elijah, and Jesus on the mountain and heard the voice of God, it must have served as a blessed affirmation of the journey they were on and a healthy reminder of the capabilities of the God they served.

Questions:
Jesus commanded them not to tell anyone until after the Son of Man has been raised from the dead. Why was this specific timing so important? What misunderstanding might have occurred if they had told everyone immediately?

What are some things that God has allowed you to witness that minister to you and others of His power and support for His children?

In moments of doubt or weariness, how can you keep the Gospel and God's worthiness in perspective?

Reflection: The climb up the mountain represents our daily walk which is sometimes tiring, sometimes confusing, and often a struggle. You may be on a difficult climb right now and focused only on the next step. But God provides "mountaintop" moments, a answered prayer, a deep sense of His presence, a Word from Scripture that comes alive, to help reframe our perspective and remind us why the climb is worth it.

Take a moment to recall one of these "glory on the mountain" moments in your own life. Write it down. Thank God for it.

Want to study further? Read the other two accounts of this same event in Mark 9:2-13 and Luke 9:28-36. Also, read 2 Peter 1:16-18, where Peter looks back on this exact moment near the end of his life. Consider how this event served as a lifelong anchor for Peter's faith and confidence in the Gospel.

Day Twenty Eight —Veil Torn

The LORD spoke to Moses after the death of Aaron's two sons, who died after they entered the LORD's presence and burned the wrong kind of fire before him. The LORD said to Moses, "Warn your brother, Aaron, not to enter the Most Holy Place behind the inner curtain whenever he chooses; if he does, he will die. For the Ark's cover—the place of atonement—is there, and I myself am present in the cloud above the atonement cover.
-Leviticus 16:1-2

In future generations, the purification ceremony will be performed by the priest who has been anointed and ordained to serve as high priest in place of his ancestor Aaron. He will put on the holy linen garments and purify the Most Holy Place, the Tabernacle, the altar, the priests, and the entire congregation. This is a permanent law for you, to purify the people of Israel from their sins, making them right with the LORD once each year." Moses followed all these instructions exactly as the LORD had commanded him.
-Leviticus 16:32-34

Then Jesus shouted out again, and he released his spirit. At that moment the curtain in the sanctuary of the Temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. The earth shook, rocks split apart...
-Matthew 27:50-51a

The "No Touch, No Go" Room
My (Paul Mollett) wife tells me about a room from her childhood at her grandma's house, a room you couldn't go into and couldn't touch. What was the point? It was reserved for the most fragile and valuable treasures.

It had glass display cases filled with collectibles: jewelry boxes, vases, porcelain dolls, and picture frames. The furniture was light-colored, and the floor was fitted with white carpet. This place sounds like a toddler's parents' nightmare. I imagine it only took one spill or one broken item to establish the rules that made this the "no touch, no go" room. It was a room of consequence. It had strict rules, and being caught there could carry great consequences.

God's Room: The Holy of Holies
This "no touch, no go" room reminds me a lot of the Holy of Holies. As described in the above passages, the Holy of Holies was the very dwelling place of God's presence. It was sacred. It contained the Ark of the Covenant and other important items.

It was a place reserved for visitation by the high priest for atonement, only once a year. The details surrounding the process the high priest had to go through before entering can be read in Leviticus 16 and Hebrews 9. There was a specific order and a sacred nature required to enter this Holy Space. Failure to honor the specific timing, method, and purity of heart required would result in certain death.

The New Room
So why don't we hear about this anymore? The Holy of Holies was the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit. When Jesus died, the veil separating the rest of the temple from the Holy of Holies was torn.

This was no ordinary curtain. It was thick and tall. The very nature of its tearing could only be the result of God's power. It was torn from top to bottom. Previously, only the High Priest could access this space closest to God. When the veil was torn, it physically represented that the Spirit no longer dwelt in that specific place.

This begs the question: *Where is the Holy Spirit?*

Jesus is our perfect High Priest, and through the offering of His life, we now have direct access to God without needing an earthly priest. We can go directly before His throne of grace. Furthermore, at Pentecost, God established a new place for the Holy Spirit in the lives of those who have placed their faith in Jesus for salvation.

God is to be worshiped as a living Spirit -anywhere, everywhere, at all times, by all people... the basic feature of Christian living is a worshiping life.
-John MacArthur, True Worship (57)

The same power that dwelt in the Holy of Holies, preserving it as Holy Ground and an honorable place for God to dwell with man, now dwells in you. The Holy Spirit is in us to sanctify, convict, empower, and educate us. There is no longer a singular place for man to dwell with God. Every believer is now a temple of the Holy Spirit. We'll learn more about this on **Day 36**.

Questions:
When you compare the Holy of Holies and your body, do you see any similarities? What is it about these spaces that makes them a suitable place for the Holy Spirit?

Do you find the presence of the Holy Spirit in your body (a temple) to be intimidating? Freeing? Exciting? Talk about this with a mature believer for affirmation or clarification.

When considering how much care and order God prescribed for the Holy of Holies, do you see that the same level of care is prescribed to our bodies, the new temple for the Holy Spirit? (Again, a great thing to discuss in mature circles.)

How does scripture instruct us to treat our bodies in light of them being a temple for the Holy Spirit?

Why should we take joy in the fact that the Holy Spirit is not confined to the Holy of Holies any longer?

Reflection: Do you live in fear or shame, forgetting your bold access? Or do you live carelessly, forgetting your holy responsibility as His temple? What is one practical way you can live differently in light of the fact that the same Holy Spirit that filled the Temple now lives in you?

Application Checkup: Has your posture changed in your prayer life? Has this changed the way you approach your worries and stresses? Even in the hardest of days, we always have many blessings to thank God for. Setting our minds on these things helps calm the storm of life.

Want to study further? The book of Hebrews is the ultimate commentary on this devotional. Read Hebrews 9:1-14 and Hebrews 10:19-25 and consider how the old system was ineffective and what do we do now that we have a new High Priest?

Partnership and Small Group Discussion

This week was a heavy one. We started with a WARNING label, witnessing the terrifying holiness of God, but we ended with the tearing of the veil. This is the moment the "Keep Out" sign was replaced with a "Welcome In" invitation through Jesus.

How to Format Your Meeting

1. **Check-In (10 Minutes):** This week covered some difficult stories (people dying for disobedience). How did reading those passages make you feel? (Confused? Scared? Awestruck?)
2. **Review (5 Minutes):** Briefly recall the encounters: Uzzah touches it and dies (Good intentions vs. Obedience). Egypt (irrigation/self-reliance) vs. Canaan (rain/God-reliance). Nadab and Abihu offer strange fire. Joshua takes off his sandals. Solomon builds it; Jesus cleanses it. The Transfiguration of Jesus. *The Veil:* Torn from top to bottom.
3. **Discussion (30-45 Minutes):** Select the questions below that will generate the most honest conversation in your group. Again, feel free to create your own questions or select specific questions you noted during the week that would benefit your group.
4. **Prayer (10-15 Minutes):** Focus on reverence and gratitude.

Discussion Questions

1. Good Intentions (Day 22 & 24) We looked at Uzzah (who tried to save the Ark) and Nadab & Abihu (who offered worship their own way). Both had good intentions or religious motives, but both ignored God's specific instructions.

- Uzzah tried to steady God's Ark. In your own life, where are you trying to manage or control a situation because you don't trust God to handle it Himself?

- Are there areas of your life where you have decided that close enough obedience is acceptable, even though Scripture says otherwise?

2. Waiting for Rain (Day 23) We contrasted Egypt (where you dig ditches to water crops) with the Promised Land (where you wait for rain).

- Egypt represents self-reliance/control. The Promised land represents total dependence. Which land are you living in right now regarding your finances, career, or family?

- What is the one thing you are convinced would finally make you happy if you could just obtain it?

3. Whose Side Are You On? (Day 25) Joshua asked the Commander, "Are you for us or for our enemies?" The answer was, "Neither."

- When you face a conflict or a problem, is your first instinct to ask God to bless *your* strategy, or do you take off your sandals (surrender) and ask for *His* strategy?

- Is there a battle you are currently fighting (like Jericho) that requires you to do something unconventional or uncomfortable (like forgiving someone who doesn't deserve it)?

4. The Torn Veil (Day 26 & 28) We moved from the Temple (a specific place) to the Torn Veil (access for all believers).

- How does reading the scary stories of Day 22 (Uzzah) and Day 24 (Strange Fire) change the way you view the torn veil on Day 28? Does it make the grace of Jesus seem more significant?

- If your body is now the Temple where the Holy Spirit dwells, is there any room in your heart that you are trying to keep locked so He can't get in?

Since we are receiving a Kingdom that is unshakable, let us be thankful and please God by worshiping him with holy fear and awe. For our God is a devouring fire.
-Hebrews 12:28-29

Prayer and Application
This week requires a two-part prayer posture: **Reverence** and **Access**.

- **Part 1: Reverence (Kneeling):** If you are able and comfortable, consider kneeling for the first part of the prayer. If you cannot physically kneel, that is okay! Acknowledge God as the consuming fire. Confess the times this week you treated Him casually or tried to steady the ark with your own control.
- **Part 2: Access (Standing/Sitting):** Shift your posture to thankfulness and gratitude. Thank Jesus that because of His sacrifice, the fire didn't consume us; it consumed the sacrifice on the cross. Thank Him that the veil is torn.
- **Request:** If anyone in the group is in a season where they can't fix their own problems, pray for God to send the rain and for them to have the patience to wait for it.

Encouragement for the Week Ahead: You carry the Holy Spirit within you. You are a walking Temple. Treat your life with that level of dignity and honor this week!

WEEK FIVE

DAY TWENTY NINE —TRUE FREEDOM
DAY THIRTY —GRACE FOR ALL
DAY THIRTY ONE —THE WAY OF GRACE
DAY THIRTY TWO —LAW FULFILLED
DAY THIRTY THREE —TURNING AND TRUSTING
DAY THIRTY FOUR —DIVINE PROVISION
DAY THIRTY FIVE —THE GENTLE GOD

Week Five

Congratulations on making it to Week Five! That's a huge accomplishment. We hope and pray that the last four weeks have been a rich journey for you, and that you're gaining new and deeper insights into the breathtaking holiness of God. Again, if you feel like you are falling behind and unable to keep up with these daily tasks, please do not stress about that. Our deep desire is that you continue growing in your knowledge of our great and awesome God, and as you learn that your life will be changed for His glory.

After spending all that time staring in awe at God's perfection, we're going to shift our focus to the one thing that allows us, as imperfect people, to stand in His presence at all: **Grace**

Let's be honest, "grace" can be a tricky concept. Sometimes, we can twist it into something it was never meant to be. We treat it like a divine "Get Out of Jail Free" card. It's like having a heavenly credit card with no spending limit and no bill. We swipe it on a little gossip here, a little outburst of anger there, maybe a splurge on envy, all while thinking, "It's fine, grace will cover it!" We rack up a huge 'sin bill' all week, knowing that on Sunday, we can just hand it over to God and say, "Can you take care of this?" We treat grace like a no-fault insurance policy and a license to sin, figuring we're covered no matter how recklessly we live.

Is that really what grace is for? This week, we're going to dig past that cheapened, counterfeit version to find the real power of God's grace. Let’s see what it is, what it isn't, and how it's meant to transform our lives, not just excuse them.

Day Twenty Nine —True Freedom

When you were slaves to sin, you were free from the obligation to do right. And what was the result? You are now ashamed of the things you used to do, things that end in eternal doom. But now you are free from the power of sin and have become slaves of God. Now you do those things that lead to holiness and result in eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord.
-Romans 6:20-23

The Great Lie of Freedom
Our culture defines freedom as total, unrestricted autonomy. "No one tells me what to do. I am my own master." We think of freedom as freedom from all rules, obligations, and restraints. But Paul turns this idea completely upside down. He says that when we *were* "free" from the obligation to do right, we weren't free at all. We were "slaves to sin."

The "freedom" that we are born with is a lie. It's like the freedom of a train car that has jumped its tracks. It's "free" from the rails, but it's also immobile, useless, broken, and unable to fulfill its purpose. Jesus said it plainly: "Very truly I tell you, everyone who sins is a slave to sin" (John 8:34). In this state, people often think they are driving the train, when in reality they are sitting on the side, wasting their lives.

What is the result of this so-called freedom? Paul's answer: Shame. **Sin always over-promises and under-delivers.** It promises liberation, excitement, pleasure, and control but pays out in shame, brokenness, and ultimately, "eternal doom."

The Lord knows very well that you cannot change your own heart and cannot cleanse your own nature. But, He also knows that He can do both.
-C.H. Spurgeon, *All of Grace* (37)

The Glorious Exchange
"But now..." Because of Christ, a great exchange has happened. We have been set free from sin's power. So, are we now totally autonomous? No. Paul says we have become "slaves of God." Well, wait a minute? Is that a good thing? In our culture, "slavery" is the ultimate negative word. Why would we trade one master for another?

Here's why: Our old master, sin, was a cruel, deceptive, hateful tormenter who despised us and wanted to lead us to our own destruction. Our new master, God, is a loving, gracious Father who adores us, cares for our needs, and gives us a gift we could never earn on our own: **eternal life.** Being a "slave of God" and a "slave of righteousness" is the most positive thing we can experience.

Scripture says that where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom (2 Corinthians 3:17). Perhaps you have heard this verse before. The verses surrounding it can't be ignored. This passage is speaking of people who are blind and unable to see or understand the Truth. But only through believing in Jesus can the veil be removed from their minds and hearts, and they can finally be free from blinding sin and reflect His image, and become the holy people we were created to be.

So If I'm Free, How Do I Live?
This brings us to this practical question. If we are now "slaves of God," we live in joyful, loving obedience to our new Master. Our freedom isn't a license to do whatever we want. It is the power to finally do what is right. We are obligated to do the things that lead to holiness, not because we have to in order to be saved, but because we get to as a response to being saved.

If someone claims, "I know God," but doesn't obey God's commandments, that person is a liar and is not living in the truth. 5 But those who obey God's word truly show how completely they love him. That is how we know we are living in him. 6 Those who say they live in God should live their lives as Jesus did.
-1 John 2:4-6

This new obedience is the marker of our new life. It's how we live out our freedom. To claim we are "free in Christ" while continuing to live as a "slave to sin" is a contradiction. It proves our "freedom" is fake. As Proverbs 28:9 warns, "If anyone turns a deaf ear to my instruction, even their prayers are detestable."

True freedom is not doing what you want. It is being empowered to do what is right. It's no longer being a slave to the impulses that destroy you, but a willing, joyful servant to the God who loves you.

Questions:
In what specific area of your life are you currently demanding 'freedom' from God's 'tracks,' and is it leading to true liberty or just the brokenness of a derailed train car?

Paul says the result of our old life was "shame." Why do we so often forget the shame that sin produces and only remember the fleeting pleasure it promises?

Why does the phrase "slave of God" feel so uncomfortable to us, even though it's a "glorious exchange"? What fears or pride does that phrase expose in our hearts?

If joyful obedience is the evidence of our freedom, what does a consistent lack of obedience in a certain area say about who or what you are truly enslaved to?

Reflection: This passage teaches that you are either a slave to sin or a slave of God. There is no middle ground. Spend a few minutes honestly reflecting on the past 24 hours. Analyze your reactions, your hidden thoughts, and where you spent your energy. Whose orders were you following? Were your actions producing the "fruit" of holiness that comes from serving God, or the "shame" that comes from serving sin? Don't just condemn yourself, but use this as a diagnostic tool to assess your true allegiance in daily life.

Application: Have you been creating a habit of daily prayer in your life? Let's continue practicing immediate **confession** as we battle sin and the flesh, praising God through **adoration**, **drawing near** to Him in our worship, humbling ourselves in a **posture** of submission and reverence, and **thanking** Him for His goodness to us.

Now, we need to turn our gauze from within, to God, to others. This week let's practice prayers of **intercession**, especially for any enemies in our lives.

1. Make a list, if you don't have one yet, of people in your life that need salvation. Make a commitment to pray for these names each day for the remainder of this study.

2. Write down a name of a person who may be an "enemy" or a person who you don't want to pray for. Identify a person who is difficult or even hurtful. Pray for them, ask God to draw their hearts to Himself, heal them, and give you the grace to love them as God loves you.

Want to study further? Read Galatians 5:1, 13-14, and 1 Peter 2:16. Review how these verses continue this concept of how we are to live daily and understand our freedom as Christians.

Day Thirty —Grace For All

You have heard the law that says, 'Love your neighbor' and hate your enemy. But I say, love your enemies! Pray for those who persecute you! In that way, you will be acting as true children of your Father in heaven. For he gives his sunlight to both the evil and the good, and he sends rain on the just and the unjust alike. If you love only those who love you, what reward is there for that? Even corrupt tax collectors do that much. If you are kind only to your friends, how are you different from anyone else? Even pagans do that. But you are to be perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect.
-Matthew 5:43-48

The Goodness of the Sun and Rain
Our human instinct is wired for fairness, or at least what we deem as "fair." We believe in "an eye for an eye." If someone is kind to us, we are kind back. If someone hurts us, our natural response is to hurt them back or, at the very least, to withdraw our kindness. "Love your neighbor" makes sense. "Hate your enemy" feels like a natural survival instinct.

Jesus steps in and shatters our entire system. "Love your enemies! Pray for those who persecute you!" Why? What's the logic? This is unnatural. He gives us the answer immediately: **Do it because your Father does it**. Not only that, but acting this way shows that you are a child of the Father.

How does God show His love towards His enemies? Well, He points to the sun and the rain. When you look outside, the sun isn't shining only on the homes of Christians. The rain doesn't only fall on the fields of the righteous. God gives the life-giving warmth of the sun and the refreshing, crop-growing rain to everyone. Even His enemies. The kindest person on your street and the cruelest person in your town both breathe His air and are warmed by His sun.

When we walk down a street and see houses... gardens... families dwelling in security... business in the marketplace... we should realize not only that God is his sovereignty is ultimately responsible for all of these blessings but also that God has granted them all to sinners who are totally undeserving of any of them!
-Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (812)

This is what theologians call "**common grace**." It is the grace of God that is common to all humanity, whether they are saved or not. "The LORD is good to all. He has compassion on all he has made" (Psalm 145:9). He has shown kindness by giving you rain from heaven and crops in their seasons. He provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy (Acts 14:17). Every good meal, every moment of laughter, every beautiful sunset, and every breath of air is a gift of God's common grace, given freely to the just and the unjust.

Children of God
Jesus says that if we only love those who love us, we're no different than anyone else. That's just a transaction. But to be "true children" of our Father, our love must look like His. **It must be "unfair."** This is where common grace gets personal. God doesn't just want us to observe His common grace. He wants us to pass it on to others.

When you show love to a coworker who slanders you, when you are kind to a family member who has betrayed you, or when you pray for the person who sees you as their enemy, you are doing more than just being "nice." You are actively demonstrating the character of God. You are giving that person a tangible, human experience of divine grace.

For many unsaved people in the world, the only "sermon" they will ever experience is your love and forgiveness. Your refusal to retaliate may be the one glimpse of God's "sunshine" they see that day.

This is how we become "perfect" as our Father is perfect. It's a call to be "merciful, just as your Father is merciful" (Luke 6:36). It's a call to be a living, breathing example of God's wonderfully "unfair" grace to a world that desperately needs it.

Questions:
In what specific ways have you been expecting or wishing for God to only bless the "good" (including yourself) and to punish the "unjust"?

What percentage of your kindness and love is transactional (given to those who love you back), versus grace-based (given to those who don't)?

When you are showing kindness or forgiveness to someone who doesn't deserve it, what is your internal feeling (Regret, anger, resentment, or a genuine desire to act as a "true child" of your Father)?

Reflection: Do you have an enemy or persecutor in your life that Jesus commands you to pray for? What stops you from doing it? God sends them sun and rain. Are you sending them your kindness and prayer? Reflect on how your unwillingness to show them grace reveals how you view the saving grace God showed you when you were His enemy.

Application Checkup: This is why we set this application challenge for this week. If you have not done it yet, begin praying for that difficult person in your life.

Want to study further? Read the gospel parallel passage Luke 6:27-36. Note the ways that you are to mimic the graciousness of the Lord to evil and ungrateful people.

Day Thirty One —The Way of Grace

Jesus told him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me. If you had really known me, you would know who my Father is. From now on, you do know him and have seen him!" Philip said, "Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied." Jesus replied, "Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and yet you still don't know who I am? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father! So why are you asking me to show him to you? Don't you believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words I speak are not my own, but my Father who lives in me does his work through me. Just believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me. Or at least believe because of the work you have seen me do.
-John 14:6-11

The Crowded Road Headed the Wrong Way
There's a popular idea that finding God is like climbing a mountain. We're all at the bottom, and we all take different paths to get to the top. One person takes the path of being a good person, another takes the path of spirituality, another takes religion, and another takes self-help, but eventually, we'll all meet at the top. This idea sounds inclusive and nice. The problem is, **it's a lie**.

Jesus spoke about the different paths we take in life. He said, "You can enter God's Kingdom only through the narrow gate. The highway to hell is broad, and its gate is wide for the many who choose that way. But the gateway to life is very narrow and the road is difficult, and only a few ever find it" (Matthew 7:13-14).

The wide, broad road is so crowded because it's the highway of self-reliance. It has many lanes:

- The "I'm a good person" lane.
- The "I work hard for my salvation" lane.
- The "I'm spiritual, just not religious" lane.
- The "My good deeds outweigh my bad" lane.

There are many "ways" that seem right, but they all lead to destruction. They are all based on our effort, our works, and our ability to build a bridge to God. But our sin has created a chasm so wide, no bridge we build could ever cross it.

The One, Narrow Way
In the middle of a confusing discussion about where He is going, Jesus makes one of the most radical claims in human history: "I am the way, the truth, and the life."

He doesn't say, "I will show you the way." He doesn't say, "I'm a good way." He says, "I AM the way." He's not a signpost pointing to the path. He is the path. He's not a self-help guru teaching us about the truth of something. He is the truth. He's not a life coach with good ideas that give you what you want to hear. He is the source of life.

Then He draws the line: "No one can come to the Father except through me." This is the narrow gate. There is only one way to heaven because only one person was qualified to build the bridge. That is Jesus!

The pursuit of holiness must be anchored in the grace of God; otherwise, it is doomed to failure.
-Jerry Bridges, *The Discipline of Grace* (2)

The Bridge of Grace
So what makes Jesus the "Way of Grace"? The Cross.

All those wide roads are about us trying to reach up to God without Jesus. Even the Pharisees attempted to create a path to God without Jesus. Their road looks narrow, difficult, and at first glance appears legitimate. But the narrow way is about God reaching down to us through Jesus. We needed grace, and God provided the avenue for it. "For, there is one God and one Mediator who can reconcile God and humanity—the man Christ Jesus" (1 Timothy 2:5).

God is perfectly holy, and His justice required a payment for our sin. But His love is infinite, and His grace provided that payment. At the cross, Jesus, who is fully God and fully man, absorbed the full penalty of our sin. "But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners" (Romans 5:8).

This is why we can't get to heaven by being "good." It was never about works. “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” (Ephesians 2:8-9).

Seeing the Destination
When Philip says, "Show us the Father," he's still thinking like he's on the wide road, looking for a different path. Jesus's answer is important: "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father!"

You don't need to look for another way. You don't need to wonder what God is like, although we can study His character all our life. Look at Jesus. He is the perfect, visible expression of the invisible God. When you look at Jesus, you see the Father's love, the Father's holiness, and the Father's grace.

There are many ways to hell. They are paved with our good intentions and our self-effort. But there is only one way to the Father. It's not a system, a religion, or a set of rules. It's a person. His name is Jesus.

Questions:
Do you find yourself sometimes on one of the "self-reliance" lanes? If so, which one?

In our culture that values inclusivity, how do you really feel about the claim Jesus makes in this verse? Does it make you uncomfortable? Why or why not?

What are some modern "ways" (e.g., popular philosophies, cultural trends) that seem "right" or good but are actually just other lanes on the broad road of self-effort?

When you look at the life of Jesus (His actions, His teachings), what specific aspect of the Father's character (love, holiness, grace) is revealed most clearly to you?

Want to study further? If you want to study this topic more deeply, on why our own "goodness" isn't enough and why Jesus is the only way, take a look at Mark 10:18, Acts 4:12, Galatians 2:21.

Day Thirty Two —Law Fulfilled

Don't misunderstand why I have come. I did not come to abolish the law of Moses or the writings of the prophets. No, I came to accomplish their purpose. I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not even the smallest detail of God's law will disappear until its purpose is achieved. So if you ignore the least commandment and teach others to do the same, you will be called the least in the Kingdom of Heaven. But anyone who obeys God's laws and teaches them will be called great in the Kingdom of Heaven. But I warn you—unless your righteousness is better than the righteousness of the teachers of religious law and the Pharisees, you will never enter the Kingdom of Heaven!
-Matthew 5:17-20

The Law's True Purpose
Don't miss this, Jesus says He didn't come to "abolish" the law but to "accomplish its purpose." It's tempting to think we can ignore the Old Testament law, believing not all of it impacts our daily habits. But Jesus gives a strong warning: if we ignore, even the least of the commandments and teach others to do the same, we will be called least in the Heaven. The simple point is: **The law is good and has good purposes.** King David, a man after God's own heart, even sang of how he loved the law (Psalm 119).

So, what was the law's purpose? It was never meant to be a ladder we could climb to God. It was meant to be a perfect mirror. **For no one can ever be made right with God by doing what the law commands. The law simply shows us how sinful we are" (Romans 3:20)**. The law is the "bite" that reveals our rotten core. Jesus came to fulfill those perfect requirements for us, providing the hope we sinners desperately need.

While reading this passage and considering the lesson God has for us, I was eating an apple. Literally chewing on an apple while chewing on ideas for this topic. I was so focused on the passage and lost in thought that I did not actually look carefully at the apple I was eating. At first glance, which is all that I gave attention to, it looked pretty and red on the outside. But this all changed when I took a large bite and tasted nothing but the rotten core. I quickly spit it out and threw the apple into the trash. Although it looked good on the outside, the apple was not good and was garbage. -Brent Smith

The Rotten Core
The Pharisees had perfected this "self-love righteousness." They were the most beautiful-looking apples in the orchard, masters of the outward performance designed to earn the praise of others and the approval of God. But Jesus exposed their rotten core. Their righteousness was built on pride, which is the very opposite of the humility and meekness God considers of paramount importance. As James 4:6 warns, "God sets Himself against the proud person."

Attention: The concept of being "rotten to the core" can be challenging. Please understand that this isn't just a critique of the Pharisees; it is a reflection on the human condition. While acts of philanthropy and compassion are "good" because they help people, they lack eternal fruit if the Holy Spirit is absent. Isaiah 64:6 reminds us that our own righteous acts are like "filthy rags." According to Paul in Romans 5 and 1 Corinthians 1, it is Christ in us who makes us acceptable to God. Only through Him can we perform deeds that truly glorify God. Apart from Jesus, our best efforts fail, and our fleshly nature eventually takes root and produces its own fruit.

Self-love, if indulged and pandered to, produces enormous personal pride. Almost always this is accompanied by arrogance in attitude and a certain crude haughtiness in behavior. Such individuals are often very difficult. There is an element of self-protection in such people which keeps others at arm's length. They are not easily approached and they are seldom open to any suggestions.
-W. Phillip Keller, *The High Cost of Holiness* (51)

This is the perfect illustration of the "self-righteousness" we've been exploring. Recall the character David from **Day Zero -Analysis**? Publicly, he's the man who has it all together, especially at church. Privately, he's a hypocrite. Although David wants people to think he's devoted, his life is actually driven by a deep-seated love for self, not a true love for God. He's more concerned with gratifying his own desires and protecting his public image than with loving God, worrying more about what people think of him than what God knows.

A Better Righteousness
So, what is this "better" righteousness? It's not *our* righteousness at all. It is Jesus! The righteousness is not on the outside of a person, it comes from the inside. We don't stand before God holding up our polished, but rotten, apple. We stand before Him, empty-handed, cloaked in the perfect righteousness of His Son.

Now, we obey God's laws not to *get* saved (which is impossible), but because we *are* saved. We obey not out of "self-love" (to make ourselves look good), but out of "God-love," in humble, grateful response to the grace He has given us.

Questions:
In what specific areas of your life are you most focused on "polishing the outside" of your apple (your public reputation, religious activities) while knowing there is a "rotten core" (a private sin, a bad attitude, or a lack of love) that you are hiding?

In what specific ways did you make a decision this week based on "self-love" (protecting your image, personal comfort, pride) rather than "God-love" (obedience, humility)?

What does this "better" righteousness (which is a gift) look like in your daily motivations, not just your actions?

If we now obey God's law out of "God-love" (gratitude) and not "self-love," how does that change your reason for doing good deeds, helping the unfortunate, tithing, serving, or being kind?

Reflection: This week, identify one "good deed" you do somewhat regularly (serving at church, helping a neighbor, your daily Bible reading). Before you do it, pause and consciously check your motivation. Verbally pray, *"God, I am not doing this to earn your favor, to look good, or to feel righteous. I am doing this out of a love for you which is my grateful response to the grace you have already given me in Jesus."* This simple act helps retrain your heart to obey for the right reasons.

Want to study further? Jesus tells the Pharisees that they are “whitewashed tombs” in Matthew 23:25-28. Compare this with Luke 18:9-14 which contrasts a Pharisee and a repentant tax collector. Note how God sees these two people.

Day Thirty Three —Turning and Trusting

Now repent of your sins and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped away. Then times of refreshment will come from the presence of the Lord, and he will again send you Jesus, your appointed Messiah. For he must remain in heaven until the time for the final restoration of all things, as God promised long ago through his holy prophets.
-Acts 3:19-21

The Memories of the Past
What do you do with your past? For many of us, our past sins and failures aren't just memories. They are heavy chains. We drag them around, allowing the shame and guilt of our "old self" to define our present. But these chains aren't just forged from our own sins. They are also made from the deep hurts inflicted on us. This can come from the critical words of a parent that still echo in our ears, the deep insecurity carved out by a childhood bully, the betrayal of a broken relationship that shattered our trust, or even the spiritual wound left by a church or spiritual leader who failed us. We allow this toxic mix of our own guilt and the bitterness from others' hurts to keep us trapped, defining who we are today.

Breaking these chains of the past comes in two parts: "Repent and turn to God.

The Turn of Repentance
Repentance is the first move. It's looking back at our sin, our old self, and making a conscious, decisive action to turn from it. It's agreeing with God that our past way was wrong and choosing to walk in a new direction.

Only God can change our hearts,
But we can take the first step by repenting.
-Aaron Pierce, *Not Beyond Reach* (36)

This is why the remembrance of our sin, while painful, is so important. It's not meant to paralyze us with shame. That shame is temporary. God's purpose for that memory is not to keep us trapped, but to motivate us. Remembering the misery of those chains makes us cherish our freedom. We do not appreciate the sunshine until we experience seasons of rain. It pushes us to run, not walk, away from that old life.

Faith in the Source
But turning from sin is only half the journey. The second, life-giving part is turning to God. This is faith. We turn from our old source of life (self, sin) and turn to the true Source.

God is not just the starting point of your life;
He is the *source* of it.
-Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life* (27)

When we do this, the incredible promise of Acts 3:19 is fulfilled: our sins are "wiped away." This is restoration. The shame is gone, the guilt is paid for, and "times of refreshment" come flowing from the very "presence of the Lord."

New Creation, New Motivation
This is how we "put away our old self," which was "being corrupted by its deceitful desires," and "put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness" (Ephesians 4:22-24). We are no longer trapped. The past, rather than being a prison, becomes a powerful motivator. Don't waste the sufferings and trials of this life as they build character in the life of a believer.

We are free to "move forward" because, as 2 Corinthians 5:17 declares, "This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!" We can confidently pray as David did after his great sin, " Create in me a clean heart, O God. Renew a loyal spirit within me.... Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and make me willing to obey you" (Psalm 51:10, 12).

Read that psalm again! That is a powerful prayer if you feel trapped by the past. Repentance and faith aren't just the key that gets you in the door of heaven. They are the way you walk every day. It's a continual turning from the old and trusting in the new, exchanging temporary shame for eternal refreshment.

Questions:
What types of past hurts/chains do you find hard to break free from, your own sin, or the hurt caused by others, and why?

When you remember a past failure, is your first reaction paralyzing shame (which keeps you trapped) or motivating repentance (which pushes you toward freedom)?

Why do we often experience just temporary relief from hurt instead of this lasting refreshment described in Acts?

What is the practical difference between only "turning from sin" (which can be behavior modification) and truly "turning to God" (which is faith in a new Source)?

Reflection: Read Psalm 51. While you do this ask the Lord to reveal to you if you have any chains of the past that need to be dealt with. Reflect on what it would feel like for God to create a new, clean heart in that area and truly restore the joy of your salvation and give you a willing heart of obedience to Him.

Want to study further? Read 2 Corinthians 7:9-11. The Apostle Paul describes sadness intended by God to produce repentance which leaves no regrets and he compares this to the worldly sadness that leads to nothing but death.

Day Thirty Four —Divine Provision

Then the LORD said to Moses, “Look, I’m going to rain down food from heaven for you. Each day the people can go out and pick up as much food as they need for that day. I will test them in this to see whether or not they will follow my instructions. On the sixth day they will gather food, and when they prepare it, there will be twice as much as usual.”
-Exodus 16:4-5

The Provision We Don't Want
Have you ever done this? You stand in front of a full pantry or an open refrigerator, scanning shelves of food, and you declare, "We have nothing to eat!"

What you really mean is, "We don't have the specific thing I'm craving right now." There are cans, boxes, and leftovers, but none of it satisfies what you want.

This is exactly what the Israelites were doing in the desert. They were angry, free from slavery but facing what they believed was certain starvation. Their fear and dissatisfaction led them to grumble against God, completely ignoring the fact that the God who parted the sea was perfectly capable of providing a meal.

This anxiety over provision is deeply human. We all feel it. We worry about our next paycheck, our health, our career, and our future.

Do you remember Liam from the **Day Zero -Analysis**? Liam had a "provision" in mind that he desperately wanted: a promotion at work. He prayed fervently for it. But when the promotion was given to someone else, Liam became angry. His faith collapsed because he believed God's job was to fulfill his desires. Liam's faith was transactional, based on the idea that if he prayed, God was obligated to give him what he wanted. He failed to see that God's perfect wisdom and sovereign plan might be different from his own immediate wants.

Daily Bread, Daily Test
In Exodus, God does provide, but He does it in a way that directly confronts their (and our) flawed view. He says, "I'm going to rain down food from heaven." But this divine provision comes with a specific instruction: "Each day... pick up as much food as they need for that day."

This wasn't just about food. It was a test. God could have given them a month's worth. He could have filled their storehouses. Instead, He gave them just enough for the day. Why? Because He was teaching them daily dependence on Him alone. He wanted to break their self-reliance. He wanted them to go to bed not trusting the food in their pantry, but trusting the God who promised to provide again tomorrow.

This is the same principle Jesus taught us to pray: "Give us this day our daily bread" (Matthew 6:11). God's provision is often designed to keep us close, to force us to trust Him for tomorrow. This is something in modern rich America we can quickly forget as we comfort ourselves in the security of a bank account.

The Provider, Not the Provision
Just like the Israelites, we can fail the test because we pursue joy by pursuing stuff. We build hope on the "tower" of self-security.

Are you pursuing joy by pursuing stuff and toys? Well... sorry, it's not there. It won't hold. The bricks will start sliding at some point. That tower of affluence and influence cannot keep you up above the pull of gravity unless the "joy in your heart" comes from somewhere much, much higher than that.
-Matt Chandler, *Recovering Redemption* (195)

God is that "somewhere much, much higher." The manna in the desert was never the point. The manna was the tool God used to point the people to Himself. It was the daily bread that was meant to lead them to the true "bread of life." As Jesus would later say, **"I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry" (John 6:35).**

God's divine provision is not a promise to give us every promotion we want or fill our bank accounts. It is a promise that He will give us *exactly* what we *need*, day by day, to accomplish His purposes and draw us closer to Him. Our real need isn't the *stuff*. Our real need is the *Provider*. And " this same God who takes care of me will supply all your needs from his glorious riches, which have been given to us in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 4:19).

Questions:
In what area of your life (finances, relationships, career) are you currently looking at God's actual provision and declaring "it's not enough," simply because it's not the specific "provision" you want?

How can you intentionally practice "daily trust" when you aren't in a place of daily need?

When was the last time an unanswered prayer made you feel angry or that God "didn't care"? Be honest: Was your frustration revealing a "transactional faith" (like Liam's) rather than trust in God's sovereign wisdom?

Reflection: If you lost your primary source of provision (your job, your savings) tomorrow, would your joy (which Matt Chandler says comes from "somewhere much, much higher") remain?

Want to study further? Read passages like Matthew 6:25-34, Philippians 4:11-13, and 1 Timothy 6:17-19. These Scriptures teach us about how we should not waste our time worrying about tomorrow but seek God’s kingdom first not relying on uncertain wealth. They also help us find contentment in both times of plenty or wants.

Day Thirty Five —The Gentle God

The LORD passed in front of Moses, calling out, "Yahweh! The LORD! The God of compassion and mercy! I am slow to anger and filled with unfailing love and faithfulness. I lavish unfailing love to a thousand generations. I forgive iniquity, rebellion, and sin. But I do not excuse the guilty. I lay the sins of the parents upon their children and grandchildren; the entire family is affected— even children in the third and fourth generations." Moses immediately threw himself to the ground and worshiped. And he said, "O Lord, if it is true that I have found favor with you, then please travel with us. Yes, this is a stubborn and rebellious people, but please forgive our iniquity and our sins. Claim us as your own special possession."
-Exodus 34:6-9

The Strength of Gentleness
What do you think of when you hear the word "gentle"? In our culture, gentle can sometimes be confused with "weak" or "timid." But in the Bible, God's gentleness is the picture of a supreme being under perfect control. It takes strength and restraint to be gentle. This is the heart of God's approachability.

In the same way that God is gentle, Scripture teaches us that we should do the same. We should speak calmy with others (Proverbs 15:1), treat each other well (Titus 3:2), and within the household husbands must be gentle and loving with their wives and not provoke their children (Colossians 3:19,21). Gentleness is one of the fruits of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23).

Now picture this. Moses is hiding in the cleft of a rock, having just asked to see God's glory. He is braced for an experience of raw, terrifying power, like the fire and thunder on Mount Sinai. Instead, God shields him and reveals the very core of His being, not in a blinding light, but in a personal proclamation.

And what is His glory? It is His goodness. "Yahweh! The LORD! The God of compassion and mercy!"

This is who He is at His core. He is not an angry tyrant looking for a reason to condemn. He is a patient Father, "slow to anger" and overflowing with "unfailing love" (lovingkindness). As Psalm 103:8 echoes, " The LORD is compassionate and merciful, slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love and faithfulness." God's love is not temporary like mine or yours, His love "smothers" a thousand generations. No one else can love like God does! In addition to His love, He forgives people who do not deserve forgiveness.

The Response to Goodness
Look at Moses's response! He heard this description, and "immediately threw himself to the ground and worshiped."

This is crucial. Moses didn't hear "compassionate and merciful" and think, "Oh, good. He's a pushover. I can get away with things." He heard God's gentle, forgiving nature and was so overcome with awe that his only possible response was to fall on his face. He saw God's mercy not as a license, but as the very reason He is so worthy of worship.

God's gentleness is not weakness. It is the most powerful thing in the universe. It is what makes Him so holy, good, trustworthy, and a faithful Father.

Notice what Moses does next. He doesn't try to hide the people's sin. He agrees with God, "Yes, this is a stubborn and rebellious people", and then he uses God's own character as the basis for his plea. "but please forgive our iniquity... Claim us." He essentially prays, "Since You are the God of compassion, be compassionate to us!" Not only have compassion but also use us even though we are rebellious.

Approachable, Not Permissive
This is the God we serve. He is gentle, but He is not a pushover. The same proclamation that promises to "forgive iniquity, rebellion, and sin" also states, "But I do not excuse the guilty." This is the beautiful tension of the gospel. How can He be both?

The cross is the answer. At the cross, God's justice did not "excuse the guilty." Our sin was paid for. And at the cross, His compassion and mercy were poured out in full on the world.

Jesus reiterated this quality of God in Matthew 11 when he explains that His burden is light, that he is gentle and lowly in heart, where we can find rest for our souls.

Because our God is this gentle, merciful, and approachable, we don't have to hide in fear when we fail. We can run to Him. His gentleness doesn't excuse our sin, it gives us the courage to repent.

We must, however, keep going back to His grace. Only the grace of God revealed in the gospel of Jesus Christ will give us the courage to get up again and keep on going even after we have failed for the umpteenth time.
-Jerry Bridges, The Discipline of Grace (201)

Questions:
In what specific area of your life have you been treating God like a "pushover," taking His mercy for granted instead of responding with worship like Moses?

What is your typical gut-level response when you experience God's forgiveness after a failure? Is it just relief, or is it a renewed sense of awe at His character?

Where in your life (at home, at work, online) do you find it most difficult to show God's "strength under control" rather than a weak, permissive attitude or a harsh, angry one?

When you pray after sinning, are you tempted to make excuses, or do you, like Moses, confidently ask for mercy?

Reflection: Think of a recurring sin. Your shame tells you to hide. But God's character (Exodus 34:6-7) gives you the courage to repent. Reflect on how the cross satisfied both His mercy *and* His justice, freeing you to run *to* Him, not *from* Him.

Application Checkup: Do you remember the application challenge for this week from **Day 29**?

Intercession and praying for the needs of others, especially those who are difficult or unsaved, is critical in beginning the process of loving God and loving others. If we really understand the holiness and righteousness of God and are faced with the reality of His perfect standards, it should prompt us to desire to view humanity with a compassionate lens.

Want to study further? Read Ephesians 4. This chapter begins and ends with a call to being humble, gentle, and forgiving one another. While you read, note the reason for this way of living.

Partnership and Small Group Discussion

Congratulations on completing Week Five! This week, we turned our eyes to the only thing that allows us to survive the holiness of God, which is Grace. We learned that grace isn't a license to sin, but the power to live a new life.

How to Format Your Meeting

1. **Check-In (10 Minutes):** Did you feel a sense of relief this week? Or did the call to love your enemies make this week even harder?
2. **Review (5 Minutes):** Briefly recall the themes of the week: Freedom isn't autonomy. It is being a slave to God vs. a slave to sin. Common grace and the command to love enemies. The broad highway of self-reliance vs. Jesus as the only Way. The law reveals the rotten core (motive) inside the shiny fruit. Repentance is turning *from* sin and *to* God. Trusting God for daily bread rather than hoarding security. God reveals His glory as compassionate and gracious.
3. **Discussion (30-45 Minutes):** Select the questions below that will generate the most honest conversation.
4. **Prayer (10-15 Minutes):** Focus on Intercession (praying for others).

Discussion Questions

1. Freedom (Day 29) We learned that true freedom isn't doing whatever you want. It is the power to do what is right.

- The world says freedom has no rules. The Apostle Paul says freedom is being a slave to God. Why does the word "slave" often rub us the wrong way?

- Be honest: In what area of life are you currently demanding autonomy from God, and how is that actually leading to shame or brokenness rather than freedom?

2. Unfair (Day 30) We looked at how God sends rain on the just and the unjust, and challenges us to love our enemies.

- Who is the enemy (or just the really difficult person) in your life right now?

- Jesus says if we only love those who love us, we are no different than the world. What would it practically look like for you to show sunshine and rain (kindness) to that difficult person this week?

3. The Rotten Core (Day 32) We used the analogy of an apple that is shiny on the outside but rotten in the middle to describe self-righteousness.

- We all have a rotten core area. This is a sin we keep hidden while we polish the outside. Without oversharing, what acts of polishing (religious activities, good deeds) do you use to cover up your internal struggles?

4. The Transactional Trap (Day 34) We discussed Liam, who got angry when God didn't give him the promotion.

- Have you ever treated God like a vending machine? (i.e., "I put in prayer/obedience, so You owe me [X].")

- How does the concept of daily bread (getting just enough for today) challenge your desire for long-term security and control?

5. The Gentle God (Day 35) God revealed His glory to Moses not as thunder, but as compassionate and gracious, slow to anger.

- When you sin, is your immediate instinct to run *to* God (because He is gentle) or *from* God (because you fear He is angry)? How does your view of His character affect your repentance?

But I say, love your enemies! Pray for those who persecute you! In that way, you will be acting as true children of your Father in heaven. For he gives his sunlight to both the evil and the good, and he sends rain on the just and the unjust alike. If you love only those who love you, what reward is there for that? Even corrupt tax collectors do that much.
-Matthew 5:44-45

Prayer and Application
This week, we are going to do the hard work of grace. We are going to pray for the people we don't want to pray for.

- **An Enemy List:** Have everyone take about a minute or two of silence to identify one person who is difficult, hurtful, or annoying them right now.
- **Prayer:** Go around the circle. You don't have to name the person out loud if it's sensitive, but pray a blessing over them.
    - *Example:* "Lord, I pray for [Name]. I ask that You would send Your 'sun and rain' on them. Bless them, draw them to you, save them, heal their hurt, and give me the grace to love them as You love me."
- **Daily Bread:** Close by praying for anyone in the group who needs to trust God for immediate provision.

Encouragement: Grace is not a soft pillow. It is a power source. Use that power this week to love the unlovable and trust the Provider!

WEEK SIX

DAY THIRTY SIX —HOLINESS RESTORED
DAY THIRTY SEVEN —THE SURRENDERED LIFE
DAY THIRTY EIGHT —BE HOLY
DAY THIRTY NINE —FAITHFUL IN THE FIRE
DAY FORTY —WHOLE WORSHIP
DAY FORTY ONE —DAY BY DAY
DAY FORTY TWO —EYES ON ETERNITY

Week Six

Welcome to Week Six, the final week!

We began this study in the perfection of Eden, looking at God's original design for the world and for humanity. Then we faced the harsh reality of the Fall, forcing us to ask, "Who are we now, as broken people standing before a perfectly holy God?"

From there, we lifted our eyes from ourselves to Him. We spent time digging into the sheer depth of God's character, from His sovereignty, all-knowing brilliance to His breathtaking mercy and grace. We then made some stops at some "Holy Spaces" of Scripture, discovering that God has specific preferences for how He is to be approached, worshipped, and revered.

Last week, we landed on the most critical truth of all: Grace. We saw that it's the only avenue into God's presence. We wrestled with the fact that this incredible gift isn't a license to keep sinning, but the ultimate motivation to flee from the very sin that separates us from Him.

So, if grace is the gate to eternal life, how do we walk the path?

That's what this final week is all about. We're shifting from the "why" to the "how." How do we, as people saved by grace, actively pursue holiness? We'll explore how God is faithfully working to restore holiness in His people, bringing us back to that "original design." All of this is done while we keep one eye on the horizon, looking forward to our final redemption and the glorious day when we are fully restored.

You're almost at the finish line. Don't give up now. Keep moving forward. If you've been going through this series with a partner, this is the week to encourage each other to finish the race strong. Let's end this journey by discovering the practical, powerful ways we can walk in the new life God has given us.

Day Thirty Six —Holiness Restored

Run from sexual sin! No other sin so clearly affects the body as this one does. For sexual immorality is a sin against your own body. Don't you realize that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who lives in you and was given to you by God? You do not belong to yourself, for God bought you with a high price. So you must honor God with your body.
-1 Corinthians 6:18-20

Imagine a powerful, wealthy, and perfectly holy king was moving into your house... permanently. You wouldn't just tidy up. You would do everything in your power to scrub it clean. You'd throw out all the garbage and would never dream of bringing anything filthy or disrespectful into the very rooms he now walks. His presence would make your house a holy palace. This is the exact picture Paul is describing. But he's not talking about your house. He's talking about your body.

As we become more sanctified in our bodies, our bodies become more and more useful servants of God, more and more responsive to the will of God and the desires of the Holy Spirit.
-Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (936)

The Sacred Space
As we have seen through this devotional, in the Old Testament there was only one place on earth where God's holy presence dwelled. He dwelled in the Tabernacle, and later, the Temple. This was a sacred space. The Holy of Holies, was so sacred that if anyone entered it improperly, they would be struck dead. This was God's way of dwelling among His people. But it was not His final plan. The final plan was not to dwell among them, but in them.

The Indwelling God
This is the restoration of holiness. The curtain has been torn. The stone walls are gone. Through the grace of Jesus Christ, God has fulfilled His ancient promise that He will pour out His Spirit on His people (Ezekiel 36:27, Acts 2:17)

You, as a believer, are now like the Holy of Holies. The living God, the Holy Spirit, has taken up residence inside you. Your body is a sacred space.

Defiling the Temple
Why is this sin, of all sins, highlighted? Because, as he says, it "so clearly affects the body." While other sins may be external, sexual sin is a violation of the temple itself. It is, as the text says, a "sin against your own body."

Think of it this way. To engage in sexual immorality is to take the sacred space where God Himself dwells and defile it. It's like inviting an idol into the Holy of Holies. It's a deep betrayal of the sacred trust God has placed in us by choosing to make our physical bodies His home.

Bought with a Price
Your life, your body, your future, they are not your own. You have been "bought with a high price." The payment was blood, the precious blood of Jesus Christ on the cross. Your holiness wasn't earned by you. It was purchased for you.

Because you are no longer your own, and because your body is a temple, the command is clear: "So you must honor God with your body."

This is what it means to have holiness restored. It's not a set of rules we follow to become holy. It is a new reality we live out because we are holy. We don't just avoid sin. We actively "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). We will talk more about this passage on **Day Forty**. This command to honor God with our bodies touches everything! Not just what we do sexually, but what we eat, what we drink, what we watch, how we speak, what we do with our "free" time, and how we treat other people. As Paul says later in 1 Corinthians, "So whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God" (1 Corinthians 10:31).

You are a temple. Live like it

Let this serve as an invitation to rise to your true potential, not as a weight to make you feel inadequate.

Questions:
If you truly treated your body like a holy palace where a King lives, what one thing would you immediately "throw out" (a habit, a thought pattern, something you watch)?

"You do not belong to yourself." How does this truth conflict with our culture's message of "my body, my choice, my life"?

In what practical ways have you been living as if your body is your own, rather than as something "bought with a high price"?

What is one way you haven't been honoring God with your body this week (e.g., sexual sin, gluttony, lack of sleep, laziness, wasting your time, watching inappropriate media, an angry attitude)?

Why do you think Paul uses such a strong, urgent command, "Run!" for sexual sin, as opposed to "stop" or "avoid"? What does this imply about our own strength versus this specific temptation?

Note: There is a reason this passage avoids the word "fight." We often tell ourselves we can handle certain content or situations without being affected, believing we can defeat temptation in the moment. However, the best course of action is frequently to run.

Application: This is the final week. If you have been tracking with these application prompts, you will be forming a healthy pattern of prayer and dependence on God through everyday hunger for Him. This week, your application task is to create a next step commission (assignment) for your life.

1. **Seek and Write:** As you progress through this final week, ask God to reveal one tangible thing you are going to do differently moving forward. This must be concrete and actionable. Write this in the back of this book under the **"My Next Steps"** section. Examples: "I will pray before I open my phone in the morning," "I will forgive [Name]," "I will tell [Name] about Jesus," or "I will serve in the kids' ministry."

2. **Challenge Yourself:** Do not pick something too easy just to quickly check it off your list. Do not move on without earnestly seeking God's direction, guidance, and refinement. Allow this to be a stretch of your faith. This is a move that requires His grace to accomplish.

3. **Find Your Truth Teller:** Once you have written down your Next Step, meet with a mature believer, the truth teller in your life. Share this goal with them. Ask them to affirm, support, and help keep you accountable to this commitment. We were never meant to walk this journey alone.

4. **Accept Your Commission:** Let this be your commission to strengthen your faith in God and share your testimony with others. By taking this step, you are choosing to be a light to a dark world, set apart by His grace.

Want to study further? Read 1 Corinthians 3:16-17. This is another great example of the Apostle Paul teaching that our bodies are God's temple. Not only an individual believer, but also the church collectively.

Day Thirty Seven —The Surrendered Life

My old self has been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. So I live in this earthly body by trusting in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. I do not treat the grace of God as meaningless. For if keeping the law could make us right with God, then there was no need for Christ to die.
-Galatians 2:20-21

Who is in the driver's seat of your life? It's a question we have to answer every single morning. We wake up, and our default setting is to grab the wheel. We have our plans, our rights, our desires, and our schedule. But the Christian life is a constant, moment-by-moment act of moving over to the passenger seat. This is the practice of surrendering.

Do you remember Violet from **Day Zero -Analysis**? She consumed harmful social media and justified it by claiming a cheap grace. Her attitude is the polar opposite of a life surrendered to Christ and dead to self. Instead, she keeps her old self alive and well, proving she is still in the driver's seat of her life.

An Execution
Notice he doesn't say, "My old self has been improved" or "My old self is trying harder." He says it was crucified. This is the language of execution. The "old self," the one driven by pride, fear, self-reliance, and sin, was legally and spiritually put to death on the cross with Jesus.

This is the foundation of the surrendered life. It's not just giving God 10% of your time or finances and then asking Him to bless *your plans*. It's the daily acknowledgment that your old life is over. Your right to your own life is forfeited.

A New Resident
A crucified life doesn't mean an empty life. Paul immediately explains the other half of the miracle: "It is no longer I who live, *but Christ lives in me*."

We died, and Christ, through His Holy Spirit, now lives in and through us. Jesus is our new power source, our life, energy, and passion. We are no longer called to live the Christian life in our own strength (which is impossible). We are called to be vessels, filled with Christ. This is why our new life is one of total dependence on the Holy Spirit. As Jesus said, "I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:5).

We are selfless in that we have died to ourselves. We have lost the right to determine the direction of our lives. Our God is our Lord, our Master, and our King. He holds our times in his hands, and he is free to spend our lives however he pleases.
-David Platt, *Radical Together* (104)

Live a Crucified Life
We live this new life by faith. We actively trust His wisdom over our own impulses. We trust His strength when we feel weak or incapable. We trust His plan when we are anxious and worried about the future. We trust His love when we feel insecure, lonely, and rejected by others. The "surrendered life" is a life of active, moment-by-moment trust.

Why go through all this? To go back to living for ourselves, or to try and earn our way to God by "keeping the law," is to trample on grace. It's to look at the cross and say, "That was unnecessary. I could have handled this myself."

If being a "good person" could make us right with God, "then there was no need for Christ to die." The surrendered life is the only genuine response to the cross.
It is the daily answer to Jesus's call:

*"If any of you wants to be my follower, you must give up your own way, **take up your cross daily, and follow me**. If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake, you will save it. And what do you benefit if you gain the whole world but are yourself lost or destroyed? If anyone is ashamed of me and my message, the Son of Man will be ashamed of that person when he returns in his glory and in the glory of the Father and the holy angels. I tell you the truth, some standing here right now will not die before they see the Kingdom of God."*
-Luke 9:23-27

Questions:
When you woke up today, what was the very first thing you "grabbed the wheel" for (e.g., your schedule, an anxious thought, a relationship problem, success at work) instead of consciously surrendering it to Christ?

In what area of your life are you still trying to improve your old self (by "trying harder" or managing your sin) instead of living as if it's already dead and Christ is your new life?

If Christ is your new power source, where are you still trying to plug into your old, depleted batteries (your own strength, willpower, or intelligence) to get through the day?

We are called to be vessels, filled with Christ. What "junk" (pride, fear, selfish ambitions, sins) are you currently filling your vessel with, leaving no room for Christ to live through you?

If living for yourself "treats the grace of God as meaningless," what's one area of self-reliance in your life that, in effect, is telling God His cross wasn't necessary for that part of your life?

Reflection: Read Luke 9:23 again. What does "your cross" look like today? How do you pick up the cross today? What things are you holding onto that you need to put down before you can pick up the cross?

Want to study further? Read John 15:1-17. As Jesus explains the vine and the branches, consider the relationship between “abiding” or “remaining” in Him and bearing fruit. What does this teach you about the difference between *your* efforts and *Christ’s* life working *through* you?

Day Thirty Eight —Be Holy

So prepare your minds for action and exercise self-control. Put all your hope in the gracious salvation that will come to you when Jesus Christ is revealed to the world. So you must live as God's obedient children. Don't slip back into your old ways of living to satisfy your own desires. You didn't know any better then. But now you must be holy in everything you do, just as God who chose you is holy. For the Scriptures say, "You must be holy because I am holy."
-1 Peter 1:13–16

The Pigmy Christian
Have you ever seen a bonsai tree? It's a remarkable work of art. A "pigmy tree" is a miniature, perfectly formed fully mature tree. But it's small because it has been intentionally stunted. Its roots are bound, its branches are pruned, and it's kept in a tiny pot. Although these pigmy trees can be very old, they are not allowed to grow into the mighty, strong trees they were designed to be.

This is what happens when we have a "pigmy God." We create a small, manageable, comfortable god who fits neatly into our lives. A god who doesn't challenge us, demand anything, or disrupt our plans. And a pigmy god inevitably produces a "pigmy Christian," a believer who looks the part but is spiritually stunted, never growing in strength, wisdom, or character.

The Core of It All
Here is the meat, the core of this entire devotional. God is not a "pigmy God." He is an all-consuming, perfectly holy fire. And His call to us is not to be a "pigmy Christian." His call is to be like Him.

Peter, quoting Leviticus 19:2, gives the foundational command of the Christian life: "You must be holy because I am holy." This isn't a friendly suggestion. It's the new family resemblance. God isn't saying, "Try to be as holy as I am" (which is impossible). He is saying, "Be holy because I am." Because you are My chosen child, your very nature has been changed. Now, live like it.

This call to personal holiness isn't just for the "spiritually elite."

But how? How can we, as imperfect people, "be holy"? Peter doesn't just give the command. He gives the battle plan.

God has called every Christian to a holy life. There are no exceptions to this call. It is not a call only to pastors, missionaries, and a few dedicated Sunday School teachers. Every Christian of every nation, whether rich or poor, learned or unlearned, influential or totally unknown, is called to be holy.
-Jerry Bridges, *The Pursuit of Holiness* (25)

How to Pursue Holiness

1. "Prepare your minds for action and exercise self-control." Holiness is not passive. It's not something that just happens to you. It is an active, daily pursuit. It requires discipline and intentionality.

2. "Put all your hope in the gracious salvation..." This is the key. This is our power. Our hope isn't in our ability to be holy. Our hope is in the grace of God. The same grace that saved us is the grace that sanctifies us.

3. "Don't slip back into your old ways..." We must actively fight against our old desires. We are obedient children now, and we can't go back to living like we did before we knew better.

Growing into the Image

Why does God care so much about our holiness? Because He is a good Father, and He wants His children to share in His character. He knows what is best for us, because He made us. Hebrews 12:10 tells us that God's "discipline is always good for us, so that we might share in his holiness."

He doesn't want us to stay as pigmy Christians. He is the divine gardener, and His grace is the pruning shear. He is cutting away the old, dead branches of our sin so that His righteousness can finally grow in us, producing the fruit of holiness in us.

Questions:

What specific area of your life are you intentionally keeping God in a "tiny pot" because you're afraid of what He might demand if you let Him be big?

When was the last time your faith genuinely disrupted your plans, cost you something, or made you feel deeply uncomfortable?

If you can't remember, what might that reveal about whether you are worshiping the all-consuming, holy God of the Bible or a "pigmy God" designed for your own comfort and convenience?

If you were to honestly assess your spiritual life over the last year, where has your growth been stunted?

In what practical way can you "try hard" (action) while simultaneously "trusting fully" (grace) in your fight for holiness?

Can you identify a recent trial or difficulty in your life that God might be using as a "pruning shear" to cut away a dead branch and make you holier?

Reflection: Reflect on one "old way" you still slip into. How does the knowledge that you are a chosen child of a holy God (your new identity) change your motivation to fight that sin, compared to when you didn't know any better?

Want to study further? Read 1 John 3:1-10 and be challenged! There are some serious statement in this passage. No one born of God will continue to sin and the one who does not love his fellow Christian is not of God... Yikes! What does this teach you about the relationship between your daily effort to be holy and the new nature God has already placed within you?

Day Thirty Nine —Faithful in the Fire

God blesses those who patiently endure testing and temptation. Afterward they will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him. And remember, when you are being tempted, do not say, "God is tempting me." God is never tempted to do wrong, and he never tempts anyone else. Temptation comes from our own desires, which entice us and drag us away. These desires give birth to sinful actions. And when sin is allowed to grow, it gives birth to death.
- James 1:12-15

The Two-Front War
When the fire of a hard trial hits, what is your first reaction? When you get the bad news (or diagnosis), when the relationship ends, when the financial pressure builds, when the unexpected happens, when life itself feels like it's on fire, what do you turn to?

If we're honest, our first instinct often isn't to turn to God in prayerful, patient dependence. Our instinct is to turn somewhere else. We turn to substances to forget, a phone for a distraction, to food for comfort, to anger for a fleeting sense of control, or to a friend to vent our despair.

These are the fires that come at us, the external "testings" of our faith. But James shows us we are fighting a war on two fronts. There is another kind of fire, a quieter one that burns inside us. The internal "temptation" that comes from our own desires. There is hope and reward for enduring this war.

The Promise
God blesses those who patiently endure. This isn't a fake "grin and bear it" endurance. This is a determined, prayerful perseverance. The fire of testing isn't meant to destroy you. It is meant to refine you. As Peter says:

So be truly glad. There is wonderful joy ahead, even though you must endure many trials for a little while. These trials will show that your faith is genuine. It is being tested as fire tests and purifies gold—though your faith is far more precious than mere gold. So when your faith remains strong through many trials, it will bring you much praise and glory and honor on the day when Jesus Christ is revealed to the whole world.
-1 Peter 1:6-7

The reward for remaining faithful in the fire is the "crown of life."

Who Lit the Match?
But what about temptation? This fire feels different. It feels dark, dirty, deceptive, and evil. James draws a line in the sand: "Do not say, 'God is tempting me.'"

This is essential. God tests our faith to prove it (like refining gold), but He never tempts us to do wrong. So where does that enticing pull toward sin come from? "Temptation comes from our own desires."

The fire of temptation is an internal one. The match is struck by our own fallen nature, which entices us and "drags us away." It's like something glittery off the trail that you go to pick up, but once you grab hold of it, it grabs you back and pulls you deeper into the woods.

1. **Desire:** A twisted want is sparked in our hearts.

2. **Sin:** We act on that desire, fanning the flame.

3. **Death:** When that sin is allowed to grow, it gives birth to spiritual death.

The Purpose of Pain
Why does God, in His sovereignty, allow us to face these fires at all? If He loves us, why not just make life easy?

The Bible doesn't present suffering as a hindrance to our redemption, but as a tool God uses to work his redemptive purpose in us.
-Paul David Tripp, *Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands* (143)

This is the key. The fire is not a hindrance. It is a tool. God uses trials to chip away our self-reliance and build our character which forms our legacy and destiny.

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. And this hope will not lead to disappointment. For we know how dearly God loves us, because he has given us the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with his love.
-Romans 5:3-5

How to Stand
So how do we remain "faithful in the fire"? How do we patiently endure? We do it by prayer and trusting God's promises.

When you are in the fire of temptation, **pray**. Then as we learned in **Day Five**, **look** for the exit God has promised.

If you think you are standing strong, be careful not to fall. The temptations in your life are no different from what others experience. And God is faithful. He will not allow the temptation to be more than you can stand. When you are tempted, he will show you a way out so that you can endure.
1 Corinthians 10:12-13

Your job is not to be so strong that you can't be burned. Your job is to be so dependent that when the fire comes, you grab hold of the "way out" He provides. That is what it means to be faithful.

Questions:
When a hard trial hit you last, what was your actual first reflex? Was it prayerful dependence, or was it something else? Describe your reaction.

Do you find yourself blaming God for the temptation that arises during your trial?

What stops you from running toward the exit at the "desire" stage, before it gives birth to sin?

Reflection: If suffering is a "tool" God uses to build character (Romans 5:3-4), how does this truth change your prayer from "God, get me out of this!" to "God, what are you building in me through this?"

Want to study further? First, read James 1:2-4. This is the intro to today's passage, which commands us to consider trials "pure joy" because they produce perseverance. **Second,** read Matthew 4:1-11. Jesus is tested in the wilderness. Notice how He models the "way out" by using Scripture to combat every temptation. **Lastly**, read 2 Corinthians 12:7-10. Paul's "thorn in the flesh." He learns that God's power is made perfect in our weakness, reinforcing the theme of dependence.

Day Forty —Whole Worship

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. Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect.
- Romans 12:1-2

It's easy to blend in. In fact, most of the time, it feels like a good idea. It can be a survival tactic. We see it in school, but it never really leaves us. We adopt the same clothing styles, listen to the same music, and echo the same opinions. Why? Because no one wants to be the one who stands out. No one wants to be seen as "too different" and risk rejection.

So, we blend. We watch the same shows, listen to the same music, chase the same goals, and stress about the same things as the world around us. If we're not careful, our faith can become just a Sunday-morning label on a life that looks, smells, and sounds identical to everyone else's.

Paul's plea in Romans 12 is a urgent command to stop blending in. He's calling us to a life that is dynamically different, a life of "whole worship."

The Living Sacrifice
Do you remember our lesson from **Day 36**? We learned that because of God's grace, our physical bodies are now the "temple of the Holy Spirit." Paul picks up that exact theme here. He "pleads" with us to take that holy temple and offer it back to God as a "living and holy sacrifice."

This, he says, is our "true and proper worship." In the Old Testament, a sacrifice was something you killed and left on the altar. But a living sacrifice is something that has to choose to stay on the altar, moment by moment, every single day. A living offering may just try to crawl off the altar and protect itself. Worship isn't just singing songs. It's what you do with your body, your mind, your time, your money, and your energy.

The Battle of the Mind
Whole worship to God goes deeper than the external actions of a person. Paul says the way we stop "copying the behavior and customs of this world" is by letting God "transform you... by changing the way you think."

This is the internal battlefield. The world's behaviors are born from the world's thoughts. What does the world think about?

- "Sexual immorality, impurity and lustful pleasures" (Galatians 5:19)
- “Jealousy… selfish ambition" (James 3:16)
- "Worry about everyday life,” whether you will have food, drink, or clothes to wear (Matthew 6:25)
- "Greed, hate, envy, quarreling, gossip… " (Romans 1:29-30)

When we let our minds dwell on these things, we are copying the world. But when we surrender our minds, God transforms us **from the inside out**. This is why Paul says this: "We destroy every proud obstacle that keeps people from knowing God. We capture their rebellious thoughts and teach them to obey Christ." (2 Corinthians 10:5). This is the action of taking every thought captive.

In the World
We are in the world, but we are not of the world. This is a great challenge. Tomorrow, we will see further of how Jesus prayed specifically for this!

To "not copy" the world doesn't mean hiding from it. It means living in it as holy, set-apart ambassadors (representatives), offering our entire lives, our bodies, our actions, and our thoughts, as an act of whole worship.

This is why the difference must be so clear. A surrendered, transformed life is the evidence of true faith.

People who claim to be Christians while their lives look no different from the rest of the world are clearly not Christians.
-David Platt, *Follow Me* (18)

Now, to clarify, this statement by David Platt is not meant to cause us to point at people and recklessly claim their eternal salvation, as we do not see the hearts of mankind as God does. Instead, actions should prompt us to investigate further whether our own lives or the lives of those we love.

Our "true worship" is the daily sacrifice of our own will in favor of God's. It's rejecting the world's mold and allowing our minds to be reshaped by His Spirit. This is how we discover His "good and pleasing and perfect" will for us.

Questions:
In what specific ways (your speech, your entertainment choices, your career goals) are you copying the behavior and customs of this world?

In what part of your life do you find yourself most often "crawling off the altar" to protect your own will?

Which of the "worldly thoughts" listed (lust, envy, worry, gossip, etc.) is the biggest battlefield for your mind on a daily basis?

If a non-believer followed you for a week, what specific evidence would they see that your life is functionally different from that of a kind, moral person who doesn't know Jesus?

Reflection: Today, consider how to “take captive” and teach your thoughts (your mind) to obey and honor Christ. How will you be accountable for your thought life? Do you need to confess a pattern of bad thought habits to your discipleship partner?

Want to study further? Read 1 John 2:15-17. This passage speaks further about not loving the world over God. It teaches about what the world offers and the result of what it provides. As you read consider your own possessions and achievements and how you hold onto those as security more than God.

Day Forty One —Day by Day

I have given them your word. And the world hates them because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. I'm not asking you to take them out of the world, but to keep them safe from the evil one. They do not belong to this world any more than I do. Make them holy by your truth; teach them your word, which is truth. Just as you sent me into the world, I am sending them into the world. And I give myself as a holy sacrifice for them so they can be made holy by your truth.
-John 17:14-19

Let's be honest, no one wants to be hated. We are hard-wired to be accepted and belong to a community. Imagine seeing a job posting that read, "Wanted: Lifelong representatives for a difficult mission. You will be required to go against the flow of culture. You will be seen as strange, offensive, and out-of-touch. You will be misunderstood, mocked, and in many cases, actively hated, and even potentially persecuted or killed because of who you represent. The work is hard, and you will often feel like a foreigner in your hometown."

Who would sign up for that?

According to Jesus, we did. In His final, intimate prayer to the Father, Jesus doesn't sugarcoat the reality of the Christian life. He states it plainly: "I have given them your word. And the world hates them" because of Jesus.

Not Of the World
Why the hatred? Because we do not belong to the world. The moment we received God's Word and His grace, our citizenship changed. We became foreigners, ambassadors for a different kingdom, not this world. And a dark world, by its very nature, hates the light because it exposes sin. People who do what is right, come into the light so that others can see that they are doing what God wants (John 3:19-21).

This brings us to the core tension of our mission. Jesus doesn't pray, "Take them out of the world." He prays, "Keep them safe from the evil one." We are not meant to be removed. We are meant to be sent, but knowing that we have a powerful God who will be with us every step of the way.

Do you remember Isabella from the **Day Zero-Analysis**? She's in despair, looking at all the injustice and evil in the world, and she's asking, "If God is holy and powerful, why does He allow this?"

This passage is the answer. This broken, dark world is the mission field. God allows the evil to persist for a time, but He has not abandoned the world. Instead, He has sent us into it, just as He sent Jesus. We are called to be the light in the dark, unjust culture that Isabella is so distressed by. We are the answer to "Why doesn't God do something?" He is. He sent us. He sent you to make a difference. As Jesus said, "You are the light of the world... Let your good deeds (light) shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father" (Matthew 5:14, 16).

The Daily Task
How can we possibly survive this task? How can we be "in" this hostile world but not be corrupted by it?

Jesus asks the Father, the all-powerful, mighty, unstoppable God to "Make them holy by your truth; teach them your word, which is truth" (v. 17). God's power and presence is our daily lifeline. Holiness, being set-apart for God's purposes, doesn't come from our own willpower or from just trying to be a good person. It comes from the Truth. The study and obedience to God's Word is the mechanism God uses to sanctify us as we live lives led by the Holy Spirit.

The Truth of God's Word washes us and cleanses our minds (Ephesians 5:26). The Truth protects us from sin (Psalm 119:11). The Truth equips us for our mission (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

When we practice daily confession, we are agreeing with the Truth about our sin. When we practice love and humility, we are living out the character of the Truth. This "day by day" surrender to the Word is how we are restored.

A Life of Surrender
This is not a one-time decision. It is a daily choice to make God's work our work.

So we make God's work our work. Since he is keeping us, we determine that we will persevere in keeping his commands, in choosing what he says is of value, and in surrendering our hearts to something bigger than our little self-focused momentary longings. Along the way, that life of surrender is also a life of rich blessing.
-Paul David Tripp, *Do You Believe?* (404)

Jesus gave Himself as a holy sacrifice so that we could be made holy by the Truth. Our job, day by day, is to immerse ourselves in His Word, obey it, and let Him transform us into the set-apart, sent people He has called us to be.

Questions:
How much of your daily decision-making is controlled by a fear of being rejected by the world?

When you see the injustice and evil in the world, is your first reaction to complain about the darkness, or to ask, "God, how are you sending me to be a light in this specific situation?"

How does your time spent in the Word compare to the time you spend in the world (social media, entertainment, hobbies, work, news)?

What is one "longing" (for comfort, approval, ease, or control) that you are currently struggling to surrender to God's bigger mission for your life?

Reflection: Think about how you present "being a Christian" to others. Do you simplify it to, "Do you want heaven? Then pray this easy prayer and you are in"? Or are you honest about the hard truth, that following Jesus means we "do not belong to the world" and must be willing to give up everything? If someone had presented the full mission to you that way, would you have accepted?

Application Checkup: Have you completed the final application challenge from **Day 36**? If not, check out the **Final Commission: My Next Steps** in the back of this book.

Want to study further? Read John 15:18-26. This passage gives the full context for why the world will hate Jesus followers, explaining that it's because we are "chosen… out of the world." As you read, consider how does knowing the world hated Jesus first change your perspective when you feel misunderstood or rejected?

Day Forty Two —Eyes on Eternity

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. For you died to this life, and your real life is hidden with Christ in God. And when Christ, who is your life, is revealed to the whole world, you will share in all his glory.
-Colossians 3:1-4

This is it. The final day of our devotional journey.

We have gone through a lot together. We started in the perfection of Eden's design, faced the reality of our brokenness before a holy God, and then spent weeks digging into the depth of God's character, from His sovereignty to His mercy. We explored the Holy Spaces where He meets His people, and then we plunged into the meaning of grace. This last week we've focused on how to actively pursue the holiness He's restoring in us.

If you feel like you didn't fully grasp everything, that's okay! This isn't an ending, it's a starting line. Let this devotional be a prompt to keep studying Scripture, to practice what you are learning, and to get an accountability partner involved in your life to help you on this path.

There is no better way to end a devotional about God's holiness and grace than to set our minds on eternity.

A New Compass
After 41 days of wrestling with holiness, grace, sin, and obedience, here is one final, practical key. It's not a new rule. It's an eternal perspective.

The Apostle Paul encourages us to "set your sights on the realities of heaven." This isn't a call to be "so heavenly minded you're no earthly good." It's not a call to sit in a field and daydream. "Setting your sights" is an active and disciplined choice. It's the act of raising our heads from the "things of earth," our worries, our ambitions, our fears, and realigning our internal compass with our true North, where God is.

The Hidden Reality
What gives us the right to look to heaven as our new reality?

1. "For you died to this life..." (v. 3). Your old, earth-bound life is over. It was crucified with Christ. You are no longer a "citizen" of this world, so you don't have to live by its rules (spiritually, please obey the laws of your authorities!), chase its rewards, or fear its threats.

2. "...and your real life is hidden with Christ in God." (v. 3). Your **real** identity, your real life, is not what you see in the mirror. It is safe, protected, and held "hidden" with Christ. It cannot be touched by the stock market, by a bad diagnosis, or by what people think of you. It is perfectly secure.

Because our life is "hidden" in heaven, we are free to stop living **for** earth. We are, as Peter says, "temporary residents and foreigners" here (1 Peter 2:11). We're just visitors on a short-term mission. This perspective changes everything for how we live our lives. It's what allows us to pursue holiness.

The Glorious Future
This hidden life won't be hidden forever. Paul ends with the promise: "And when Christ, who is your life, is revealed to the whole world, you will share in all his glory" (v. 4).

This is our "blessed hope" awaiting the wonderful day of Jesus' return (Titus 2:13). This is the "final restoration" we've been longing for. The pursuit of holiness, the fight of faith, the struggle against sin, it all ends in sharing in the actual, unfiltered, perfect glory of God.

This eternal perspective is not an escape from the present reality we live in. It's what gives us the courage to live a surrendered life now in hopes of a certain future with God.

Faith is the heroic effort of your life,
you fling yourself in reckless confidence on God.
-Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost For His Highest* (129)

That is what an eternal perspective is. It is the "heroic effort" of choosing to believe that the unseen, hidden life is more real than the one you can see now. It is flinging yourself in reckless confidence on the promise that when Christ returns, you will be right there with Him, sharing in His glory.

Questions:
What is the biggest "earthly thing" (a persistent worry, a specific ambition, a relationship) that is currently pulling your sights down from the "realities of heaven"?

If you truly believed your identity was perfectly secure, what earthly "threat" would lose its power over you today?

If you have already died to this life, why do you think you're still so afraid of losing earthly things?

If your "reckless confidence" is in God, what is one "heroic effort" or step of faith God is asking you to take now that seems foolish from an "earthly" perspective?

Reflection: Keep reading Colossians 3:5-11. Consider how putting to death the earthly things in you will help you keep an eternal perspective. Note down any specific areas that you struggle with. Write down ways that you can put on the new nature of Christ.

Want to study further? Read 2 Corinthians 4:16-18. This passage begins with, this “is why we never give up.” Our Spirits are being renewed every day by the strength and power of the Holy Spirit. Examine how the small and temporary troubles can become overwhelming and make us forget the glory that is ahead awaiting us.

Partnership and Small Group Discussion

You made it! You have completed the 42 days of *Set Apart by Grace*. This final week shifted from the what (God's character and grace) to the how (living a holy life). We explored what it means to be a temple, a living sacrifice, and a citizen of heaven.

How to Format Your Meeting

1. **Check-In (10 Minutes):** How does it feel to be done? Are you relieved? Sad? Inspired? Be honest about the spiritual fatigue or spiritual high you might be feeling.
2. **Review (5 Minutes):** Briefly recall the practical steps of this week: Your body is God's home. Run from sexual sin. Being crucified with Christ (Galatians 2:20). Refusing to be a pigmy Christian serving a pigmy God. Trials build character. Temptation comes from *our* desires. Being a living sacrifice who doesn't copy the world. In the world, but not of it. Setting sights on eternity.
3. **Discussion (30-45 Minutes):** Select the questions below to guide your final discussion.
4. **Prayer (10-15 Minutes):** Focus on Commissioning and Next Steps.

Discussion Questions

1. The House Guest (Day 36) We used the illustration that if a King moved into your house, you wouldn't just tidy up, you'd throw out the trash.

- Since your body is the Temple of the Holy Spirit, what is one specific trash item (a habit, a show you watch, a substance) that you realized this week simply cannot stay in the King's house?

2. The Living Sacrifice (Day 37 & 40) We talked about the surrendered life (Galatians 2:20) and the living sacrifice (Romans 12:1). The problem with a living sacrifice is that it keeps trying to crawl off the altar.

- In what specific situation this week did you try to crawl off the altar and take control back from God? (e.g., in an argument, in your finances, in your schedule).

3. The Pigmy God (Day 38) We discussed the bonsai tree Christian, who is stunted because they keep God small and manageable.

- Have you been keeping God in a tiny pot because you are afraid of what He might ask of you if you let Him get big? What does breaking the pot look like for you right now?

4. The Source of the Fire (Day 39) James 1 taught us that God tests us, but He never tempts us. Temptation comes from *our* own evil desires.

- Why is it so much easier to blame our environment ("I was stressed," "They made me mad") than to admit, "I sinned because I wanted to"? How does owning your desire change how you fight it?

5. The Foreigner (Day 41 & 42) We ended by setting our sights on eternity, recognizing we are ambassadors in a world that might hate us.

- If a non-believer shadowed you for the last 42 days, would they have enough evidence to convict you of being a foreigner who doesn't belong to this world? Or would they think you fit right in?

Final Evaluation:

- **The Spiritual Inventory:** If you haven't done so yet, please take the **Spiritual Inventory** at the back of the book for the final time.
- **Discuss:** Compare your results from Day 1, Day 21, and today.
    - Where did you see the most growth?
    - Where are you still stuck?
    - *Note:* Remember, growth is often slow. Celebrate even small shifts in your score!

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. For you died to this life, and your real life is hidden with Christ in God. And when Christ, who is your life, is revealed to the whole world, you will share in all his glory.
-Colossians 3:1

Prayer and Application
Commissioning: Since this is the final meeting for this study, spend your prayer time commissioning one another into the world.

- **Share Your Next Step:** Let everyone briefly share. Based on the last 42 days, what is the **one** tangible thing you are going to do differently moving forward? (e.g., "I will pray before I open my phone," "I will forgive (Name)," "I will tell (Name) about Jesus," "I will serve in the kids' ministry").
- **Pray:** Separate into pairs (if you are meeting in a larger group). Specifically pray for their next step. Ask God to give them the power and endurance to stick with it.

Benediction: Close by reading **Numbers 6:24-26** over the group:

> May the LORD bless you and protect you. May the LORD smile on you and be gracious to you. May the LORD show you his favor and give you his peace.

Well done, good and faithful servants. Now, go live set apart for God!

Your sense of identity, meaning and purpose, your goals for your life, what you long for your loved ones, how you use your energy, time, and money, your sense of right and wrong, your means of making decisions, how you use your gifts and abilities, and where you look for peace and rest
must be connected to this declaration:

"Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!"

-Paul David Tripp, *Do You Believe?* (108)

Final Commission: My Next Steps

Week 6 Application Challenge

We have spent these weeks together journeying through the depths of God's character. But filing our heads with knowledge is not enough. It is merely the foundation. Transformation happens when knowledge meets obedience. Goals are critical as we pursue God, seek His righteousness, and apply His grace in our daily decisions.

We cannot create this **Next Step** for you. This is not a generic task to be checked off a list. It is a spiritual milestone that we ask you to seek the Holy Spirit for. He is the One who will convict, inspire, and bring to mind the specific areas of growth needed to continue this journey long after you close this book.

If you have been tracking with the application prompts throughout this devotional, you are already forming a healthy pattern of prayer and dependence on God through everyday hunger for Him. Now, it is time to solidify that hunger into action.

The Assignment

1. **Seek and Write**: As you progress through this final week, ask God to reveal one tangible thing you are going to do differently moving forward. This must be concrete and actionable. Examples: "I will pray before I open my phone in the morning," "I will forgive [Name]," "I will tell [Name] about Jesus," or "I will serve in the kids' ministry."

2. **Challenge Yourself:** Do not pick something too easy just to quickly check it off your list. Do not move on without earnestly seeking God's direction, guidance, and refinement. Allow this to be a stretch of your faith. This is a move that requires His grace to accomplish.

3. **Find Your Truth Teller:** Once you have written down your Next Step, meet with a mature believer—the "truth teller" in your life. Share this goal with them. Ask them to affirm, support, and help keep you accountable to this commitment. We were never meant to walk this journey alone.

4. **Accept Your Commission:** Let this be your commission to strengthen your faith in God and share your testimony with others. By taking this step, you are choosing to be a light to a dark world, set apart by His grace.

Final Takeaway Questions

Looking back at the person you were on **Day 1**, what is the biggest internal change you've noticed in how you view God's holiness?

Identify a specific area where you previously felt beaten down or captive by guilt. How has embracing God's radical grace helped you find freedom in that area?

How has learning to be humble before God changed the way you interact with others or handle your daily challenges?

My Next Steps

Use the space below to write your commission.

My Conviction: (What is the Holy Spirit pressing upon your heart?)

My Action: (The one tangible thing I will do differently moving forward)

My Accountability: (Who is the mature believer I will ask to hold me to this?)

Take delight in the LORD, and he will give you your heart's desires. Commit everything you do to the LORD. Trust him, and he will help you. He will make your innocence radiate like the dawn, and the justice of your cause will shine like the noonday sun.
-Psalm 37:4-6

Spiritual Inventory

This assessment is designed to highlight signs of your spiritual health. The scores may change from season to season or even daily. It is helpful to ask truth tellers who know you well to complete the survey about your health. Discuss your findings with God and with a spiritual friend to determine what your next steps should be in your spiritual life. The scale goes from **Almost Never, Seldom, Occasionally, Fairly Often, Almost Always**. It is best not to think too much about your answers, but respond with your first thought.

LOVE	**Never/Seldom/Occ/Often/Alwys**				
I value and accept others who have different values/beliefs than mine.	1	2	3	4	5
I am envious of others' accomplishments or rewards.	5	4	3	2	1
I struggle with forgiving people who have wronged me.	5	4	3	2	1
I have areas in my life that are not under God's control.	5	4	3	2	1
I ask and receive God's unconditional love.	1	2	3	4	5

Total Score:

JOY	**Never/Seldom/Occ/Often/Alwys**				
I express gratitude for small things in life, like the food I eat.	1	2	3	4	5
I celebrate God's presence in my life.	1	2	3	4	5
I am celebration challenged.	5	4	3	2	1
I rejoice when times are difficult.	1	2	3	4	5
I have a pity party when things are not going well.	5	4	3	2	1

Total Score:

PEACE	**Never/Seldom/Occ/Often/Alwys**				
I stress out about things.	5	4	3	2	1
I am a calm person.	1	2	3	4	5
No matter what I do, I can't get my mind off of my problems.	5	4	3	2	1
I feel my gifts & abilities are valued and utilized.	1	2	3	4	5
I get angry and use inappropriate language when things don't go as I would like.	5	4	3	2	1

Total Score:

PATIENCE	**Never/Seldom/Occ/Often/Alwys**				
I get upset with others who don't live up to my expectations.	5	4	3	2	1
I am willing to wait for what's best for my life.	1	2	3	4	5
I bear up well under difficult circumstances.	1	2	3	4	5
I am easily irritated when things don't work out the way I think they should.	5	4	3	2	1
I forgive others who have wronged me.	1	2	3	4	5

Total Score:

KINDNESS	**Never/Seldom/Occ/Often/Alwys**

I get upset when people I've helped don't appreciate it.	5	4	3	2	1
I extend grace to others.	1	2	3	4	5
I adapt to meet the needs of those around me.	1	2	3	4	5
People tell me I'm inconsiderate of the needs of others.	5	4	3	2	1
My words/conversations hurt the feelings of others.	5	4	3	2	1

Total Score:

GOODNESS	**Never/Seldom/Occ/Often/Alwys**				
I treat others as I want to be treated.	1	2	3	4	5
I have impure thoughts.	5	4	3	2	1
People see me as authentic.	1	2	3	4	5
I keep commitments.	1	2	3	4	5
I think the worst of others and I'm usually right.	5	4	3	2	1

Total Score:

FAITHFULNESS	**Never/Seldom/Occ/Often/Alwys**				
I have trouble making and keeping promises.	5	4	3	2	1
People say that I am dependable.	1	2	3	4	5
I waver in my beliefs.	5	4	3	2	1
My devotion/loyalty to God runs hot and cold.	5	4	3	2	1
I trust God to be in control of my life.	1	2	3	4	5

Total Score:

GENTLENESS/MEEKNESS	**Never/Seldom/Occ/Often/Alwys**				
I am easily annoyed by others' behaviors.	5	4	3	2	1
I tell others things that will help them grow in a way they can receive them.	1	2	3	4	5
I have been told I am arrogant.	5	4	3	2	1
People say I'm judgmental.	5	4	3	2	1
I have a calming effect on others.	1	2	3	4	5

Total Score:

SELF-CONTROL	**Never/Seldom/Occ/Often/Alwys**				
I have mastery over my behavior.	1	2	3	4	5
I rely on God's power instead of my own.	1	2	3	4	5
I have addictions.	5	4	3	2	1
I easily give in to my desires.	5	4	3	2	1
My emotions get out of control.	5	4	3	2	1

Total Score:

1. What are your three strongest characteristics?

2. What are your two weakest characteristics?

3. Are there areas where you are not being honest about yourself? Do you have a spiritual illness you are unwilling to change?

4. Who do you need to share this information with to help you become spiritually healthy?

5. What is your plan to improve your spiritual health?

Essential Beliefs

God
1. We believe in one God, Creator of all things, holy, infinitely perfect, and eternally existing in a loving unity of three equally divine Persons: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Having limitless knowledge and sovereign power, God has graciously purposed from eternity to redeem a people for Himself and to make all things new for His own glory. (Genesis 1, Deuteronomy 6:4, Isaiah 40:13-14, Isaiah 48:16-17, Matthew 3:16-17, Matthew 28:19, John 10:27-30, II Corinthians 13:14, Ephesians 4:4-6).

The Bible
2. We believe that God has spoken in the Scriptures, both Old and New Testaments, through the words of human authors. As the verbally inspired Word of God, the Bible is without error in the original writings, the complete revelation of His will for salvation, and the ultimate authority by which every realm of human knowledge and endeavor should be judged. Therefore, it is to be believed in all that it teaches, obeyed in all that it requires, and trusted in all that it promises. (Matthew 5:18, John 12:47-50, II Timothy 3:14-16, Hebrews 4:12, I Peter 1:23-25, II Peter 1:19-21)

The Human Condition
3. We believe that God created Adam and Eve in His image, but they sinned when tempted by Satan. In union with Adam, human beings are sinners by nature and by choice, alienated from God, and under His wrath. Only through God's saving work in Jesus Christ can we be rescued, reconciled and renewed. (Genesis 1:26-27, Genesis 3, John 1:19, John 3:1-12, John 16:11, Romans 3:23, Romans 5:12-19, Romans 6:23, Ephesians 4:22-24, Titus 3:5).

Jesus Christ
4. We believe that Jesus Christ is God incarnate, fully God and fully man, one Person in two natures. Jesus—Israel's promised Messiah—was conceived through the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. He lived a sinless life, was crucified under Pontius Pilate, arose bodily from the dead, ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father as our High Priest and Advocate. (Isaiah 7:14, Isaiah 53, Matthew 1:18-25, Matthew 28:6, Luke 1:34-35, Luke 24:38-39; 50-53, John 10:15, John 19:30-34, Hebrews 7:24-28, Hebrews 9:22-26).

The Work of Christ
5. We believe that Jesus Christ, as our representative and substitute, shed His blood on the cross as the perfect, all-sufficient sacrifice for our sins. His atoning death and victorious resurrection constitute the only ground for salvation. (John 1:12, John 3:16, Acts 4:12, Romans 5:9, Ephesians 2:1, Ephesians 2:8-10, Hebrews 10:12-16, I Peter 3:18-19).

The Holy Spirit
6. We believe that the Holy Spirit, in all that He does, glorifies the Lord Jesus Christ. He convicts the world of its guilt. He regenerates sinners, and in Him they are baptized into union with Christ and adopted as heirs in the family of God. He also indwells, illuminates, guides, equips and empowers believers for Christ-like living and service. (Matthew 10:20, John 3:3-5, John 14:21, John 16:8-11; 13-14, Romans 8:1-17; 26-27, I Corinthians 6:19, Galatians 5:16-25, Titus 3:5).

The Church
7. We believe that the true church comprises all who have been justified by God's grace through faith alone in Christ alone. They are united by the Holy Spirit in the body of Christ, of which He is the Head. The true church is manifest in local churches, whose membership should be composed only of believers. The Lord Jesus mandated two ordinances, baptism and the Lord's Supper, which visibly and tangibly express the gospel. Though they are not the means of salvation, when celebrated by the church in genuine faith, these ordinances confirm and nourish the believer. (Matthew 16:16-18, Matthew 28:19, John 6:53-58, Acts 2:38-42, Acts 6:1-6, Acts 10:47-48, Acts 14:23, Acts 15:1-31, I Corinthians 11:20-34, Philippians 1:1, Titus 1:5, Hebrews 10:23-25, I Peter 5:1-3).

Christian Living
8. We believe that God's justifying grace must not be separated from His sanctifying power and purpose. God commands us to love Him supremely and others sacrificially, and to live out our faith with care for one another, compassion toward the poor and justice for the oppressed. With God's Word, the Spirit's power, and fervent prayer in Christ's name, we are to combat the spiritual forces of evil. In obedience to Christ's commission, we are to make disciples among all people, always bearing witness to the gospel in word and deed. (Exodus 23:6, Leviticus 19:18, Deuteronomy 6:5, 15:11, Matthew 5:13-16, 7:17-18; 12:33, 22:37-39, 35, 28:19, John. 20:21, Acts 1:8, Romans 12:10, 2 Corinthians 10:3-5, Ephesians 6:10-18, Revelation 7:9)

Christ's Return

9. We believe in the personal, bodily and glorious return of our Lord Jesus Christ. The coming of Christ, at a time known only to God, demands constant expectancy and, as our blessed hope, motivates the believer to godly living, sacrificial service and energetic mission. (Matthew 24:29-30, I Thessalonians 2:19-20, I Thessalonians 4:16, Titus 2:11-13).

Response and Eternal Destiny

10. We believe that God commands everyone everywhere to believe the gospel by turning to Him in repentance and receiving the Lord Jesus Christ. We believe that God will raise the dead bodily and judge the world, assigning the unbeliever to condemnation and eternal conscious punishment and the believer to eternal blessedness and joy with the Lord in the new heaven and the new earth, to the praise of His glorious grace. Amen. (Matthew 24:29-30, Luke 16:23-24, I Thessalonians 4:16-18, Revelation 20:11-15).

The Good News

God's Purpose: Peace and Life: Our purpose is to glorify God. God loves us and wants us to experience peace and life, abundant (John 10:10) and eternal. We can have this peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 5:1). Those who place their trust in Jesus can have eternal life with God (John 3:16).

The Problem: Our Separation: God created us in His own image (Genesis 1:27) to have an abundant life. Still, the sin of humans resulted in separation from God (Genesis 3, Romans 5:12). We all have sinned (Romans 3:23), and the penalty for sin is death (Romans 6:23, Revelation 20:14-15). We cannot work our way to God, and nothing we do can save us because of the separation (Titus 3:5).

God's Grace: The Cross: God sent His son, Jesus Christ, to earth to pay the penalty for our sins by dying on the cross (Romans 5:8), which bridged the gap between God and people. Jesus rose from the grave (1 Corinthians 15:3-4) and is now the mediator between God and men (1 Timothy 2:5).

Your Part: The Response: To receive Jesus Christ, you must understand the problem, that you are a sinner and nothing you do on your own will gain you eternal life with God (Ephesians 2:8-9). You must repent of your sins, believe that Jesus Christ died for you, and put your trust in Jesus as your Lord. When you do this, you will become one of God's children (Romans 10:13), the Holy Spirit will indwell within you, and you will begin the amazing journey of growing in the knowledge of this great God and living a life that serves your Savior.

"if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved." Romans 10:9-10

Believers Duty: God's Will: Through trust in Jesus Christ, you can have eternal life with God in heaven. This is by His amazing grace. Once you have surrendered your life to God, the journey has just begun. Believers are filled with the Holy Spirit and given unique gifts to obey God's commands and to spread the good news of Jesus Christ, the way of salvation. You are to make disciples of Christ who make more disciples. Believers are to read God's Word (the Bible) to understand His will, pray to Him, ask Him for direction in life, and walk in obedience to His Word. Believers of Jesus Christ are not perfect people. You will fail, but you have a merciful and forgiving God and Father who hears your prayers.

Discipleship Commitment

Mutual Accountability: A healthy discipleship meeting has a culture of accountability. For this to happen, you must be transparent about your life. Be prepared to share your testimony of coming to faith in Christ, personal convictions, sin struggles, and joyful praises with each other. The critical ingredients for biblical accountability in discipling relationships are confidentiality, authenticity, and obedience. Without the willingness to embrace this process, accountability cannot happen.

Initial space _____
I commit to being accountable.

Biblical Truth: The various concepts that shape your meeting should come directly from the Bible. You must be in the Word daily and encourage each other to do the same. The critical tasks you should do passionately are memorization, inductive study, and obedience to the Word. We should strive to memorize, draw truth from, and apply it to our lives.

Initial space _____
I commit to the Bible.

Reproducible tool: This book functions as a tool for you to use for yourself and future generations of disciples. As a curriculum, it requires your attention during the week and leading up to your meeting. It is helpful to work on it every day rather than
cramming it all into the day before your meeting. This format is intended to encourage daily Bible study, scripture memorization, devotional time, and prayer time.

Initial space _____
I commit to using this tool.

Intentional Prayer: Prayer is an essential part of your relationship with the Lord. At the end of most lessons, you will find a prayer prompt. The hope is that you will not only pray through the written prompt but that you will use it to start an intentional time of prayer. Pray daily for each other. Pray for your circle of people-family, local church body, friends, coworkers, and neighbors.

Initial space _____
I commit to prayer.

Life-on-life Friendship: The life-on-life nature of discipleship fosters friendships with a Kingdom-focused purpose. Share your life struggles and victories. Use your time in this meeting to build friendships intentionally for the sake of spiritual growth. Lead the way in finding time outside the meeting to spend time together as friends (food, fun, family).

Initial space _____
I commit to friendship.

Spiritual Reliance: God gave us His Spirit as our Helper, Convictor, and Comforter, and He is essential to disciple-making. Though you may not feel qualified for this work, you have the Bible and the Spirit, which is more than enough. God does not call the equipped. He equips the called, and He has called YOU. Trust the Holy Spirit during this disciple-making adventure.

Initial space _____
I commit to relying on the Holy Spirit.

(Disciplers only) Gospel Fluency: Discipplers must be fluent in speaking about and living out the gospel in front of their disciples. While you are aware that you should share the gospel with non-believers, it is also important to regularly discuss the good news of Jesus with your disciple. Make sure that those you are discipling not only hear you speak about the good news of Jesus but also witness you living it out. Prayerfully consider evangelistic projects or personal witnessing opportunities to share with your disciples over the next few months (missional events, mission trips, sharing Christ specifically with those being prayed for at the bottom of the accountability card, etc.).

Initial space _____
commit to sharing the gospel and living it out.

Accountability questions

These questions are to be asked of one another in a spirit of accountability (Proverbs 27:17). They are intended to stimulate conversations of character and confession of sin in a safe environment that values honesty, vulnerability, confidentiality, and grace.

1. Have you spent quality time in your spiritual disciplines this week?
2. Have you taken advantage of opportunities to share your faith this week? Explain.
3. Have your words and actions been a good testimony to the gospel of Jesus this week?
4. Have your thoughts and speech been pure (cussing, criticism, negativity, etc.)?
5. Have you been sexually pure this week? Have you been exposed to sexually alluring material? (For those who are married: Have you prioritized quality romantic time with your spouse?)
6. Have you been a good steward of your finances? Have your finances lacked integrity in any way?
7. Have you been honoring and generous in your meaningful relationships this week (Family, friends, etc.)?
8. Have you given in to any addictive behavior this past week? Explain.
9. _____
   (Your personalized accountability question.)
10. Have you been completely honest with me?

I'm praying for the salvation of the following two people and prayerfully considering how to share Christ with them myself: _____ and _____

Help for a Discipler

How do I choose who I should disciple?
The first step is simple: Pray! Prayerfully consider who you should walk with through this discipling journey. Trust the Holy Spirit to provide opportunity and be open to where He leads you. Good places to start looking may include a small group Bible study that you are already attending, your family, workplace**,** neighborhood, school, or gym. Men disciple men and women disciple women. Married couples are an exception.

When someone comes to mind through this prayer time, consider these five necessary characteristics that give evidence of another's salvation (using the acronym F-R-U-I-T). You cannot disciple an unbeliever, share Christ with them.

- Look for **Fundamentals** of spiritual conviction. Do they have a personal testimony of salvation through faith in Jesus?
- True believers are defined by how they perceive the Scripture, the **Revelation** of God to us. Do they show any signs of spiritual hunger for the Word of God?
- You are also looking for someone **Unashamed** of the gospel. Do they display a simple appreciation for the truth of the gospel? Or do they shy away from talking about the saving work of Christ?
- Next is **Integrity** – a person with integrity will show consistency between belief and behavior. Do their lips match their lives?
- Finally, look for **Tenderness**. Love characterizes all true believers, so you should see tenderness and compassion displayed throughout their lives.

When the Holy Spirit provides a potential disciple, initiate a friendship. Clearly explain what the disciple-making journey looks like and what they can expect. Share the story of your spiritual journey and ask them to share their story likewise. If you feel led by God at the end of this initial meeting, invite them into a discipling relationship with you.

What is the schedule for a disciple meeting?
Establish an attainable schedule for all involved and prioritize your meetings. Commit to meeting with your group weekly for the next few months, but prayerfully consider staying together for a subsequent training time for up to a year or more. Jesus spent eighteen months with His disciples, training them to reproduce themselves. An average discipleship group meeting will last about an hour and a half. Disruptions are inevitable. There will be times when your group cannot meet due to sickness, emergencies, or work conflicts. However, set the standard early that the meeting is a priority each week, and you do not cancel unnecessarily.

Where should we meet?
Establishing a consistent meeting space and time is important. You want a place that is convenient and accessible for those in your group. The body of Christ is a diverse group of people; one group is comfortable meeting in a busy restaurant, but another group finds the atmosphere distracting. Sometimes, you will have to be creative with spaces to make your meeting possible.

How do I create a culture of accountability within our group?
Take the first step in your group and open up to them about the things you struggle with in Life. Be vulnerable and allow them to hold you accountable. Share your struggles and permit them to speak into your life. We encourage you to use the accountability questions provided to help facilitate this. Find out which questions are best suited to your group by going through them in the first few meetings. Evaluate where the most accountability is needed. At other times, just pick and choose the most relevant questions for the people in your group. Be sensitive to the needs of your group. Accountability needs may vary according to the changes in the group members.

How do I encourage reading, meditating, studying, and memorizing Scripture?
Lead by example. Make sure you are abiding by the Word by reading, meditating, studying, and memorizing Scripture. As is often the case in one's spiritual journey, you cannot give away what you do not have. Share with them the high points of what God is revealing to you through His Word. Ask them about their walk with God. Identify where they are struggling and help them overcome obstacles. Equip them with tools to make them more confident in approaching God's Word and pray that they would desire His Word daily.

What should we discuss during our discipleship group?
Start your discipleship meeting with a discussion. Ask them how they are doing spiritually. Focus on daily life struggles and praises – transition to a time of accountability. Pray for one another and make a plan of action for accountability if needed. Avoid letting the entire group get derailed into one long counseling session, although some "counseling-like" times might be necessary if your group members are going through especially hard times of job loss, sickness, divorce, etc. Spend the majority of your time working through the questions. Give everyone time to share their comments and ask questions. Highlight anything that God has shown you throughout the week. Be prepared to spend extra time whenever special needs arise within your group. Ask the Holy Spirit for guidance throughout, and be sensitive to His promptings. Your meetings may look different from week to week.

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