

40 DAY FAST



**ATTRIBUTES
OF THE
CHURCH**



COVER ART

When creating the cover art for this devotional, we aimed to make a thoughtful, appealing, and meaningful design. As we considered the Attributes of the Church, there were a few things we instantly knew we wanted to incorporate into our work. The outer form of the graphic, which is the shape of an old lancet gothic window, provides a defined space for the piece to come together, though it is not the piece itself. This is reminiscent of a church building, which serves as a location for Jesus' followers to come together, though it is not the Church itself.

For the interior, we referenced Jesus' words in John 15:1–8: "I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. Every branch in me that does not produce fruit he removes, and he prunes every branch that produces fruit so that it will produce more fruit... Remain in me, and I in you. Just as a branch is unable to produce fruit by itself unless it remains on the vine, neither can you unless you remain in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. The one who remains in me and I in him produces much fruit... My Father is glorified by this: that you produce much fruit and prove to be my disciples."

So, we see that Jesus is the vine through which the whole church holds together and thrives. The branches are Jesus' followers who make up the true Church, abide in Him, and are filled with His Holy Spirit. If His followers remain in Him, they are able to produce fruit—represented by clusters of grapes. If they do not remain in Jesus and do not obey His Word, then they wither and are unable to produce fruit.

The workers who are pruning the fruit represent the original twelve disciples. The disciples provided an example of how we are to operate as the Body of Christ—helping each other grow in Christ through teaching, reproof when necessary, encouraging, and comforting. Simply put, they tended to and pruned the early church. Then, they went and made more disciples who were in turn to make even more disciples, following the Great Commission in Matthew 28:19.

When we are in a church community and we interact with other Christians, it allows us to engage with Christ Himself since He is in each one of us through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. We benefit from interacting with other members of the body because we prune (teach, reprove, lift up, and comfort) one another, just as the disciples did for the early Church.

We hope this visual representation helps create a clearer picture of the true Church as you engage with this devotional over the next 40 days.

PREFACE

"I write these things to you, hoping to come to you soon. But if I should be delayed, I have written so that you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household, which is the Church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth." –1 Timothy 3:14–15

What is the Church? Let's start by defining what the Church isn't. The Church isn't a building. You can't put up four walls and a roof, adorn it with a sign reading "First Denomination Church of Location," and say, "Here is a church!" if it sits empty and unused. The Church isn't a weekend worship service. That's part of it, but not all of it. Jesus never said, "Attend an hour-and-a-half weekly service. This is the greatest and most important commandment." And yet, so often when we talk about the Church, it's either "Which church do you go to?" or "Let's go to church." Is this how the Bible talks about the Church? Of course not! In first-century Christianity, no group of Believers had a building dedicated solely to their weekly gatherings. When they talked about the Church, early Christians knew something we've largely forgotten today: the Church isn't a building, it's a people.

The Church with a capital C refers to all people who have faith in Jesus—no matter the time or place. So the apostle Paul, Augustine of Hippo, Martin Luther, and you all belong to the same Church. And this Church is an odd group of people. On one hand, we are the messengers of the living God to a dying world. We are the Body of Christ, the hope of the world. On the other hand, if you ask anyone who's not a Christian what they think about the Church, you won't hear anything close to that description. You'll hear about the failures of the Church, like greed, sexual immorality, anger, and hurt. And those people aren't wrong. The Church is made up of fallible human beings who sin, repent, and sin again. So why does the apostle Peter call the Church "a royal priesthood, a holy nation" (1 Peter 2:9)? Doesn't he know who he's talking about?

Over the next 40 days, we'll explore the tension between many of the attributes of the Church. We've selected twenty attributes to define and explore biblically. We will spend two days on each attribute. First we'll define the attribute, then we'll answer the questions "So what?" and "What do we do about it?" Each "definition" devotional is followed by an "application" devotional on how we can live out that attribute. Hopefully, by the end of these 40 days, you'll be better equipped to go out and be the salt and the light of the world.



BEFORE WE BEGIN

BASIC HOW-TO GUIDE

For each of the 40 days of this fast, we have composed a devotion for you to read. Each one was written by a different author, and they cover a different attribute of the Church. Before reading the devotion daily, get out your Bible and read the Scripture referenced at the top of the page. Doing so will give you the proper context for what is written in the corresponding devotion. Take time to contemplate the portion of Scripture and the devotion as you read them. Try not to rush! After you've read each devotion, take time to pray for 10 minutes. Communicate back to God what He's told you through your reading and tell Him how you feel about what you've read. Most importantly, leave room for the Holy Spirit to speak to you. Don't forget, we are doing this because the Holy Spirit has led us to fast together, just as He led Jesus into the wilderness to fast for 40 days. There is power in us collectively removing distractions and focusing on God. We want to always be growing as a community, and that doesn't just mean numerically. We want our spiritual depth to be even greater than our numerical attendance. If we devote ourselves to reading the Scripture, reading each devotion, and spending time with God in prayer, there's no limit to what God can and will do in this community!

WHAT IS FASTING?

To fast means to voluntarily abstain from certain foods, eating and/or drinking, or certain activities for an extended period of time. Biblical fasting is a discipline of voluntarily denying one's self in order to be available for prayer and communion with God. Since it's an ultimate act of self-denial, you are entering into an intense training in righteousness.

WHY FAST?

There are many reasons why people fasted in the Bible, and all of them are good. Some wanted wisdom and power, while others were repenting of their sins. However, there was one

aspect of the fasting experience each had in common: a personal encounter with the living God. As you begin to consider reasons for your fast, there is one that will override all other reasons and that is to have a powerful, life-changing encounter with God.

WHY GIVE UP SECULAR MEDIA?

As followers of Christ, we are the temple of the Holy Spirit (see 1 Corinthians 6:19). Just as nothing unclean was allowed to enter the temple, we should be careful with what we allow to enter our hearts through our eyes or ears. As Christians, we are called to discern what we watch, what we listen to, and what we think about (see Philippians 4:8).

WHAT WILL WE BE FASTING?

In addition to what we are fasting listed in the snapshot below, we also encourage those participating to ask and listen to the Holy Spirit about giving up other things for the duration of the fast personal to them, such as social media, caffeine, video games, etc.

40 DAY FAST SNAPSHOT AND BASIC INFORMATION

DAY 1-10	NO SECULAR MEDIA, MEATS, OR SWEETS
DAY 11-20	NO SECULAR MEDIA; 1 MEAL A DAY
DAY 21-30	NO SECULAR MEDIA, MEATS, OR SWEETS
DAY 31-40	NO SECULAR MEDIA; 1 MEAL A DAY

PREPARE SPIRITUALLY

Ask God to help you make a list of your sins. Confess every sin the Holy Spirit calls to your remembrance and accept God's forgiveness. Seek forgiveness from all whom you have offended, and forgive all who have hurt you as the Holy Spirit leads you.

PREPARE PHYSICALLY

Eat smaller meals before the fast and avoid food high in fat and sugar. If you have a chronic ailment or are on prescription medication, consult your doctor and consider modifying your fast.



All scripture is referenced from the CSB translation unless otherwise noted.

PRACTICAL TIPS AND GUIDELINES

EXERCISE MODERATELY

- During the days when we're fasting a meal or only eating one meal, avoid strenuous exercise and excess physical activity.

STAY HYDRATED

- Make sure to drink plenty of water while fasting.
- Drinking fruit juice during the fast will decrease your hunger pains and give natural energy.
- The best juices are made from fresh watermelon, lemons, grapes, apples, cabbage, beets, carrots, celery, or leafy green vegetables. In cold weather, you may enjoy a warm vegetable broth.
 - Mix acidic juices (orange and tomato) with water for your stomach's sake.

REST AND PREPARE MENTALLY

- Rest as much as your schedule will permit.
- Prepare yourself for temporary mental discomforts, such as impatience, crankiness, and episodes of anxiety.

- Expect some physical discomfort, especially on the second day. You may have hunger pains and dizziness.
- Withdrawal from caffeine and sugar may cause headaches.
- Physical discomforts may also include weakness, tiredness, or sleeplessness.

BREAKING THE FAST

- End the fast by eating certain foods gradually. Suddenly reintroducing your stomach to foods you haven't eaten in 40 days will likely have negative, even dangerous, consequences.
- Practice moderation and wisdom in what media you introduce back into your life after the fast is over.

FOUR THINGS TO CONSIDER

1. **BE CONTENT THROUGHOUT**

Avoid complaining about what foods you can't eat, movies you can't watch, etc. Don't appear gloomy for people to feel sorry for you or think how spiritual you are. On the contrary, do what Jesus says and "put oil on your head and wash your face" (Matthew 6:17)! Act normal and carry on. We have the privilege and honor of giving things up for Christ, knowing He gave everything up for us. Complaining negates the very purpose of this fast. We don't have to fast, we get to.

2. **AVOID VIEWING THE FAST AS A "DIET PLAN."**

Some people will see the chief benefits of these next 40 days as getting a little slimmer, getting off caffeine, or not taking desserts for granted. But if we look at Scripture, we see it as a time set aside for deep spiritual urgency, when God's people really wanted Him to show up in a big way.

3. **REPLACE SACRIFICE WITH GOD**

Sometimes we can get caught up in the "whats" of fasting without thinking about the "who." For these next 40 days, there are things we should want to give up in our lives so we might replace them with God. As Jared Wilson says in his book "Gospel Deep," "the soul has a palate and a throat, else Jesus would not bid us drink." John Piper

says, "It is not just our bodies that are built for enjoyment, but our spiritual senses, the insides of our insides." The problem, of course, is we are bent on thinking our insides will have joy when our outsides do. But it doesn't work that way. It's actually the other way around. Food and drink will not truly satisfy our bodies until the bread and wine of Jesus' body satisfies our souls. For the next 40 days, we get to savor and enjoy Christ without any distractions. If we just give up food and don't replace it with the presence of God, it is of no benefit to us. We'll only be unnecessarily hungry people. Let's all take a moment to breathe in, slow down, and remember not just what we're about to do, but who we are doing this for.

4. **FASTING SUCCESSFULLY**

If you sincerely humble yourself before the Lord, repent pray and seek God's face, you will experience a heightened awareness of His presence (see John 14:21). A single fast, however, is not a spiritual cure-all. Just as we need fresh infilling of the Holy Spirit daily, we also need new times of fasting before God. It takes time to build your spiritual fasting endurance. If you fail to make it through your first fast, do not be discouraged. As soon as possible, undertake another fast until you do succeed. God will honor you for your faithfulness.

FASTING, SABBATH, AND “DIGITAL BABYLON”

WHAT IS “DIGITAL BABYLON?”

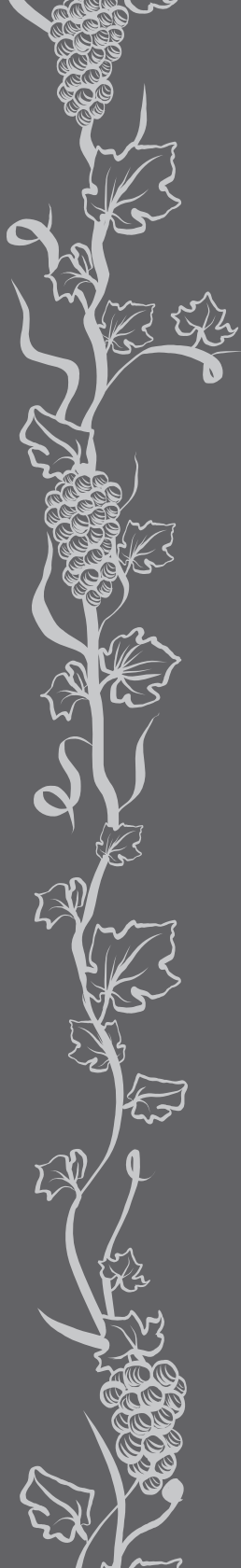
In the book, “Faith for Exiles” by David Kinnaman and Mark Matlock, the authors describe our society’s obsession with digital media. They called the effects and culture of this new way of living “Digital Babylon.” Biblically, Babylon was a place where the Israelites were in exile from their home, Jerusalem, for 70 years. Whereas Jerusalem was known as a place of faith in the true God, Babylon was a pluralistic, fast-paced, hedonistic culture where anything went, and everything was always changing.

Sounds a lot like today, doesn’t it? That’s why Kinnaman and Matlock call today’s culture Digital Babylon. But Digital Babylon isn’t a place like the biblical Babylon. It’s an idea, a movement, a culture. And we’re all in it. Anywhere you go online, Digital Babylon is pushing its values to you. “You’re perfect the way you are.” “Buy our product, and then you’ll be happy.” “Only you can decide what’s true and what’s false.” So our goal, living in the culture of Digital Babylon, is to view ourselves as exiles, not of this world but in this world.

WHAT DO WE DO ABOUT IT?

Kinnaman and Matlock prescribe five practices for building resistance to Digital Babylon, which you can read about in their book. During this 40 day fast though, our urge to you is simple: establish routines of digital sabbath. “Digital sabbath” means intentionally removing yourself from Digital Babylon for a set amount of time. Taking digital sabbath doesn’t mean you can’t even look at a screen until the end of the fast. But it does mean intentionally determining the beneficial or detrimental uses of your devices and eliminating the detrimental uses.

Maybe for you, this means removing yourself from social media, the news cycle, and digital games for the next 40 days. Or you could set aside an hour a day where you don’t look at your phone and are exclusively and wholly present with your family. Whatever you need to do, do something. These 40 days’ whole goal is to focus our attention on God, so remove yourself from a culture doing everything it can to pull you away from Him.





LOCAL DAY 1 DEFINITION

Read Acts 2

Being an active part of a local church is central to following Jesus. It takes more than just Acts 2 to prove this point, but in this passage we see everything which defines a Christian done, not in isolation, but in community. Prayer? All together in one place. Receiving the Holy Spirit? All together in one place. Teaching the gospel? Baptism? Giving? You get the idea. Believers gathered together to follow Jesus together.

But let's be honest, life in the first century looked a lot different than our lives today. Of course they had to do these things in community back then! They were 1400 years out from the printing press, much more from high-speed internet access and pocket supercomputers with three integrated cameras. But now? We can catch a sermon on YouTube, put an emoji in the livestream chat, and maybe even give a few dollars—all with headphones in at our garage gym before clocking in to our work-from-home job. Isn't that just as good? We're doing all the same things! We're even doing them with more efficiency, that all-glorious modern virtue. We don't have to get dressed, we can fast-forward through the announcements, and we don't even have to bother with getting out of the parking lot!

Of course, I'm being facetious with all this. God designed His Church to be a local gathering of Believers to pray, worship, teach, and give. When He created humanity, He didn't call it good until there was more than one person (see Genesis 2). If God doesn't call isolation good, why should we? If God calls community good, why should we avoid it? We'll talk about the application of these principles tomorrow, but for now, focus on the truth God has created us to worship Him in a community of fellow worshippers.

Pray, giving thanks for the privilege of being in a community of other Christ-followers.



LOCAL DAY 2 APPLICATION

Read 1 Corinthians 12

One of the first things you'll notice about a local gathering of Believers is none of them are just like you. And that might be disappointing. If you join a community hoping to find someone who gets all your movie references, listens to the same music as you, and is also a bioengineer for artificial house plants, you'll probably be disappointed. It sounds silly, but people's natural tendency is to be with like-minded people. In 2019, Vice News highlighted a real estate company whose sole mission was to help people of a particular political party find new homes in areas which shared that same ideology. I dare say the Church is not immune from a similar desire for a "lifestyle enclave," a group of people who think like us, talk like us, and look like us.

How does that desire line up with what Paul says to the Corinthians? It doesn't. Everyone who places their trust in Jesus and follows Him is a member of the Church. It doesn't matter what gift He has given you, what race you are, or your status in society. We are all members of the same body, and it is good our members are different from one another! We need other people to be strong where we are weak, and we need to be strong where they are weak.

But when we embrace this truth—that we need to be in a local gathering of Believers who are different from us—we're going to run into problems. We're going to disappoint one another, we'll get frustrated with each other, and we'll be tempted to say, "I'm better off on my own." We need to fight the temptation which says isolation is better than community. God designed us to be in a harmonious, interdependent community, and we need to live that out.

Pray God would give you a love for people who are different from you, especially in your local church.



GLOBAL DAY 3 DEFINITION

Read Revelation 7

What's truly remarkable about this passage is its inclusivity. It doesn't discriminate against any nation, tribe, people, or language. There's no separate service for young adults or the elderly, no exclusive gathering for Hispanics or Ethiopians, and no division into different denominations at the crossroads. Instead, they all come together in unity to worship.

Before we reach the gates of Heaven, it's crucial to recognize Christ's Church extends far beyond the four walls within which we worship. Across the globe, people engage in daily worship—many without the luxuries and conveniences we often take for granted. It's easy, especially in the comfort of America, to adopt a solely Western perspective. Yet, we must remember the global Church has a rich history. Long before we enjoyed air-conditioned sanctuaries and gourmet coffee, early Christians faced persecution, traversed treacherous terrain, and risked their lives to gather with fellow Believers.

As our world becomes more interconnected through the internet and social media, we risk becoming trapped in echo chambers the algorithms create. It's vital to heed the command of Matthew 28:19, where we are called to make disciples of all nations. This mission takes diverse forms: some are called to be missionaries, some to fervent prayer for the world, and some to financially support global outreach.

We should be grateful the early Church recognized the global significance of Christ's message. Through their tireless efforts in evangelism, prayer, translation work, and labor, we now have the thriving Church we are part of today. Jesus came for both Jews and Gentiles, and we must view our lives through that inclusive lens. How can we impact our city, county, state, country, and world with the love of Christ? Our mission is to extend His message of hope and salvation to every corner of the earth.

Pray for God to strengthen your brothers and sisters in Christ as they do His work all over the world.



GLOBAL DAY 4 APPLICATION

Read Romans 15

Romans 15:20 contains a powerful message that reminds us the Church is more than just our local congregation, it is a global and ever-expanding body. In this verse, the apostle Paul expresses his ambition to preach the gospel where Christ has not yet been named. Paul's ambition reflects a broader perspective of the Church, one that extends beyond the boundaries of a single local gathering. It challenges us to see the mission of the Church is not confined to our immediate surroundings. Instead, it calls us to look beyond the comfortable confines of our local congregation and consider the vastness of the global Church.

As Christians, we are part of a worldwide community of Believers. Our faith transcends geographic and cultural barriers. Romans 15:20 invites us to share Paul's ambition by being actively engaged in spreading the gospel to places where it has not yet been heard. This involves supporting missionary work, praying for unreached people groups, and even considering how we, individually, can participate in global mission efforts.

Furthermore, this verse teaches us the Church is a dynamic and ever-growing body. New Believers are constantly being added to the Church, and the work is never complete. Our mission to make disciples of all nations is ongoing in nature (see Matthew 28:19). Our local congregation is just one part of a larger, ever-expanding tapestry of faith. Let us be inspired by Paul's ambition to take the gospel where it has not yet been proclaimed. And let us remember the Church is not limited by geographic boundaries or the walls of our local sanctuaries. Instead, it is a global movement that invites us to actively participate in God's plan to reach all people with the message of His love and salvation.

Pray for God to show you your role within the global Church.



PEOPLE OF GOD

DAY 5 DEFINITION

Read 2 Corinthians 6

What roles define you? Are you a parent? Artist? Sibling? Restaurant worker? Dog owner? Think about all the roles you fill that characterize who you are. Have you thought of a few? Now think about the role that surpasses all of these: God's child. One of our most incredible yet humbling roles as the Church is being the people of God. When we choose to follow Jesus, God adopts us into His family, and we become His people. As the people of God, we represent Him to those around us. When we follow Jesus, our purpose becomes God and nothing else.

In today's passage, Paul referenced Leviticus 26:12 when he wrote, "I will be their God, and they will be my people" (2 Corinthians 6:16). As the Church, we are God's people—His chosen people. We are also His children, as seen in verse 18, which says, "you will be sons and daughters to me." Just as a person adopts a child and the child becomes their own, God adopts us when we choose Him as Lord of our lives and we become His. Our earthly roles—mom, cousin, friend—are parts of our identity, but as people of God, our identity is rooted and built on God, our adoptive Father.

Peter speaks to this as well. In 1 Peter 2:9–10, he wrote, "you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for His possession, so you may proclaim the praises of the one who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people." Of course, we have a choice. We must choose God, and when we do, He also chooses us and calls us His people.

Pray God will help you embrace your role as a son or daughter of God.



PEOPLE OF GOD

DAY 6 APPLICATION

Read 2 Corinthians 7

The Bible says we are God's people, so how should that affect the way we live? Our purpose in life should revolve around being a son or daughter of God. Remember the roles you thought of yesterday, the ones you fill on earth. Our role as the people of God should influence all the other roles we have. Are you a parent? You should parent your children not just as their mom or dad but also as a child of God. Are you a boss? You should treat your employees the way a child of God does. You get the idea. Being a child of God should pierce through every part of our lives: how we speak, act, think, and what we take in.

Verse 1 of today's passage says we should "cleanse ourselves from every impurity of the flesh and spirit." Peter wrote a similar passage: "I urge you as strangers and exiles to abstain from sinful desires that wage war against the soul. Conduct yourselves honorably among the Gentiles, so when they slander you as evildoers, they will observe your good works and will glorify God on the day He visits" (1 Peter 2:11–12). These verses should encourage us as we apply them to our lives. Remember our role as people of God does not come to us through going to church, our parents' faith, acts of kindness, or volunteering with nonprofits, it comes through faith in God. When we choose to follow God, He adopts us as His own.

In God's mercy, He calls us His people. As we read yesterday, Peter says those who have received mercy from God now have the unique role of proclaiming praises to God, the One who has brought us into the light (see 1 Peter 2:9). Let's proclaim God's praises in our daily lives so those we have influence over may see Jesus' love, hear the truth, and want to learn more about how to be the people of God.

Pray for opportunities in your everyday roles to reflect God and proclaim His praises.



BODY OF CHRIST

DAY 7 DEFINITION

Read 1 Corinthians 12

When the apostle Paul was looking for a way to help the church in Corinth understand the value each of them had in Christ, he described the Church as a body. All humans have a body, so it's a metaphor we can still understand today, even in a different culture and time. Our bodies are made of many different parts, and yet those differing parts make up one unified body—it's the same with the Church. If any one of those parts was missing, the body wouldn't be complete. When we lose parts (both physically and in the Church), we struggle because the role that part filled goes unfilled.

There is great beauty in understanding ourselves in this way. For one, we see how each one of us matters. There are no outcasts in the Body of Christ. To be a member means you belong, and that kind of message speaks volumes in a culture like ours that's desperate for inclusion. Even more beautiful than that, however, is understanding God intended for things to be this way. He intended for us to be one, to work together, and to have our own unique roles and functions. Just as He made our eyes and ears and noses to have their unique places in our bodies, He designed you and me and each of those around us to be who we are and to complete His body, the Church.

Another way to look at this is we—the Body of Christ—are the living, breathing will of God working in the world today. Jesus is working through us right now to bring restoration and healing to His creation. When we show up to play our part—no matter how big or small it is—lives are changed.

Pray for God to give you a greater understanding of how you and other Christians around you fit into the Body of Christ.



BODY OF CHRIST

DAY 8 APPLICATION

Read Romans 12

Romans 12 serves as a fitting companion for 1 Corinthians 12. In 1 Corinthians, Paul paints a clear picture of what the Body of Christ is, then in Romans, he communicates how the Body of Christ should behave. We are the will of God at work in the world, but what does that look like?

One of the most important things to remember about the will of God is He came into the world as a servant to save us and reconcile us to Himself. Philippians 2:7 says Jesus “emptied Himself... by sharing in human nature,” which was an act of humility. Humility is exactly what Paul encourages in Romans 12. We need to be humble in how we think of ourselves as members of Christ’s body. On one side, we don’t need to think too highly of ourselves, believing the world revolves around us or our place in God’s Kingdom is more prominent than it actually is. On the other side, however, we don’t need to dismiss the role God does want us to fill in His body. If God has equipped us to lead, we need to do that. If the Holy Spirit is moving in us to encourage others, we need to do that. However God has designed for us to serve, we need to be obedient and play our part. When we all work together in the roles God designed for us, we will see more people come to know Christ and have their lives transformed by Him.

We need to come to every day with the attitude Paul presents in Romans 12:1, willing to “present [our] bodies as a living sacrifice.” We should offer our lives to God for Him to use in whatever way He sees fit and encourage others to do the same. He wants to work in and through all of us, and we can be confident He will when we say “yes” to His plans.

Pray God will help you be bold to obey His leading.



BRIDE OF CHRIST

DAY 9 DEFINITION

Read Ephesians 5

Perhaps no other attribute of the Church brings to mind such vivid imagery as “Bride of Christ.” Immediately, our minds turn to veils of white lace, handsome tuxedos, sweet-smelling orchids, soft candlelight, and tender love songs. Or, for fathers of recent brides, perhaps the image is of stacks of hundred-dollar bills flying out of a wallet! No matter the image, it’s undeniable this special attribute has incredibly deep meaning for all of us. However, that meaning may be better understood by reflecting on Jesus’ Jewish roots—and the cultural norms surrounding marriage in His day—rather than weddings in our contemporary American culture.

In ancient Jewish culture, marriages were arranged by parents. To be chosen as the bride of a wonderful man was an honor. To be chosen by a wealthy prince—the King’s only Son—who was also loving and kind, would be an unfathomable joy! To know the security of every need supplied with tender care, as described by Paul in Ephesians 5:29, would be incredible. Jesus chose the imagery of the bride, groom, and marriage to describe the special, intimate relationship He envisioned with those who choose to follow Him—those whose hearts are completely devoted and whose fondest desire is to live with Him forever in a loving, mutually committed relationship.

It’s not hard to imagine Jesus thinking about that image when He expresses His undying, covenantal love for His followers in His prayer in John 17 or in the parable about preparing for the bridegroom’s return in Matthew 25. Paul chooses the same imagery to describe how men should love their wives the way “Christ loved the Church and gave Himself for her” (Ephesians 5:25). What an honor to be chosen to be the Bride of Christ! How will you respond to such incredible love?

Pray for God to help you understand the magnitude of being chosen by the Prince of Glory, and thank Him for His love and the promise of eternity in His homeland.



BRIDE OF CHRIST

DAY 10 APPLICATION

Read Revelation 19

The idea of the Church being the chosen Bride of Christ has implications for our relationships with Christ, as well as our relationships with others in the Church. It is also the model upon which earthly marriage is based.

As previously noted, in Jewish culture, marriages were arranged by families not individuals. However, engaged couples accepted they had made a lifelong commitment. They were bound to each other just as if they were married, although the wedding would not take place for some time. The bride remained in her parents' home during the betrothal, while the groom went away to prepare a place for them to live—usually in his father's household or on his father's property. Not knowing exactly when the groom would return, the bride worked to create her wedding gown and items for her new home.

Throughout Scripture, we are reminded God the Father chose us. His Son Jesus, who loved us before we even knew Him, left His home and His Father to be "betrothed" to us. In John 14:2, Jesus reveals He is going away to prepare a home for His chosen ones: us!

Revelation 19:8 makes it clear the bride is to appear with "fine linen... [which] represents the righteous acts of the saints." This indicates we are to stay busy with "righteous acts" as we prepare for the wedding, anxiously awaiting the Bridegroom's return. Out of love for Christ, we are to:

- Stay true and faithful to Him
- Listen and respond to His Word, learn more about Him, love Him more fully, and obey Him more readily
- Serve humbly alongside the others who make up the Bride of Christ
- Be ready when the Bridegroom returns

Pray, giving thanks to God for choosing you and for the certainty of the future with Him, join with the multitudes in Heaven proclaiming, "Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns!"



TEMPLE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

DAY 11 DEFINITION

Read Hebrews 9

As relational beings, we demonstrate love through the simple act of presence. God set this example first when He created us to be with Him, sharing His infinite love. He has desired our presence from the beginning (see Genesis 1), and Scripture is the story of how God pursues us throughout eternity (see Revelation 22). Let's look at each unfolding scene in God's story and observe the thread of "presence" weaving from beginning to end:

Scene 1: The curtain rises in the Garden of Eden, which God created for the purpose of dwelling relationally with humanity (see Genesis 1). He walked with Adam and Eve in the Garden, sharing in fellowship. However, as a result of their rebellion, they were removed from Eden. One sin separated humanity from God—but hallelujah, God's love doesn't quit! Scene 2: This scene unfolds in the desert, where God's people wandered after escaping slavery in Egypt. God desired their presence, so He instructed Moses to build a tabernacle—a mobile tent where His presence rested (see Exodus 40:34–35). Scene 3: King Solomon completed a permanent temple in the Promised Land, where God dwelt with His people (see 1 Kings 8:10–13). Although God was with them, they didn't desire to obey Him. Their rebellion resulted in the temple's destruction. With no temple, how could God dwell with His people? Scene 4: Centuries of God's silence passed before the long-awaited main character Jesus "became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14). In that verse, the word for "dwelt" could also be translated as "tabernacled." God desires to be with us so strongly He sent His son to be the Savior of the world and restore the relationship that was broken in Eden (see 1 John 4:14). Scene 5: This scene began after Jesus ascended to Heaven and sent the Holy Spirit to dwell within His people (see John 14:16–17). We still find ourselves in this scene today.

As God's child, you have constant access to our Almighty God because you are now the temple where He resides! You are experiencing an honor heroes of the faith couldn't have imagined a few millennia ago.

Pray, giving praises to God, whose presence actively resides in you.



TEMPLE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

DAY 12 APPLICATION

Read John 14

Your body is a sacred temple where the Holy Spirit resides. The Holy Spirit's role is to counsel, comfort, convict, and commission you through His unlimited power. His presence is evidence you have been chosen and adopted into God's family. You receive the full benefits of being God's heir, with the Spirit as the down payment of your inheritance (see Ephesians 1:13–14). Walk in confidence because the same power that raised Jesus from the dead is at work in you (see Romans 8:11).

The Spirit's work can be hindered (quenched) within you through misuse of your body (see 1 Thessalonians 5:19). Participation in sin defiles His temple and grieves His heart (see Ephesians 4:30). While you were born in sin, you weren't created for sin. It's quite the opposite: you were created for good works (see Ephesians 2:10). This "good work" is missional living. Yesterday, we looked at the original temple, which was a structure people visited to experience God's presence and learn about Him. Now, you are His temple and you take God's message to the ends of the earth. What you do matters! Use your body in a manner worthy of the gospel. Honor Him with your life—your actions, thoughts, and speech—because you are the vessel God is using to share His message of salvation.

We paused yesterday's story at Scene 5 (the present), but Scene 6 remains on the horizon. Jesus left earth to prepare a place for you, and He is coming back to receive you into the new heaven and new earth (see John 14:2–3). "Then [you will hear] a loud voice from the throne: 'Look, God's dwelling is with humanity, and He will live with [you]. [You] will be His people, and God Himself will be with [you] and will be [your] God'" (Revelation 21:3). In eternity, there is no temple because Jesus will be present with His people, dwelling with us as He did in Eden: face-to-face (see Revelation 21:22). Rejoice that your present suffering doesn't hold a candle to the glory that is to come (see Romans 8:18)!

Pray for God to help you see how the Holy Spirit is already at work in your life, and how you can honor Him.



SACRAMENTAL

DAY 13 DEFINITION

Read Acts 8

The book of Acts reads like a Quentin Tarantino script. Different plot lines weave in and out of each other to make one unified story. Chapter 8 is no exception to that multi-narrative structure. We begin with the aftermath of Stephen's death, then Philip goes to Samaria, Peter and John make a brief cameo with a magician named Simon, and we return to Philip's adventures with foreign government officials. At first glance, you might not see the thread connecting one narrative scene to the next, but Luke, the author of Acts, is a better writer than that.

For our purposes here, we're going to focus on the role of baptism in this narrative. There are three kinds of people who all receive baptism but react differently. First, the Samaritans believed Philip's preaching about the gospel, and received baptism in Jesus' name. Simon also believed and was baptized, and he closely followed Philip and his ministry. Then an Ethiopian treasurer in his motorcade was baptized right before Philip teleported out. (Why Tarantino hasn't picked this up for a script yet is beyond me.)

Part of what Luke is doing here is establishing what baptism is and isn't. He establishes baptism is a normal response to believing Christ's gospel. Everyone who enters into the Church goes through the waters of baptism. But Luke also establishes baptism isn't a magic formula to be saved. Simon believed, Simon was baptized, and Simon even closely followed an apostle! But Simon still had a false view of God's power and how God works. Contrast that with the experience of the Ethiopian eunuch. He was hungry for the truth and, despite his position, humbly received Philip's teaching and sought opportunities to be obedient. Simon sought to gain position through works and bribes, while the eunuch sought to humble himself through the sacrament of baptism. The sacrament of baptism (and communion, which we'll look at tomorrow) is not a path to power, it's a call to obedience and humility.

Pray for the humility to realize where God's power truly lies and how you can humbly receive it.



SACRAMENTAL

DAY 14 APPLICATION

Read 1 Corinthians 11

Paul makes it clear there is a right way and a wrong way to take communion—the Lord’s Supper. But the division between right and wrong isn’t in the way it’s administered, like passing a plate or receiving it from a priest, having fresh bread and actual wine or Matzo crackers and Welch’s grape juice. The division between correct communion and incorrect communion is in the reverence and repentance with which you receive it. And Paul makes it clear there are real consequences, sickness and even death, for improperly taking communion.

When the Corinthian church would come together, their way of taking communion was to share a full meal together but in the style of the worst kind of potluck. Each person would bring their own meal for themselves, and if they got impatient waiting for the rest of the church to show up, they would just start digging in. Some people would have enough food to gorge themselves and enough wine to get wasted, while others barely had enough to call it a meal. While they were remembering the generosity and the service of Jesus, they were being selfish and stingy.

So in our modern context, we should learn from the mistakes of the Corinthians. When we have the opportunity to take communion, rather than hurrying to try to beat the post-church traffic, we should slow down and reflect on how communion is an opportunity to remember the work of Jesus and the promises that are in Him. We are holding in our hands a physical reminder of the most important event in all of human history. Recognize the weight and significance of what those simple, ordinary elements (the bread and the cup) represent. Judge yourself and ask God to make you repentant for sins you’ve committed against Him. Then joyfully partake in the work Christ has accomplished for you!

Pray God would give you respect and reverence for the work of Jesus and how it is symbolized in the elements of communion.



PRAYERFUL

DAY 15 DEFINITION

Read Mark 11

As the Church, we are called to reflect the characteristics and attributes of our Savior. One of these attributes is prayerfulness. The importance of prayer in the life of a Believer cannot be emphasized enough. Through prayer, we communicate with our Heavenly Father, seek His guidance, and experience the transformative power of His presence. In Mark 11, we find a powerful reminder of the essential role of prayer in the life of the Church.

After clearing the temple of those who had turned it into a marketplace, Jesus declared, "My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations" (Mark 11:17). This statement, uttered by Jesus Himself, reveals the heart of God for His Church. The church is not merely a place for social gatherings, it is a house of prayer. It is a sanctuary where Believers gather in unity to seek God's face, intercede for others, and bring their praises and petitions before Him. Prayer is not just an individual practice, it is a communal and collective expression of the Body of Christ. When the Church prioritizes prayer, it aligns itself with God's purposes, inviting His presence to dwell among His people.

Prayer equips the Church to fulfill her mission effectively. Through prayer, the Church discerns God's will and receives divine direction. Prayer transforms the people of God from passive bystanders to active participants in God's redemptive work. It empowers us to address the needs of our communities and extend a helping hand to the brokenhearted. A prayerful Church acknowledges its dependence on God. It recognizes that its efforts and initiatives only bear fruit when birthed out of a deep relationship with the Father. Through prayer, the Church reflects the profound truth that we are called to stand as one—that our faith is not an individual endeavor but a collective mission to bring light, healing, and reconciliation to a broken world.

Pray for the needs of others in our community, our nation, and our world.



PRAYERFUL

DAY 16 APPLICATION

Read Matthew 26

In Matthew 26, Jesus (the Son of God) provides us with a profound display of the importance of prayer. As we explore this pivotal moment in the Garden of Gethsemane, we can discern invaluable lessons about the significance of prayer in our lives. This passage delves deeper into why the Church is intended to be a house of prayer, as well as the vital role prayer plays in shaping our faith and relationship with God. Let's focus on three takeaways:

- Embrace vulnerability in prayer: As Jesus faced His crucifixion, He sought refuge in prayer. In the Garden, He withdrew from His disciples and knelt down before His Father. This act of prayer demonstrates Jesus' reliance on the Father as well as an essential truth: prayer invites us to embrace vulnerability with God. Through prayer, we can lay down our fears, struggles, and uncertainties, allowing God to work in us and bear the weight of our burdens.
- Surrender to God's will: While praying in the Garden, Jesus uttered the famous words, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me. Yet not as I will, but as You will" (Matthew 26:39). Here, Jesus exhibits complete submission to the Father's will. Through His example, we learn the importance of surrendering our desires, fears, and plans to God in prayer. As a Church, when we foster a culture of prayer, we create space for individuals to align their hearts and minds with the will of God.
- Seek strength and support: Another crucial aspect emphasized by Jesus' prayer in the garden is the need for strength and support in times of great sorrow and anguish. By seeing the Church as a house of prayer, we facilitate an environment of support which allows others to find refuge in God's presence and experience His comforting hand. Prayer is a vital lifeline, both in our personal lives and as a community.

Let us be encouraged to step into a lifestyle of prayer as Jesus demonstrated for us.

Pray, following the example of Jesus in today's reading.



BIBLICAL DAY 17 DEFINITION

Read 2 Timothy 3

Today's passage warns that the world will grow progressively more evil and people will become increasingly corrupt during the period between Christ's ascension and His return ("the last days"). We're told that it will become more and more difficult to live for Christ. Where will evil manifest itself in the last days? In people, as verse 2 states. Sinful people who live corrupt lives will create difficult times, and some of these people will even pose as Christian teachers and lead others astray. Distorted love will characterize our society. People will be "lovers of self, lovers of money... not loving good... lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God" (2 Timothy 3:2-4, ESV). There will be evil people and imposters who are deceived and will seek to deceive others (see 2 Timothy 3:13).

How can we be protected from the deception, distorted love, and evil of the last days? By the Bible—the Word of God. Every one of us is susceptible to deception unless we obey and become firmly grounded in Scripture. Scripture is not just a good book of suggestions for how to improve our lives, it is actually "breathed out by God" (2 Timothy 3:16, ESV).

But it's not enough to just believe in the authority of Scripture. We must allow Scripture to shape our lives. The Scriptures are profitable for teaching—showing us what to believe, how to think, and how to live our lives. The Scriptures are also profitable for reproof and correction, they confront us when we're living ungodly lives or have false beliefs. God intends for His people, the Church, to be "train[ed] in righteousness" by the Bible so we "may be complete, equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16-17, ESV). That is why the Church must be biblical—with the Bible as our ultimate authority for how to live out the Christian life.

Pray for God to give you wisdom as you apply His Word to your life.



BIBLICAL DAY 18 APPLICATION

Read 2 Timothy 2

As “biblical” Christians, we must present ourselves to God as workers who correctly teach the word of truth (see 2 Timothy 2:15). We’re encouraged to focus on the truth of Scripture, the nature of God, and the necessity of holy living—not to debate fringe theology with others so we can feel smarter and spiritually superior. We’re also told it is useless to fight about words because it leads to the ruin of those who listen (see 2 Timothy 2:14).

We’re told to be workers. Our work, as servants of God and students of His Word, is compared to the work done by soldiers, farmers, and athletes (see 2 Timothy 2:4–6). These three professions all require dedication, discipline, and diligence. Following Jesus and serving God according to the biblical standard is definitely not a life of ease, comfort, and convenience. We can’t take shortcuts or cheat by redefining or disobeying God’s truth or by lowering His standards for our lives. If we want the rewards of faithfulness, we must compete according to God’s standards by His grace, like Olympic athletes. We must be committed, devoted, and single-minded in our lives, like soldiers. And we must practice patience, diligence, and endurance, like farmers.

Spiritual change will not happen overnight. It will take years of careful, loving, and diligent nurture through Bible study, Christian community, and time spent with the Lord in prayer. Spiritual care and growth is often not glamorous. It’s done in private places and quiet times. While it can often feel like work, it is actually God who is working in us as we surrender ourselves to Him.

Pray for God to give you endurance, commitment, and patience as you carry out His work and share the truth of His Word with those who need to hear it.



BENEVOLENT DAY 19 DEFINITION

Read Acts 6

Benevolence: a word few know and even fewer understand. The dictionary defines it as a disposition to do good. Scripture describes many of God's attributes, including His benevolent attitude and goodness. As followers of Christ, we should reflect that same attitude of generosity and goodness throughout our lives.

In today's chapter, we see where the Church has started to grow, and the 12 disciples could no longer do everything themselves. So the disciples proposed that other Believers step up and help with daily distributions. The disciples said it wouldn't be right for them to give up preaching—which was essential—to serve tables. But this one act of service had great effects. As a result, the Word spread and the priests increased in number. How? Because of God's benevolence portrayed through the Church.

To put it simply, the physically hungry came to the place where food was given out. Once fed physically, they were then fed spiritually. At that point, the people who had been fed told others who were still hungry where to get food, and so the cycle continued. When it comes to the gospel, we're all just beggars telling other beggars where to find the good bread. In Acts 6, the Church exemplified God's goodness by just serving a meal. Jesus did this very thing in the gospels, and God still does it with us every single day. God fills our souls and our stomachs. He causes the sun to rise and set, the rain to come, and the crops to grow. The Lord is good all the time, and He uses His Church to share His goodness by spreading the gospel.

Pray for God to help you see His goodness in the Church around you.



BENEVOLENT

DAY 20 APPLICATION

Read Philippians 2

Every day we have the opportunity to reflect God's benevolence by giving to others as He has given to us. But genuine benevolence requires humility. Throughout His life on earth, Christ demonstrated God's goodness through His humility—and we should do the same.

In Christ's actions, we see the empathy and love we should have for each other. Both of these attributes can be summed up by one word—benevolence. Jesus was God in flesh and bone, and He came to show us how to serve. He was a servant of the people and a slave to God. He even laid His life down for those the Father loved. Jesus didn't do any of these things to exalt Himself—in fact, it was quite the opposite. When we face hard times, we forget to thank God for His goodness. But Jesus showed us how to love God, even in the hard times and even if the hard times are caused by the people we love.

God's goodness—His benevolence—goes beyond our comprehension. We know Jesus understood, and He shared it with us. In His goodness, Jesus gave us His Word, and in that Word is life. In it, we learn true humility, goodness, faithfulness, and love, to put it simply, we learn the character of the One whom we reflect to the world. We cannot hope to draw others to lives of love, grace, and goodness without the humility to see the Lord called us to faith in Him in that exact same way.

Pray the Lord will humble us and teach us to reflect His benevolent attitude to the world, so His Kingdom will grow and His name will be honored.



VISIBLE DAY 21 DEFINITION

Read John 15

On the surface, it seems obvious the Church is visible. We think of visible structures like church buildings or tangible items like crosses. But the Church isn't a physical building or the things in it—rather, it's the people who make up the body of Believers. When we remember that fact, our mission to be visible in the world becomes far more than just occupying a building. Those who have joined God's Church through a relationship with Jesus should be marked by certain characteristics. Through these characteristics, the Church can recognize those who belong to it.

In John 15, Jesus tells us how the Church can remain visible. First, each disciple should remain connected to Jesus, the True Vine. It is only through that life-giving relational connection with our Savior we are capable of displaying the fruit of the Spirit and the visible evidence of a Christian life (see Galatians 5:22–23). In John 15:8, Jesus says this fruit proves we are indeed part of God's Church. Next, He explains the Church should demonstrate the same sacrificial love He showed them. This kind of love is one of the fruits that comes from abiding in a relationship with Jesus. In the final section of chapter 15, Jesus warns true members of the Church will be persecuted by the world. While Believers should not seek to be hated, Jesus explains hatred from the culture around us will be a natural byproduct of following the One the world already rejected.

God never intended for the people who belong to His Church to be a mystery. His Word tells us a true disciple is a person who demonstrates obedience to His commands (see Matthew 28:19–20, 1 John 2:3) and produces good fruit (see Matthew 7:16, Ephesians 5:8–9). As we do those things, we will reveal the Church to the world.

Pray for the members of the Church to remain connected to the True Vine so our lives will show fruit.



VISIBLE

DAY 22 APPLICATION

Read 1 Thessalonians 1

This chapter is the opening to a letter Paul wrote to the church in Thessalonica. While this was written to a specific group of people, God inspired this Scripture as encouragement and instruction for all Believers. This group of disciples set a great example of how the Church should remain visible to those around them. Like a light on a hill, the example they set radiated the gospel to all who could see it (see Matthew 5:14–16).

Paul and his fellow missionaries had witnessed the Thessalonians' faith which led to works, their agape love which led to labor, and their hope in Jesus which gave them endurance to continue producing this good fruit. Their works, labor, and endurance outwardly displayed what it looked like to be the Church. The Church described in this chapter is not a hobby or an occasional social gathering, it is a committed family united through a shared relationship with Jesus. Because they lived lives that imitated Jesus, the Thessalonians became an example other Believers looked to as a model of what the Church should be. Through their encouragement and example, the word of the Lord "rang out" throughout the region and to further unbelievers (see 1 Thessalonians 1:8).

Many modern cultures focus on the individual. Often, Christians fall into this way of thinking when it comes to following Jesus. Do you place too much emphasis on your personal efforts and growth in the faith—and not enough emphasis on your role as a member of the larger Church who is contributing to its reputation in the world? When we, as the Church, share our lives and allow our faith, love, and hope to lead to action, people everywhere will take notice. Then, the good news of Jesus will spread far beyond our community, and God's Kingdom will grow.

Pray about how you can help others see what the Church should look like in the world.



INVISIBLE DAY 23 DEFINITION

Read Matthew 7

Though the Church is a visible display of God's Kingdom here on earth, what we see often isn't the same as what God sees. The visible Church comprises many who may not be true followers of Jesus. Some of the people who are "in" the Church aren't actually "of" the Church. Good fruit is the evidence of authentic and genuine faith in Jesus and cannot be divorced from the life of a Christ-follower. However, as Matthew 7:21–23 suggests, good works are not what save us. Only God can see people's hearts and know if their works are motivated by love for Him or love of self.

Unlike the visible Church, the invisible Church is made up of solely true followers of Jesus who produce fruit motivated by love of Jesus and not love of self. In Matthew 7:21–23, we see a group that claims to be the Church, but in reality, they aren't. Christ is aware of their illegitimate claims based upon visible actions, and His awareness suggests He is also mindful of a group of legitimate members of the Church whose actions are often invisible.

In Matthew 3:12, Jesus separates the wheat from the chaff, indicating the two are mixed and only He can see the full extent of the difference and divide them. Again, in Matthew 13:24–30, we see good seed sowed, but it grows together with weeds that were planted by an enemy. Both will be harvested, but the weeds will be separated out and destroyed, and the wheat will be stored in the sower's barn. This parable shows us again only Jesus sees and knows those who are truly His.

Pray for encouragement for all who are part of the invisible Church.



INVISIBLE

DAY 24 APPLICATION

Read John 10

Is the invisible Church made up of sheep? If Christ is the Good Shepherd (and He is), then yes, we are His sheep. Sheep follow where their shepherd calls, as we see in verse 27. So we must ask ourselves: Do we follow? Do we see our lives marked by obedience to Jesus? If not, then what or whom do we follow? Do we follow self, politics, sex, or even family? While these things are good in the proper context, the key phrase is “in the proper context.” If our first obedience isn’t to Jesus and His Word, maybe it’s time to do a heart check.

If we know Jesus says a hallmark of His followers is their obedience to Him, why wouldn’t we strive to live according to His Word? None of Jesus’ commands are burdens to us, but they lead to abundant life (see John 10:10). Why would we run to sin rather than to our loving Creator? Why would humans try to live in a way other than the one God designed for us? We don’t try to eat cereal with an iPhone, do we? I suppose we could, but it would be an incredible misuse of what each item was designed to do and be. If we bear the image of God, then the way we live our lives should reflect the One whose image we bear.

Together, let us run the race of life, listening to the loving call of our Good Shepherd. Let us follow His voice as a sheep follows its shepherd, as He guides us into abundant life here on earth and in the age to come. If we simply hear and follow His voice, we can have confidence we are indeed His Church.

Pray for your ears to hear the voice of the Good Shepherd, Jesus.



IMPERFECT

DAY 25 DEFINITION

Read 1 Corinthians 5

Today's passage addresses an issue with a church member who was living in sin—a sin that was detestable even among pagans. Instead of mourning over his behavior (see 1 Corinthians 5:2), the church allowed it to continue and even boasted about it (see 1 Corinthians 5:6). In response, Paul rebuked the church of Corinth and explained in detail people who claim to follow Christ must be held to a higher standard. This is sometimes painfully executed, as Paul instructs the Believers in this church not to associate with this man. Paul equates sin to leaven, if you put just a tiny bit of leaven into unleavened dough, it spreads throughout the whole batch. If the sinful actions of this man went unchecked, it would eventually infect the entire church.

As Believers, we must hold our Christian brothers and sisters to a higher standard than those who do not follow Christ. We are not to associate ourselves with people who claim to follow Christ yet actively live in unrepentant sin. On the contrary, we are to associate and walk with those who are not yet Believers. We see this modeled in the life of Jesus. In verse 10, Paul explicitly instructs us to remain in community with the immoral people of this world. Anyone apart from Christ is not going to act Christ-like, and we can't expect them to.

All throughout Scripture and in our own lives, we see perfection is never going to be achieved on this side of Heaven. However, a true Believer in Christ won't want to live in a consistent pattern of sin. Whenever we are aware a brother or sister in Christ is living a sinful lifestyle, we are to follow the teachings of this text and do as it instructs.

Pray for God to reveal any sinful patterns in your life to repent of.



IMPERFECT

DAY 26 APPLICATION

Read Galatians 6

As we discussed yesterday, God expects Believers to hold each other accountable. This expectation is one reason why living in Christian community is essential for the Believer. Every one of us is prone to falling into a pattern of sin. The enemy wants us to isolate ourselves from each other so he can gain a foothold in our lives. By living in vulnerable, intentional community with others who actively follow Christ, we keep ourselves from falling into sinful traps. When a brother or sister in Christ does fall into sin, those in Christian community are to “restore such a person with a gentle spirit” (Galatians 6:1).

With that said, it’s essential we watch out for ourselves when we approach a fellow Believer about their sin. At the end of verse one, Paul warns a person who goes to help a fallen Believer faces the potential danger of being tempted in the same way. Additionally, pride could very easily creep into our hearts when we’re helping restore a fellow Believer. We might be tempted to think, “At least I’m not as bad a sinner as this guy.” Matthew 7:5 addresses our sinfulness when Jesus commands us to “First take the beam of wood out of your eye, and then you will see clearly to take the splinter out of your brother’s eye.”

It can be intimidating to confront someone about their sin. We might be tempted to think these instructions are only for certain Christians. However, the Spirit of Christ abides in us all, giving us each exactly what we need. People who are led by the Spirit possess the fruit of the Spirit, addressed in Galatians 5. If you bear the fruit of the Spirit and depend on Christ, you are equipped to go to a brother or sister in Christ about their sin.

Pray for God to show you any paths to restoration you should walk.



HOLY

DAY 27 DEFINITION

Read 1 Peter 2

Many people consider “holy” to mean being morally good and having a right standing with others. But when we look at the definition in a biblical context, we find something different. Holy means to be set apart for the One True God. He is holy because nothing has ever been or will ever be like Him. No one has done what He has done. No one else spoke and created stars, planets, mountains, oceans, and people. No one else has resurrected themselves from the dead and forgiven the sins of the world. He is holy because He is God.

The same One who is holy calls the Church His people, and we are His people because we’ve been given God’s righteousness to become a holy priesthood. Because we are His, we are called to be set apart from others and to be different from the world around us. We are called to rid ourselves of sin, but God doesn’t rid us of things so we may be left without. He always gives us something better. Instead of malice, we are given peace. Instead of deceit, we are given goodness. Instead of hypocrisy, we are given kindness. Instead of envy, we are given joy. Instead of slander, we are given love.

We are given these gifts because of Christ’s mercy. As Peter says, “Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people” (1 Peter 2:10). The Church is filled with God’s people, and we are His most prized possession—all so we may praise the One who died for us and forgives our sins.

Pray for the Church to be full of holy people who worship a holy God.



HOLY DAY 28 APPLICATION

Read 1 Peter 4

Some of us may know what it's like to live one way and then to repent. We know the sting of rejection that comes from strangers, friends, or family members who reject us for our beliefs. We know the pain of people we deeply care about making comments like "I can't wait to see you outgrow this phase," "You believe in what now?" or "I give you three months before you burn out." Yet others know the pain of missing out on potential friends or the fleshly desire to regret following Christ at an early age. These are all side effects of the Church being set apart.

Peter gives us the wisdom that holy people do not panic in the face of hardship. Just like our Lord didn't panic on the cross, we do not panic knowing the end of all things is closer every day. Instead, we are to have constant love and to serve others through God's strength and His Word, so God may be known. The Church is not meant to suffer from our sins, instead when we suffer, it should be because we represent Christ. Suffering because of our sins isn't suffering, it is the righteous consequence for our actions. When we suffer because of Christ, it is a blessing because we have been set apart by God Almighty!

The Church's holiness does not depend on our circumstances but on the One we represent, the One who calls us holy. Our feelings and circumstances do not determine truth, God does. If God says the Church is holy, then it is—and we are to act accordingly. So do not be discouraged when you face hardship, and do not be distraught in peaceful times. Rest knowing Jesus has you, and He will never leave or forsake you because you are one of His holy people.

Pray to be a holy person who worships a holy God.



IN THE WORLD

DAY 29 DEFINITION

Read Genesis 1

Imagine for a moment you are walking in the park, and you stop to look up. You see the bright blue sky and rays of light piercing through the branches of the trees above. Crouching down, you pick up a leaf and observe the ants passing you on the sidewalk. Do you realize how undoubtedly amazing this is? The sky, the ground, and the creatures that run along in it were all created by a word from our Heavenly Father. How inconceivable this truth is to our human minds! God created everything, every single thing. We have taken those things and created with them within His framework, but there is nothing we can create outside of what God has created. We see the beauty and intentionality of the world God created in Genesis 1.

This world was created to amaze us. Sometimes we forget just how awe-inspiring this life is because we simply live within our own idea of existence. Genesis 1:28–30 not only invites us to see the goodness of what God has given us but it also invites us to be part of creation! Just as Christ has called us to be part of the creation process, He calls us to share the gospel with all those we encounter.

Romans 1:20 says, “For His invisible attributes, that is, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen since the creation of the world, being understood through what He has made. As a result, people are without excuse.” God’s power and divine nature are truly on display if we stop and take a moment to acknowledge His goodness in creating the world, which He created for us to enjoy and live within. We serve a God who designed good things for us to enjoy and to point others to Him in the process.

Pray for eyes to see the goodness in creation and to understand God’s love for His creation shown through His Son, Christ Jesus.



IN THE WORLD

DAY 30 APPLICATION

Read 1 Timothy 4

As 1 Timothy 4 so beautifully puts it, we have an obligation and responsibility regarding creation and creativity. We are to steward and acknowledge creation with thanksgiving. In 1 Timothy 4:4, we find "everything created by God is good." If everything God created is good, we must praise Him for what He has given. Go outside and take a few moments to sit and observe. Write down some of the things you see in nature you are genuinely grateful for. It could be something visible like the beauty of the flowers by your neighbor's mailbox, or something invisible like the sun's warmth stretching across your face. Think about the beautiful creation of God's design for marriage or the joy your children bring to your life. All of these things display God's creativity and His love. He uses all things to point others to Himself.

As creations of the Creator, we have an obligation to use our gifts and talents to create as well. Whether you are an artist or an accountant, God has given us all unique talents with the purpose of giving Him glory. Take time to reflect on how you can use your giftings to create something that points others to Him. In action, word, and deed, we have this amazing opportunity to use our God-given talents and creativity to honor Him.

I love how this chapter closes: "Pay close attention to your life and your teaching, persevere in these things, for in doing this you will save both yourself and your hearers" (1 Timothy 4:16). Whether you feel like a particularly creative person or not, we all create things each and every day. We have an opportunity with our words and hands to create things that lead others toward Him or away from Him. How can you point someone to Christ today through His creation and His attribute of creativity within you?

Pray for inspiration to create for His glory, in a manner that points people to Christ and isn't hidden away.



IN EXILE

DAY 31 DEFINITION

Read 1 Peter 1

We're all on a journey to our forever home, the Kingdom of God. In 1st Peter, we find a church that was displaced and experienced persecution. They were exiled and felt like strangers in their own world. The same can be said about the Church today. Many of us may feel displaced, like we don't fit in or are wandering with no place to call home.

But God offers us so much promise in 1st Peter. We can be encouraged by God's faithfulness to His Church. We will face trials and tribulations, but our faith remains unshaken due to the living hope we have through Christ's resurrection. We are actually called to live as exiles—not of this world but citizens of the Kingdom of God! As we journey through challenges, God refines us and calls us to stand out through lives of holiness. Our faith is tested, purified, and strengthened. We are to love one another deeply, even when the world may not understand the convictions of the Church. Our love will bear witness to the transformative power of Christ.

Although we are in exile, let us remember we are not alone. We are surrounded by a larger spiritual family—a community of Believers who share our journey. As C.S. Lewis wrote, "If we find ourselves with a desire that nothing in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is we are made for another world." You are a citizen of Heaven. One day, we will enter God's Kingdom, not as exiles but as sons and daughters.

Pray for strength and encouragement from the Holy Spirit as the Church in exile awaits the promises of God that are still to come.



IN EXILE

DAY 32 APPLICATION

Read Revelation 21

What hope we have! In Revelation 21, we see a glimpse of the coming Kingdom of God. There will be a day when we no longer walk as exiles but as citizens of God's Kingdom. In a world that is often at odds with our faith, we—the Church—find ourselves in a state of exile. But today's chapter shows us a picture of our future destination, which we can cling to amidst our spiritual sojourning.

There will be a day when the New Jerusalem is established—a day when the Bridegroom, Jesus, will come for His bride, the Church (see Revelation 21:2). On that day, all our suffering, pain, sickness, and tears will be wiped away (see Revelation 21:4). All of the images in Revelation 21 paint a picture of the hope we have in Christ. They serve as a reminder one day we will all dwell in the fullness of God's presence.

Everything we do on this earth as exiles is temporary. The suffering we experience will one day fade, and the tears of sorrow will be replaced. We can be encouraged by that fact! What's not temporary is the eternal Kingdom of God—a Kingdom that He will establish, free from sin, suffering, and pain. It gives us hope to live for what is eternal. When we're in the middle of circumstances that feel like they will crush us, we can look forward to what Christ will eventually make new. Remember, we are eternal beings in a world where we do not belong. We are in a foreign land, not our home. Today, take time to remind yourself that our present-day suffering as exiles will one day be replaced by life in God's Kingdom.

Pray, giving thanks to our faithful God, who will keep His promise to replace our broken world with His perfect Kingdom.



CONTEMPORARY

DAY 33 DEFINITION

Read Matthew 16

The word “contemporary” is defined as living or occurring during the same time. As Christians, we are called to live out our faith and to do what Scripture says in a world full of other people who are not. There is a great disconnect between Christians and non-Christians, we exist at the same time and in the same space, but we do not believe the same things. Christians are not called to isolate ourselves in a bubble. Instead, we are to go into culture and share the truth of God’s Word.

American culture promotes self-truth, self-love, sexual freedom, and self-worship, while Christ taught surrender, selflessness, sexual purity, and self-denial. As Christ-followers, we are called not only to have awareness and discernment of false teachings but also to be counter-cultural while loving those who do not believe what we believe. In verses 5–12, Jesus tells His disciples twice to “beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.” At first, the disciples think Jesus is referring to physical bread, but verse 12 starts with an amazing phrase: “Then they understood.” Finally, the disciples understood Jesus wasn’t telling them to be cautious of bread but of the teachings of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

Jesus never told His disciples to ignore or run away from the teachings of the Pharisees and Sadducees. He told them to beware—to be cautious and alert to their danger. Jesus never told His disciples to be isolated from false teaching but to be insulated by what He had taught them. The same is true for us. We must not ignore what the world around us is teaching or promoting, but if those teachings don’t align with the Word of God, then we are to avoid them and to do our best to encourage others to avoid them as well.

Pray for discernment, especially to see what is truly good or not good.



CONTEMPORARY

DAY 34 APPLICATION

Read Acts 17

In today's chapter, the apostle Paul shows us how to be insulated by the Word but not isolated from the world. He went to three different cities, spread the gospel, and converted many people who followed cultural truth instead of biblical truth. For the purposes of this devotional, we're going to focus on the final city Paul visits, Athens.

When Paul visited Athens, as verse 16 states, "he was deeply distressed when he saw that the city was full of idols." Because of Paul's knowledge of Scripture and his relationship with Jesus, Paul was able to discern the culture of Athens wasn't Christ-centered. If we continue reading, we see Paul didn't lock himself in a room somewhere. He went out and had conversations with people not only in the synagogues but also in the streets. He even talked with Greek philosophers (see Acts 17:18), and these conversations led Paul to the cultural and intellectual center of Athens, the Areopagus (also referred to as Mars Hill). While in the Areopagus, Paul shared the gospel with a group of people who "spent their time on nothing else but telling or hearing something new" (Acts 17:21). While addressing the crowd, Paul used the words of some of their own poets to explain who Jesus Christ was and why He was important for their salvation. Using something familiar to the people of Athens allowed them to relate to Paul and the gospel in a way they never had before.

How can we apply this to our lives? Paul enjoyed art, culture, and literature, and he enjoyed discussing them too. But his identity, love, and devotion were first and foremost planted in his relationship with Christ. Paul was able to take the things that gave him common ground with non-believers and use them as a gateway to share the gospel.

Pray for God to use things you enjoy to open opportunities for you to share the gospel with others who share those same interests.



HISTORIC DAY 35 DEFINITION

Read Matthew 1

It's easy to see a list of names in the Bible and simply skim until you hit the narrative again. Usually, at best, we think of reading the genealogies as something necessary to slog through. At worst, we don't pay them much mind. I'm not saying you need to memorize who fathered whom and be able to recite it. But I want us to think about why Matthew begins his gospel with Jesus' family tree before he tells you anything about Jesus Himself.

One of the things Matthew accomplishes here is grounding Jesus in a particular history. Jesus didn't mystically appear as a baby out in the wilderness. He had a family history! Many of the people listed here are famous figures in the Old Testament who made significant contributions to the history of Israel. Matthew demonstrates how all of their contributions led up to the birth of Jesus. As Jesus was growing up in His humanity, He could look to His "predecessors" (in a sense) and learn from their example. He could learn about the faith of people like Abraham and Rahab and know they were part of His story. He could also learn about the failures of people like David, Solomon, and Rehoboam and not do what they did.

Similarly, the modern Church has a history it can look back on. Think about your own story of faith. Who led you into a relationship with God? Who led them? And before them? We all—individually and together—have a spiritual lineage we can learn from, both good examples and bad examples. We can read about much of it in the New Testament and see how our earliest "ancestors" handled situations very similar to the ones we find ourselves in today. But Church history doesn't end with the book of Revelation! There are about 1900 years worth of Church history from the time the New Testament was written until today—and all of it led to you, right now, reading this devotional. The question is, will we learn from it?

Pray, giving thanks to God for all those who have come before you and have led you to faith.



HISTORIC DAY 36 APPLICATION

Read Hebrews 11

It's easier to do something when you know someone else has done it before. The classic example of this is running a mile in less than four minutes. It was thought to be impossible, or at least close to impossible, until someone finally did it for the first time in recorded human history in 1954. Since then, over 700 runners have broken a four-minute mile in the U.S. alone. The impossible becomes possible when someone does it.

So how does this relate to the Church being historic? Whatever trials we face, whatever questions we have—no matter how big and impossible they seem—they have all been faced and overcome by those who came before us. So we may take heart we can overcome them too. For example, how can we have faith when we do the things God calls us to do but never see the fruit of it? What do we do when it seems like God doesn't hold up His end of the deal? That's what Hebrews 11 is all about. We should be like Abraham, Rahab, and so many other faithful predecessors who, despite what they could see physically, knew they served a faithful, unseen God.

Looking to our faith ancestors doesn't just apply to "What should we do?" situations. It applies to "What should we think?" situations too. What questions have you had about God? Have you ever felt like you were the first person to ask something? Why is there evil? Why did Jesus come 2000 years ago and not now? How do I know if my Bible translation is correct? Sometime in the history of God's people someone somewhere has asked the questions you're asking, and they've thought long and hard about the answers. When we come across difficult questions or situations, we should look to the examples of those who came before us. Learn about Church history, but more importantly, learn from it!

Pray for God to show you the lessons learned by Believers who came before you.



DIVERSE DAY 37 DEFINITION

Read Galatians 3

Take a moment to think about the people in your church community. Who is in your Life Group? Who do you serve with? What types of people do you see and interact with at church services? I hope when you think about these groups of people, there are different backgrounds and stations of life represented. But one thing you likely have in common is you all live in the same country, and you have probably always lived in the same country. With that shared background comes a commonality of culture that lends familiarity to your interactions and relationships.

Now, broaden your thoughts. Imagine people who don't live in the same country as you and never have. Most of the people reading this devotional are Americans or currently live in the U.S., so think about South Americans, Asians, or Africans. Do you ever take time to consider there are churches in those parts of the world too? And does it ever cross your mind that your church—along with all the others—is part of the unified, global people of God? No matter what corner of the world we are in, we are one.

The apostle Paul reminds us of the Church's unity in Galatians 3. He depicts different types of people in verse 28, all of whom occupied very different social positions and circles: Jews and Greeks, slaves and free people, men and women. There is great diversity in that list, and through Christ they are all one, transcending cultural and societal barriers. Right now, as I write this devotional in Murfreesboro, Tennessee, there are connections to brothers and sisters in Cairo, Egypt, Jakarta, Indonesia, and San Salvador, El Salvador. The fact that God is working in all of these different places and cultures proves how big God is and how open-hearted He is to all people.

Pray for eyes to see and appreciate the diversity of God's people.



DIVERSE

DAY 38 APPLICATION

Read Galatians 2

In my childhood church, there were several deeply entrenched traditions. For example, on communion Sundays, the elements were prepared in special plates which were passed around so everyone could grab their own communion wafer and little cup of juice. Then the pastor led us through taking the bread and juice, all together, to remember the body and blood of Christ. The first time I visited a different kind of church on communion Sunday, my world was shaken. At that church, everyone waited in line to see the pastor, who administered the elements to each person. There was the familiar juice in a little cup, but the rest was unfamiliar. The symbolic Body of Christ was a fluffy loaf of bread which the pastor pinched off a bit at a time, and each person took the elements on their own before walking away from the altar.

That day, my confused, very young mind received a lesson about the Church's diversity in culture and practice. Both ways of taking communion were okay, which helped me recognize the Church doesn't look the same in all places. We should be willing to accept diversity among God's people, instead of criticizing them or telling them they're wrong when they do things differently than we're used to.

The life of Peter helps us learn not to be hypocritical. We shouldn't change the way we treat people based on who else is around. In Galatians 2, Paul tells of confronting Peter for this kind of behavior—not just because it was bad for him but because he was leading others astray by his bad example. Just as others watched Peter, people are watching us too. The more open-hearted we remain with other churches, the more God can use our differences to help people come to know Christ.

Pray for opportunities to get outside your church culture and support others.



UNIFIED DAY 39 DEFINITION

Read John 15

In this chapter, we learn Jesus is the True Vine. This statement is one of several “I am” statements Jesus makes in the book of John. As Jesus’ followers, we best know who we are when we see who He is. Therefore, because Jesus is the True Vine, we are the branches. The language Jesus uses here reminds us of a grapevine. A gardener plants a grapevine to produce grapes. As followers of Jesus (the Church), we are unified in our purpose to produce spiritual fruit.

The Church produces fruit when we are rooted in Christ as the Vine. Without Him, we are not able to do anything. As the branches of the Vine, the Church should produce the fruit of sacrificial love, obedience to Jesus’ commands, and a desire to know more of Jesus. We must also understand when Jesus tells us to love one another as He has loved us, He calls us to love those who are also in the Church. In John 13:35, Jesus stated the world would know His followers by the love they have for one another.

Furthermore, Jesus does not command us to love only those who are in the Church, He tells us to love those who do not follow Christ, too. In John 15:16, Jesus says He appointed His followers to go and produce much fruit. Later in that chapter, Jesus goes on to say we—as His followers—will be persecuted and hated for going out and doing the very thing He appoints us to do as His branches. Undeniably, as Christ's followers, we are to bear fruit. No matter the circumstances, the Church of Jesus Christ must bear much fruit for His glory and our joy.

Pray the Holy Spirit would produce the fruit of a Believer in your life and in the Church.



UNIFIED

DAY 40 APPLICATION

Read James 4

The enemy of unity in the Church is pride. James says our selfishness leads to friendship with the world. In verse four, James says when the people of God entertain our selfish passions, it is considered hostility toward God. This is the height of arrogance: to think our selfish passions are more fulfilling than God. How silly of our hearts we would choose our desires over the God who created us! Another insidious way pride manifests is when we compare and criticize one another. Again, this is our selfishness rising to the surface. The Church must see the importance of eradicating pride from our hearts.

Our selfishness is how we conjure up control as humans. Essentially, we're saying we think and act better than God does. This type of arrogance puts us at odds with our Savior and Church family. But the remedy for pride is found in verse seven. Because of the evil in us, we must submit to God and draw near to Him. The wonder of our God is as we draw near to Him, He draws near to us. Through this process, our Father purifies our hearts with His great grace.

As the Church, we must humble ourselves before the Lord. We must understand who He is, and that is why reading the Bible is critical to the life of a Believer. The more we know God, the more we understand our daily dependence on Him. Through that relationship, God pushes us to widen the lens of our life and realize it isn't about us as individuals. We have a united purpose. We must remain in Jesus to lead more people to follow Him. We do this together—as the Church united in Christ for His good work through our lives.

Pray for unity in the Church, ask the Lord to draw close to you, and trust He already has.

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