



40 DAYS OF AWAKENING

Lenten Study Guide

GAINESVILLE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH



WAKE UP!

Lent Week 1 | Awaken | Ephesians 5

Ephesians 5: 8-14

For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) and find out what pleases the Lord. Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them. It is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret. But everything exposed by the light becomes visible—and everything that is illuminated becomes a light. This is why it is said: “Wake up, sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.”

Romans 13:11-12

And do this, understanding the present time: The hour has already come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light.

Day 1 - The alarm is going off!

What happens when your alarm goes off? Do you pop out of bed at the first ring, hit the snooze 3+ times, or sleep through 7 alarms and still barely make it out the door on time? Sometimes it depends on why you are getting out of bed, right? If you are the parent of a teenager, you know how hard it is to peel them out of bed for school, yet they eagerly get up to hang with friends on the weekends.

In Ephesians 5 and Romans 13, Paul is speaking to the people of the early church about “waking up” in a spiritual sense. By using the analogy of darkness, or night, he lists the wide variety of sins and worldly evils that we may have experienced in the darkness before knowing Christ. He reminds us that we are now children of the day, or of the light, and we are meant to be free from the darkness in our lives, and in the world around us. Of course, just as we do today, the early church had the tendency to return to their old ways of thinking, and spiritually fall asleep. These moments don’t have to be drastic, they are often a subtle, gradual lull back to sleep. It could be a season of busyness, a struggle that causes you to focus on yourself, or a season of worldly success that lulls you into thinking you can do this on your own and you don’t need God. Maybe you stop praying over things, miss church services, pull back from attending small group, stop feeling as generous, become too busy to read the Bible, and suddenly you are drifting back to sleep. You may become numb to His Spirit, unable to hear His voice, anxious about the future, and find yourself slipping back towards old habits, doing life on our own, and our old destructive coping skills.

What happens when the Lord says “WAKE UP SLEEPER”? Do you know what your spiritual alarm sounds like? Are you hitting snooze, for a few extra moments in the dark? Are you ignoring it because you have become cozy under the blankets of old habits or addictions? Are you pulling the covers over your head to drown out it’s ring? Just as we studied last week in Ezekiel, even if you have fallen asleep, or covered yourself to the point of death, there is hope! The Lord invites you to WAKE UP, to let His Spirit to breath life into your lungs, and to be covered in the armor of His light!

- Ask the Lord in prayer today - Where are you inviting me to wake up? Where am I spiritually drifting, sleeping, or even on death’s door? 1 Where are alarms going off in my life right now?

Deeper Dive

Scripture to meditate on:

- Ephesians 5: 1-7** ~Follow God's example, therefore, as dearly loved children and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people. Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving. For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person—such a person is an idolater—has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient. Therefore do not be partners with them.
- Romans 13: 8-10** ~Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law. The commandments, "You shall not commit adultery," "You shall not murder," "You shall not steal," "You shall not covet," and whatever other command there may be, are summed up in this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." Love does no harm to a neighbor.

Day 2 - Stepping into the light

When you wake up in the morning, many of us take a moment to adjust to the brightness of the lights in our homes. Of course, if you've ever been an early riser, or on a camping trip, you can attest that dawn's first light paints some of the most beautiful scenes that you could ever imagine. God is truly the master artist every morning as the sun slowly rises and He wakes us up in the most beautiful ways.

When we think about waking up spiritually, and stepping into the light of Christ, it can be intimidating at first. Walking into a church service for the first time in a long time can feel like a huge spotlight shining on our heads. Signing up for a small group when you haven't opened your Bible in years (or maybe decades) can feel like all eyes are on you. Attempting to pray after a season of silence, can feel like you've failed before you've begun. This is when it's important to remember that stepping into God's morning light isn't like your bright unflattering bathroom lights showing your every flaw in judgement & condemnation. God's light shines with the purpose to heal you from the inside out. His light doesn't condemn you, it shines in order to take away the darkness with the power of His forgiveness, grace, mercy, and love. He shines light on your broken places so that you can see the wounds that needs to be covered by His grace, those atrophied faith muscles that He is eagerly waiting to help you strengthen again, and the spiritually dead areas that He will breath life into again. God's light, just like the sunrise, draws us to Him, demands our worship & praise, is consistently unconditional, and is undeniably pure in Spirit and always for our good.

When we read the full chapters of Ephesians 5 and Romans 13, Paul describes a multitude of sin and evil in the world. If we attempt to read it like a checklist to follow in our own strength it's overwhelming. However, God isn't asking us to use our own strength, or to light up our own lives. When we attempt this on our own, shame can create barriers of unworthiness, bitterness can keep us from forgiveness, or we can justify away our sin and forget the need for true light. Even good things, like our worldly successes, can offer us a cheap temporary light source, like a flashlight that runs out of batteries. God is not asking you to step into your own light, or create a light for yourself, He is inviting you to step into His light. His light is the only true lasting freedom from darkness, and it's through His strength that you can face & heal the brokenness His light illuminates in you.

- Where are you trying to turn on your own light, or create your own light? What would change if you stopped striving, and accepted the invitation of stepping into His light through His strength?*
- What is keeping you from stepping into the light of Christ and waking up to healing the darkness in your life?*

Deeper Dive

Scripture to meditate on:

- **Ephesians 6: 11-18** ~Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.
- **Ephesians 4: 20-24** ~That, however, is not the way of life you learned when you heard about Christ and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

Day 3 - Getting ready

Everyone has a "getting ready" routine in the morning. Some households, depending on your season of life, may be more chaotic than others. However, most of us generally change out of our PJ's, wash our faces, and put on clean clothes for the day. Spiritually speaking we can relate this to what Paul is saying when he says "let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light" in Romans 13:12. When the Spiritual alarm goes off, God's light peers through the window, and we begin to pull back the covers of sin and brokenness our lives, then it's time to get ready. Let's take a look at these stages of getting ready in a spiritual sense.

1. **Pray and listen:** Before your feet hit the floor, pray and seek God's plans for you. This is the moment when the light shines through your window, and you realize that you can't be a part of God's plan while you're cozy under all those blankets of brokenness. *Ask yourself - What does God have for me today? Am I seeking to follow Him, or am I still trying to make my own plans and asking God to bless MY way of doing things?*
2. **Take off your PJ's:** Once your feet finally hit the floor, it's time to take off the clothes you wore under all those blankets of sin and brokenness. As Paul writes "let us put aside the deeds of darkness" in Romans 13, we need to take off the clothes that we wore in the night. Are there things in your life, situations, relationships, addictions, or old coping skills that you need to truly take off and put aside? Are you still wearing what you wore in the night while trying to be a part of God's plans for you in the day? Waking up and stepping into the light requires us to take off our night clothes, wash our faces, and get ready for what God has planned for us today. *Ask yourself - What do I need to let go of to be free to walk in the light? What coping strategies, or habits, helped me survive in the night, but are keeping me sleepy in the day?*
3. **Put on clean clothes:** Once we have taken off the clothes we wore in the night, we need clean clothes to put on. When Paul says that we need to "put on the armor of light", he's saying that we need to guard ourselves against falling back into darkness. The dark things that we set aside need to be replaced with what God has called us to. We need daily spiritual armor to protect us, guide us, and provide the strength to follow Him. This armor comes from devoting ourselves to spiritual rhythms of prayer, reading in the Word, fellowship & accountability with other believers, worship, and praise. Paul speaks of this more extensively in Ephesians as He fully describes putting on the armor of God. *Ask yourself - Where am I lacking spiritual armor in my life? How is God trying to protect me against falling back into my old ways? Is there an area of armor that I need to strengthen as I walk as a child of the light?*

Deeper Dive

Scripture for today's study time:

• 1 Thessalonians 5: 4-11

~But you, brothers and sisters, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief. You are all children of the light and children of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness. So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be awake and sober. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night. But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet. For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him. Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.

Day 4 - Walking in the light

Now that your alarm has gone off, you've opened your eyes, the light of Christ has brought you out from under the covers of your sin, and you've prepared for the day that God has planned for you, it's time to walk out of the door, right? This may look different for each of us, as God calls each of us to uniquely different days, and a uniquely different calling and purpose in our lives. No matter what our unique calling is, we all are called to one thing: Follow Him. When we surrender to following Christ with our whole lives, we are walking in the light.

Paul gives us specific instructions for walking in the light when he says "be very careful, then, how you live - not as unwise but as wise". Let's take a look at both chapters in scripture to gain perspective on the differences of walking in the light verses the our old ways of darkness.

Walking in the light means:

- **Shifting "desire" to a love that gives instead of consumes.**
Instead of sexual immorality or impurity, reflecting a Christ-like love towards others that mirrors the pure goodness and holiness of His love for us. Instead of asking what can others do to satisfy our selfish desires, how can we love others the way that Christ unconditionally and sacrificially loves us.
- **Shifting from "I don't have enough", to "God is enough".**
Instead of greed and jealousy, having contentment rooted in your thankfulness for God's provision in your life. Knowing and believing that God is enough, that what He wants for you is enough, and that you are & have enough through Him.
- **Shifting from seeking a numbing escape to peaceful fullness.**
Instead of filling ourselves with addictions, idolatry, drunkenness, and excess, being filled with the Spirit through prayer, worship, gratitude and accepting His love & encouragement. Sometimes this involves therapy to break these powerful cycles and fully be able to surrender to walking freely in the peace of His light.
- **Shifting from trying to avoid sin to seeking God's purpose.**
Instead of arguing, defending, justifying, or gossiping, living in a way that seeks peace, purpose, love and grace towards others. We can never avoid sin on our own, through our own self-righteousness, we need to keep our eyes focused on God's purpose and promises in order to be free from this old way of life.
- **Shifting from hiding your imperfections to living in truth.**
Instead of hiding or justifying your sins and brokenness, allowing the light to shine on them for accountability, authenticity and truth. Allowing His light to examine us, is how we stay in the light. We have to seek visibility & authenticity over perfectionism.

Deeper Dive

Scripture for today's study time:

- **1 John 1: 5-10** ~God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all [b] sin. If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word is not in us.

Day 5 - Daily Awakening

Awakening isn't "self-improvement", it's living the resurrection life. Waking up takes consistent faithful shifts towards surrendering your dead and dark places to the one who can bring all things into new life. This is Holy Work, and for many of us it can take a few snoozes of the alarm and a few times of climbing back into bed to recognize and see clearly the goodness and freedom of living awake, alive, and free with Christ! Each and every day is another chance to throw off those covers and set those feet firmly on the floor. Let's look at some practical faithful shifts each of us can take to move towards living daily in the light of Christ.

1. **Feel instead of flee** - What do you reach for when you are overwhelmed? Is it doomscrolling, extra snacks, oversleeping, or overworking? The next time you crave "escape", pray and God to shine His light on what you are feeling inside, and why you crave that escape from it. Spend time sitting in that hard feeling, even if it's scary or painful. Ask God to fill you with His healing Spirit verses all the other destructive things we try to fill it with. Being present to feeling life instead of fleeing it will wake you up!
2. **Respond instead of react** - When a conflict arises, what is your "go to" reaction? Is it anger, judgement, justification, proving your point, OR is it hiding your feelings, allowing boundaries to be crossed, and saying "yes" just to avoid it? Instead of going with "autopilot" next time, pause to reflect & pray. Ask God to help you answer the questions - Is this loving or is this just relieving my anxiety? Is this loving or is this proving I'm right? Is this loving or am I reacting out of insecurity & fear? Is this loving or am I trying to assert dominance or control? Then take time to respond with Godly wisdom & love before reacting on instinct.
3. **Carry gratitude as a weapon** - When you find yourself complaining, comparing and feeling jealousy towards others this week, instead of tearing other's down, think of one thing you are thankful for. Spend time thanking God for what you have this week, BEFORE asking for what you want or need Him to provide. Daily celebrate the abundance you have in Christ.
4. **Put on Christ daily** - Write the armor of God verses in Eph 6 and put them somewhere you will see them each morning. As you get dressed in the morning visually imagine placing Christ's armor on your body. When you are tempted during the day, ask yourself "Does this help me to reflect light of Christ, or does it remove it?" Let your identity in Christ lead your behavior, not the other way around. Live each day because of whose you are, and follow His purpose and plan for you. Live a life sustained by daily exposure to the light through scripture, prayer, worship, generosity, and fellowship with other believers. Wake UP each and every morning to walk in the light!

INTEGRITY

Lent Week 2 | Awaken | 1 Thessalonians 5

I Thessalonians 5:4-24

But you, brothers and sisters, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief. You are all children of the light and children of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness. So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be awake and sober. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night. But since we belong to the day, let us be sober, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet. For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him. Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing. Now we ask you, brothers and sisters, to acknowledge those who work hard among you, who care for you in the Lord and who admonish you. Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work. Live in peace with each other. And we urge you, brothers and sisters, warn those who are idle and disruptive, encourage the disheartened, help the weak, be patient with everyone. Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always strive to do what is good for each other and for everyone else. Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. Do not quench the Spirit. Do not treat prophecies with contempt but test them all; hold on to what is good, reject every kind of evil. May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it.

Day 1 - Integrity is wholeness

What does it mean to live with integrity? A study by the University of Chicago found that characteristics of integrity include honesty, equitability & fairness, trustworthiness, and acting with respect & empathy toward oneself and others. Psychology today found that having integrity is linked to improved self-esteem, mental health stability, mature emotional regulation, and being able to cultivate & keep close relationships. This study also found that individuals with high levels of integrity also had high levels of empathy, and emotional intelligence. Living with integrity is quite literally good for you, and for those around you. It is more fully defined as being honest, whole hearted, and undivided in consistent adherence to your moral principles and values. Integrity can also be defined as the opposite of hypocrisy, or basically "practicing what you preach". When God calls us to live with integrity, He is calling us to live with wholeness, as an undivided spirit fully devoted to following Him.

In Paul's letter to the church in Thessalonica, he encourages them to continue living with Godly integrity. When Paul and Silas had to flee Thessalonica in Acts 17, they were fearful that the church may not continue in their absence. After sending Timothy to visit them, they were thankful to learn that the church was still thriving. This letter both encourages and reminds them of the life they are called to live in the Spirit, highlights the importance of their identity as children of the light, and give them guidelines for living with integrity through Christ.

This letter isn't meant to cast judgement, or to condemn those living in darkness, nor is it meant to be a checklist of rules for us to strive for in our own strength. It's meant to encourage & guide us to continue allowing the Spirit to "sanctify you through and through...for your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless". (vs.23). Living fully awake as a child of the light, with whole hearted, honest integrity is a life-long formational process from the inside out, not something that we are called to manufacture on our own.

- *Where in your life do you sense division in your spirit? Is there an area that you are living a double-life? Where do your outside actions not match your inner identity as a child of God? Pray and ask God to awaken your spirit to these divided spaces in your life as you seek wholeness in Him this week.*

Deeper Dive

Scripture to meditate on:

• 1 Thessalonians 5: 1-5 ~

Now, brothers and sisters, about times and dates we do not need to write to you, for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. While people are saying, "Peace and safety," destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. But you, brothers and sisters, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief. You are all children of the light and children of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness.

• Galatians 1:10 ~

Am I now trying to win the approval of human beings, or of God? Or am I trying to please people? If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a servant of Christ

• 2 Corinthians 5:17 ~

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come:^[a] The old has gone, the new is here!

• Romans 8: 17 ~

Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

Day 2 - Integrity begins with identity

If integrity is defined as living honestly, whole hearted, and undivided in spirit, then the first step is honestly knowing our identity. We see this in the first few verses as Paul emphasizes who we are in Christ before he calls us towards living a lifestyle of integrity, or wholeness of spirit. He firmly addresses identity before addressing behavior. Throughout scripture, and in Jesus' ministry, we see this same pattern in teaching. Knowing who we are, or being reminded of who we are, as children of God should inform how we live our lives as His faithful followers. Knowing that we are loved by God, made in the image of God, and children of God should inform our every decision from the inside out. Let's take a look at what this passage says about our identity in Christ.

1. **Brothers and sisters** - When reading scripture it's always good to ask yourself who the audience is, as it explains the context for which the passage was written. The term "Brothers and sisters" in the New Testament was for fellow believers, or church members. This passage is addressed to the church, with the purpose to encourage them to continue living faithfully & with integrity. It was not intended to be used to judge or condemn those still living in darkness outside the church. Instead, it should encourage us all, with urgency, to share the Good News with those that may still be spiritually asleep. Our identity as brothers and sisters in Christ reminds us that we are called to be different than the world around us. We don't need to live in the same fear that the world does because we have salvation in Christ. *Ask Yourself ~ Do you live in fear or anxiety about any areas of your life? Are there ways that fear or anxiety causes you to reach for worldly things to make yourself feel better? What would it mean to live whole heartedly, knowing that you are a brother and sister in Christ?*
2. **Children of the light, or of the day** - When Paul talks about the Lord coming like "a thief in the night", a thief wouldn't exactly be a welcome surprise. In fact, having a thief break into your house at night would be a terrifying experience that we wouldn't want to go through. Paul is saying that those still in darkness will experience the Lord's coming in this way. Once again, this should give us all a sense of urgency in sharing the good news with those still in darkness. This should also remind us that we should not live our lives in fear because we have salvation as children of the light. Salvation through faith in Christ is literally in our DNA as His dearly loved children. *Ask yourself ~ Do you live in fear of trying to please the world around you? Do you try to hide parts of yourself or cover them up with perfectionistic performance? What would it mean to live whole heartedly, knowing that you are a child of God, dearly loved, forgiven, and covered by His grace? How could living with this identity draw others to Christ?*

Deeper Dive

Scripture to meditate on:

- Matthew 23: 1-12** ~Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples: "The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. So you must be careful to do everything they tell you. do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach. They tie up heavy, cumbersome loads and put them on other people's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them. "Everything they do is done for people to see: They make their phylacteries[a] wide and the tassels on their garments long; they love the place of honor at banquets and the most important seats in the synagogues; they love to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces and to be called 'Rabbi' by others. "But you are not to be called 'Rabbi,' for you have one Teacher, and you are all brothers. And do not call anyone on earth 'father,' for you have one Father, and he is in heaven. Nor are you to be called instructors, for you have one Instructor, the Messiah. The greatest among you will be your servant. For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.

Day 3 - Integrity opposes hypocrisy

The opposite of living in honest whole hearted integrity is living in hypocrisy. The Bible speaks strongly against hypocrisy. The faith that we profess should be the same faith that we practice. This is what it means to live with a sober and clear conscience. Not only is this important for our own spiritual life and maturity in faith, it is also a witness for the world around us to see. This is why Paul talks about putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and salvation as our helmet (1 Thess 5:8). If you remember when he talks about the armor of God, the breastplate is our "righteousness". This is not self-righteousness, but righteousness that come from faith in Christ. Our faith and love for Him and others should be what protects us from falling back into darkness. The helmet would be for protection, and also to show the soldier's rank, or identity. Our identity is that we are sinners, saved by His grace, acknowledging our need for His salvation. Living with integrity means that we are living honestly and authentically as followers of Christ, knowingly saved by His grace. His Spirit working inside of us should shine outward with integrity.

A study was recently conducted on those that chose to leave the church over the last few years. The study cited that 70% of those that have walked away from faith, and potentially back into darkness, chose to leave over hypocrisy. They felt that the teachings of Jesus were in contrast to ways that church leaders or members acted and lived. This is certainly not new, and Jesus boldly rebuked the religious hypocrites of His day. We all remember the scene of Jesus flipping tables due to the church taking advantage of the poor and marginalized.

Throughout the gospels Jesus shared parables and teachings that often revealed the hypocritical contrast between the church's claim to follow God, and their failed human attempts at self-righteousness and judgmental condemnation. He exposed their hypocrisy in bold and dramatic ways throughout His ministry.

Before you get judgmental yourself, and start thinking of all the failed church leaders you've heard of, or the churches that have fallen into hypocrisy, let's pause. It's important for our own spiritual awakening & growth to ask ourselves if there are some hypocritical areas in our own lives may need healing as well. Even the fact that some of us were getting ready to judge someone for judging is a starting place. Sometimes we have to allow Christ to flip some tables in our own hearts, no matter how painful that may be, before we can begin to move towards living with integrity.

- *Take some time today to read the rest of Matthew 23. Read verse by verse (all the "woes") and ask yourself if you have any tendencies of living a double life like this too? Prayerfully ask the Spirit to soften your heart to see clearly with a sober mind. Be honest, and prayerfully ask for His forgiveness and healing today.*

Deeper Dive

Scripture for today's study time:

• 1 Thessalonians 5:12-27

~Now we ask you, brothers and sisters, to acknowledge those who work hard among you, who care for you in the Lord and who admonish you. Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work. Live in peace with each other. And we urge you, brothers and sisters, warn those who are idle and disruptive, encourage the disheartened, help the weak, be patient with everyone. Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always strive to do what is good for each other and for everyone else. Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. Do not quench the Spirit. Do not treat prophecies with contempt but test them all; hold on to what is good, reject every kind of evil. May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it. Brothers and sisters, pray for us. Greet all God's people with a holy kiss. I charge you before the Lord to have this letter read to all the brothers and sisters. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

Day 4 - Integrity shows up in ordinary obedience

Living with integrity and having a wholeness to your spirit may sound complex, however, it is truly just following God in ordinary everyday consistent obedience. 1 Thessalonians 5 includes a practical guideline as a reminder to live in obedience to Him. Of course, we need the guidance of the Holy Spirit to be able to discern with wisdom and integrity in all of these situations.

- **Honoring our faith leaders** - Our faith leaders should be held with high regard, respect and love because they have been called by God to teach and guide us in our faith. Of course, this doesn't mean that we shouldn't be discerning (see the last bullet for today's study). *Ask yourself ~ Have you found yourself being extra critical of your church leaders, or the ways that they do the work God has called them to? Have you gossiped or slandered them in any way?*
- **Protecting our peace** - We are called to live at peace with those around us, and in the body of Christ. The believers that create disruptions to peace in the body should be held accountable with love and restoration. When we avoid accountability to avoid conflict, it is only counterfeit peace. *Ask yourself ~ Do you create peace in your relationships with others? Instead of communicating directly, have you been prone to gossip or slander others? Is there someone that you need to reach out to restore in relationship today?*
- **Encouraging the weak** - We are called to encourage those that are disheartened, or weak in faith, and to be patient with them. Instead of reacting in judgement for those that are weaker in their faith, we are called to encourage and lift them up. *Ask yourself ~ Are you an encouragement to those that you are in relationship with? Or do you find yourself judging others to make yourself feel better? Are you patient with those that aren't as far in their faith journey?*
- **Let go of offense** - We are called to do good to others unconditionally. Just as Christ does for us, we should love and care for each other no matter the circumstances. This does not mean that we shouldn't have healthy boundaries. However, it does mean that we shouldn't seek to get "revenge" for their offense, or stop desiring goodness in their life. *Ask yourself ~ Are there situations that I need to let go of? Are there situations that I'm trying to seek revenge instead of loving reconciliation?*
- **Question teaching** - God gives us His Holy Spirit to help us to discern His teaching. False teaching is just as prevalent now as it was during the time that Paul wrote this letter. It's important to prayerfully consider what you are watching, hearing or reading. If the teaching goes against the Word of God, it should be avoided as evil. *Consider the media and teaching you absorb, are there any voices that are becoming stronger than the Word of God in your life?*

Deeper Dive

Scripture for today's study time:

- **1 Thessalonians 5: 23-27**

~May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it. Brothers and sisters, pray for us. Greet all God's people with a holy kiss. I charge you before the Lord to have this letter read to all the brothers and sisters.

- **Hebrews 4:13** ~Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

- **Romans 12:2** ~Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will

- **James 1:22** ~Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.

- **Hebrews 3: 12-13** ~See to it, brothers and sisters, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called "Today," so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness.

Day 5 - Integrity is formed

Awakening to living with whole hearted integrity is a life long formational journey. It is daily putting on your armor and awakening your spirit, soul, mind, and body to following Him. It is daily surrendering to ordinary obedience in every detail of your life. Integrity is faithfully living with an undivided alignment with the Spirit as expressed through your choices and the rhythms in your life. As Paul writes at the end of this letter, God will "sanctify you through and through" so that you may be "kept blameless" when the Lord comes again. There is hope in the Good News journey of spiritual formation, and awakening in our lives.

These next few weeks as we pray about awakening in our own lives and in the lives of our brothers and sisters in Christ. Let's take a look at some very practical daily formational steps to living a life of integrity in Christ.

1. **SPIRIT: Surrender** - Start your morning with naming honestly where you are, not where you wish you were. Resist the urge to sound super spiritual during this prayer. Just be raw and honest. Spoiler: He already knows the whole messy truth!
2. **SOUL: Align with His truth** - Throughout your day notice your inner dialogue. Especially when you are tired, stressed or triggered because integrity starts from the inside out. Replace self accusation, lies from the enemy, guilt or shame, anxiety or turmoil with God's truths and promises. For example, when you tell yourself "I'm failing", quickly replace it with "God is faithful to complete His work in me". You may want to keep a journal of your self-talk to pray over at the end of the day. Allow His Spirit to help you process His truth over your soul.
3. **WHOLE SELF: Practice integrity in choices** - Integrity isn't proven in big moments, often it's revealed in small consistent daily choices. Before responding or making a decision, ask yourself ~ Is this choice consistent with who God is forming me to be? Am I saying yes out of love, or out of anxiety and pressure? Seek the TRUE motivation behind the decision.
4. **BLAMELESS: Confess quickly** - When you notice misalignment, don't hide or justify, give it over to the Lord quickly. It doesn't need to be perfect and all figured out, just bring it into the light and trust Him to give you the grace & truth to move forward.
5. **BROTHERS AND SISTERS: Community keeps us awake** - Integrity deepens in trusted, safe, accountable relationships, not in isolation. We need to have safe spaces, and safe people in our community of believers to share our struggles, hold us accountable, and to lift us up in prayer and encouragement. This is KEY to staying consistent in this formational lifelong journey, **5**

GENEROSITY

Lent Week 3 | Awaken | 2 Corinthians 9: 6-11

2 Corinthians 9: 6-11

Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to bless you abundantly, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. As it is written: "They have freely scattered their gifts to the poor; their righteousness endures forever." Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. You will be enriched in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.

Day 1 - Awakening reveals God's nature

Part of waking up is realizing that everything we have is a gift, and not an achievement that we could ever have earned on our own. When we awaken to God's Spirit in us, then we begin to see clearly who God is, and understand more fully the generosity of His nature. God is not only our creator, but He is our provider of all that we have, or ever will have. His provision is a gift that is freely given, and not earned. God provides for us because of who He is and His great love for us. Even in our sin & shame, as in Genesis 3:21, it says that God provided Adam and Eve clothes and coverings for their bodies. God loves us enough to provide for us, even if it's to cover our sin and shame.

Throughout scripture we see that God's nature of lavish generosity is unchanging. In the Old Testament in Deuteronomy 8:18, Moses tells the people, "But remember that it is the Lord your God who gives you the power to gain wealth, in order to confirm His covenant that He swore to your fathers, as it is today." Then in the New Testament, James 1:17 says "Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, with whom there is no change or shifting shadow." Over and over in the Bible we can read of God's miraculous provision for His people.

While God is the provider of our physical needs like food, water, safe passage, or rescue, He is also the provider of our greater spiritual and eternal needs. In the familiar passage, John 3:16, it says "For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that everyone who believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life." God gave His only son, part of Himself, as a Holy Sacrifice for our salvation and the forgiveness of our sin. Then in John 14:16, Jesus promises "And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever— the Spirit of truth." God gives us His Holy Spirit to dwell within us to guide us, advocate on our behalf, and to teach us to follow Him. In the end it says that God is preparing a place for us, an eternal home and resting place for us, to be with Him forever (John 14:1-3).

- Take time today to list at least 5 things that God has given you, that you could not have earned. Spend time thanking Him for each one, but more importantly thanking Him for WHO He is as your good giver and provider of all that you have.

Deeper Dive

Scripture to meditate on:

• **Isaiah 55:1-3** ~“Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and you will delight in the richest of fare. Give ear and come to me; listen, that you may live. I will make an everlasting covenant with you, my faithful love promised to David.

• **Matthew 6: 19-21; 31-34**
~“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

~So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

Day 2 - Awakening > “MINE!”

From the time we are barely able to speak, we quickly learn the word, “MINE”! It’s not something that we really have to teach kids to understand. Most specialists agree that it is a natural developmental milestone. This is the age when we start to understand possession and personal identity. These are not necessarily bad things, however, in our toddler years we are naturally egocentric, territorial, and highly emotional beings. We don’t have to learn these traits unfortunately, they just come to us naturally as we enter our “terrible twos” phase of life. Of course as we grow and mature, we are hopefully taught to share, to be generous, and to cooperate with others. These are learned traits, and learned traits take lots of practice, as any parent of a strong willed toddler will attest.

As adults, we might not roll on the floor of Walmart screaming for a cookie. However we might have an internal tantrum when we want something we can’t have, we feel like someone else has more than us, we have to wait for something, or when we fear that we don’t have enough. A quick glance at grocery shelves before a snow storm will show us exactly what our adult tantrums can do. We justify our selfish, greediness and scarcity mindset as wise stewardship, or as protecting our families. This is exactly what believing the lie of scarcity can do. Scarcity says I don’t have enough, I’m not going to have enough and I certainly don’t have enough to share. Scarcity screams MINE!!!

Awakening to life with the Spirit, we begin learning to trust that we have more than enough because HE is more than enough. In Philippians 4:19 it says “And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus.”, and in Ephesians 4:20 it says “Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us”. The more we know WHO God is, read in His word, understand His promises, and trust in His provision and faithfulness, the more we can begin to let go of our “MINE” toddler tantrums. Awakening teaches us that God’s provision is not fragile, it does not need to be stockpiled, and it is not characterized by fear. God’s provision is generous, good, steady, consistent, and always exactly what we need, exactly when we need it.

Scarcity and fear can dangerously lull you back to sleep. Just as we needed practice sharing and generosity as toddlers, we need to continue practicing generosity as adults. Generosity built on trust in God keeps us AWAKE to His Spirit. We can’t trust in God’s provision without letting go of the lies of scarcity in our lives.

• *What are you hoarding? When are you screaming MINE? Is it with your time, energy, money, emotional bandwidth, or even worldly possessions? What are you holding onto for fear of not having enough? What would it look like to go from MINE to HIS?*

Deeper Dive

Scripture to meditate on:

- Luke 19: 1-10** ~ Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy. He wanted to see who Jesus was, but because he was short he could not see over the crowd. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way. When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today." So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly. All the people saw this and began to mutter, "He has gone to be the guest of a sinner." But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount." Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."

Day 3 - Awakened generosity restores

If you grew up in Sunday School you probably remember singing the song about Zacchaeus who climbed up in a sycamore tree. What you might not have learned is that Zacchaeus' profession would probably be considered a thief today. Tax collecting in Jesus' time wasn't like the IRS, it involved stealing from the poor in order to make an income. Of course Luke goes a step further to note that Zacchaeus was a wealthy "chief tax collector". This tells us that not only was he a thief, but he was a successful leader of the thieves.

What does Jesus do when He encounters this sinful man? Does Jesus rebuke his sinful life, his lack of generosity, or his greed? No, instead Jesus says "come down" I want to be with you. Jesus meets Zacchaeus where he is, accepts and loves him, showers him with mercy and grace, and seeks to restore him. This is truly a dramatic awakening encounter with the Lord. When God displayed His generosity through His abundant love, forgiveness, and grace, Zacchaeus awakens! Zacchaeus' immediate response is generosity as he exclaims, "Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount." At this moment, Jesus knew that Zacchaeus had accepted the generous gift of restoration as He proclaimed salvation over him. True awakening produces the fruit of generosity!

Generosity is a spiritual fruit. It is an outpouring of the Holy Spirit already working inside of us. Godly generosity isn't just about meeting a need, it is about Holy restoration. As we learn to follow Jesus and become more like Him, we learn that Jesus' purpose in being generous was never just to give someone a piece of bread, a bite of fish, or even to heal their bodies. Jesus' purpose was to restore and awaken their souls to salvation! Jesus had compassion on the crowd of 5,000+ in Mark 6 because "they were like sheep without a shepherd" not because they were physically hungry. His goal wasn't just to feed their earthly bodies in a miraculous way, it was to teach them about the bread of life so that they would never be hungry again. This is exactly the type of Godly generosity that we are called to have in our lives as well. Our generosity shouldn't be performative, or only because someone asks or has a specific need, and it shouldn't be because your church has proved the worthiness of a specific cause for you to give to. Godly generosity should be without limit, abundant, lavish, and a bold outpouring of the Spirit at work inside of us. Generosity should explode from our lips just like Zacchaeus as our hearts and souls are awakened!

- Where do you need to awaken to the generosity of God, so that you can experience the exploding abundant fruit of generosity that the Holy Spirit wants to pour out through you?*
- Where is Jesus inviting you to care more about restoring than donating? How can you be generous relationally and materially?*

Deeper Dive

Scripture for today's study time:

- Jeremiah 17: 5-8** ~Cursed is the one who trusts in man, who draws strength from mere flesh and whose heart turns away from the Lord. That person will be like a bush in the wastelands; they will not see prosperity when it comes. They will dwell in the parched places of the desert, in a salt land where no one lives. "But blessed is the one who trusts in the Lord, whose confidence is in him. They will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream. It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green. It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit."
- Matthew 6: 1-4** ~"Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven. "So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you."

Day 4 - Awakened generosity is unconditional

Let's take a moment to reflect on the ways that the world expresses generosity. It's not quiet, it's not unconditional, and it almost always has strings attached. Often there is a motive of pride or reciprocity that gets justified by doing this seemingly good thing. It's easy to spot when an act of generosity has a hidden purpose of seeking validation or praise, requires a reciprocal "thank you", keeps score, or has some form of conditions attached. This is counterfeit generosity, and at its core it's focused on selfishly serving the giver. This type of generosity can dangerously lull us back to sleep, thinking that we are doing good things on our own, while actually serving ourselves instead of God. This will never lead to the abundant joy, unlimited provision and restoration that the generosity through the power of Christ promises. As it says in these verses in Jeremiah, trusting in our own strength will lead us to burnout and spiritual dryness or death. In contrast, trusting in the Lord, and acting in His strength awakens us to life "like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream. It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green. It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit". This is living the awakened life.

When we give generously without reciprocity we reflect the heart of Jesus and demonstrate our faith in God's provision. Just as Jesus calls us to in Matthew 6, "Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them". This form of generosity is an outward expression of the abundant, generous love and kindness that Jesus has shown to each of us. As it says in Mark 10:45 "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many". Jesus freely gave to the point of sacrificing everything for us. Awakening to what He has done for us gives us the perfect example of sacrificial generosity.

Awakening to unconditional generosity is also a demonstration of our faith in God's provision for us. To give without needing or expecting a return, we have to surrender our fears about having enough and accept that God will take care of our needs. Trusting God allows us to give freely, and without reservation, because we know that God is our provider. Just as it says in Philippians 4:19 "And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus." We can never out-give God!

- Are you attempting to do generous things, to prove your worthiness to others or to earn something in return? Are you acting generous to receive validation or recognition?*
- Have you ever become angry or bitter when someone didn't seem "thankful" when you were generous towards them? Have you been tempted to keep score when it comes to giving time, money, hospitality, or even grace & forgiveness to others in your life?*

Deeper Dive

Scripture for today's study time:

- **Ephesians 5: 15-16** ~Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil.
- **Luke 16:10** ~“Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much.
- **Hebrew 13:10** ~Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it.
- **Proverbs 11: 24-25** ~One person gives freely, yet gains even more; another withholds unduly, but comes to poverty. A generous person will prosper; whoever refreshes others will be refreshed.
- **Romans 12:13** ~Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality.
- **James 1:22** ~Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.
- **Psalms 24:1** ~The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it

Day 5 - Awakening makes generosity a lifestyle

When we awaken to the Holy Spirit in us, our generosity becomes more than an occasional act or a one-time emotional response.

Instead of having moments of generosity, we embody a rhythm of generosity in our lives. Living with a generous lifestyle mirrors the generous nature of God Himself living in us. As it says in 2 Corinthians 9, “Each one should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not out of regret or compulsion. For God loves a cheerful giver.” This verse expresses the importance of intentional and joyful giving, free from obligation or guilt. This is not a “try harder” type of generosity, this is generosity coming from a life that is rooted and grounded in the generous love of Christ. Let's take a look at some practical ways to live out a generous life.

1. **Create margin** ~ You can't live generously if you are maxed out. With your finances leave a “generosity buffer” to allow for the Spirit to lead you towards Spirit lead giving each month. With your time leave space in your calendar each day for those “divine interruptions” and ask the Spirit to bring people and opportunities into those spaces that you have created.
2. **Obey quiet promptings** ~ Prayerfully be in tune with the Spirit throughout your day. When you feel the nudge to send an encouraging text, share a meal with someone, or to give financially to someone, DO IT!! Generosity grows through practicing obedience to the Spirit. Don't overthink it, it doesn't have to be perfect, just say YES to the Spirit's quiet promptings.
3. **Have a messy gathering** ~ Practice generous hospitality without perfection. Invite people into a messy house, simple food, and authentic honest conversation. Generosity isn't about impressing others, receiving praise for your amazing home or meal, and it's not about putting the spotlight on yourself. Generosity is about welcoming others unconditionally. What better way to mirror that than to invite them into your everyday life with love and acceptance.
4. **Share what you have** ~ Be generous with what you already have in your hands, not what you wish you had. Awakened generosity trusts that God will multiply what we release to Him, not what we hoard. No matter what, we all have something to give. Maybe it's a listening ear, presence, skills, or resources. Just like we learned in those toddler years, share! Truly it was never really ours in the first place.
5. **Let generosity be your worship** ~ Generosity is a form of worship to the Lord. Before you give this week, spend time in prayer and ask God to accept this gift as an act of Holy Worship reflecting your thankfulness and worship for who He is!

PEACEMAKERS

Lent Week 4 | Awaken | Galatians 6: 1-10

Galatians 6: 1-10

Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently. But watch yourselves, or you also may be tempted. Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. If anyone thinks they are something when they are not, they deceive themselves. Each one should test their own actions. Then they can take pride in themselves alone, without comparing themselves to someone else, for each one should carry their own load. Nevertheless, the one who receives instruction in the word should share all good things with their instructor. Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. Whoever sows to please their flesh, from the flesh will reap destruction; whoever sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.

Day 1 - Peace Keeping vs. Peace Making

Unless we live on an island by ourselves, we will all experience conflict and disagreement in our lives. In fact, we have probably all experienced broken relationships due to pride, selfishness, unforgiveness, fear, distrust, bitterness, revenge, and resentment. Some of us may have experienced so much brokenness and dysfunction, that it feels familiar and falsely safe, or expected. This is certainly not what God intended when He calls us to live as peacemakers in Christ.

On the other hand, you may have heard someone say "oh, we never fight". Of course, we might roll our eyes, knowing the reality is "we haven't fought YET". On a more serious note, this might be a red-flag that they are "peace keeping" on their own instead of "peacemaking" through the power of the Spirit. Peace keeping can initially look like outward peace. However, it's often stemming from an avoidance of conflict or accountability in the name of suppressing tension at all costs. This can lead to dishonesty, people pleasing, unhealthy boundaries, abuse, resentment, passive aggressiveness, stress, and anxiety. Once again, this is not what God intended when He calls us to be peacemakers. Peace keeping is an outward facade, or counterfeit peace at best.

When we look at Christ's example as the Prince of Peace, we see that His peacemaking was not silent and His life was not without conflict. Through Him we can learn how to face conflict as peacemakers. Jesus doesn't say blessed are those that avoid conflict or accountability, and He doesn't say blessed are those that seek to stir up conflict. Instead He says In Matthew 5:9, "Blessed are the peacemakers". Instead of protecting comfort, avoiding hard conversations, or pridefully proving our point, Jesus calls us to focus our hearts on truth, love, healing and restoration. Through His Spirit we can accept responsibility for any wrongdoing, experience forgiveness, stand in truth, and face conflict with a heart positioned towards healing and restoration.

- *What relationships feel tense, bitter, unresolved, or broken in your life right now? Have you lost hope or become comfortable in the brokenness?*
- *Are there areas that you are people pleasing or avoiding accountability in the name of keeping peace? What would it look like to surrender these situations to the Lord this week?*

Deeper Dive

Scripture to meditate on:

- **Romans 12: 17-21** ~Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. On the contrary: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.
- **Genesis 3: 8-12** ~Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden. But the Lord God called to the man, "Where are you?" He answered, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid." And he said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?" The man said, "The woman you put here with me— she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it." Then the Lord God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate."

Day 2 - Seeking peace on our own

From the beginning, after the very first sin, Adam and Eve experienced broken peace. Sin created a chasm between God, man, and even between each other. Their first reaction was to keep the peace by hiding and attempting to cover it up themselves. As crazy as this seems, to attempt hiding from God, don't we often do the same? Whether it's brokenness with others, inside ourselves, or between us and God, we try to keep our own peace in a multitude of ways.

- **We try to get even** ~ Revenge can be a subtle passive aggressive jab or a joke with a little too much truth to it, or it can be bold wildly destructive schemes. Either way, hurting someone who hurt you is only temporary peace. That short-lived moment that you may feel justified will fade quickly and your vengeful actions most likely made the chasm to peace even farther away. In Romans 12 God calls us to surrender any judgement or wrath to Him, and to trust Him to rebuke the evil around us. *Ask yourself ~ Are there areas where you need to trust God with His protection and justice? Are there areas that you have sought revenge or are harboring resentment? Do you need to ask for His forgiveness and surrender to Him this week?*
- **We self-defend** ~ It's easy to get defensive when a conflict arises. When you feel yourself digging your heels in, this should be a red flag that you are attempting to keep peace on your own. Temporarily you might feel like your self-defense is justified or that you need to prove your point, however, being prideful or self-righteous doesn't bring Godly peace. When we are focused on protecting ourselves, our eyes are not on the Spirit. We are called to put on His armor and trust God as our protector, refuge, and strength. When we become self-defensive we are putting ourselves in the place of God. *Ask yourself ~ Where have you relied on your own self-defense or self-righteousness this week? What would it look like to prayerfully put on the armor of God and allow Him to be your refuge & strength?*
- **We blame** ~ In the garden, after God confronts Adam and Eve, the blame game begins! Adam quickly blames Eve, then he even blames God for creating Eve, and then Eve blames the serpent. We can easily get caught up in this elaborate game to attempt restoring peace, or justifying ourselves. However, when we awaken to the Spirit, and allow His light to shine on our dark places, the first step in healing is accepting responsibility for our own role in the conflict or broken peace. We have to surrender our mistakes and broken parts to Him in order to receive His grace, forgiveness, and reconciliation. *Ask yourself ~ Where are you playing the blame game? Are you using it to hide or mask areas that you need to surrender? Prayerfully ask the Lord to shine His light on your dark places this week.*

Deeper Dive

- **Proverbs 21:29** ~The wicked put up a bold front, but the upright give thought to their ways.
- **2 Corinthians 12:9-10** ~But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.
- **Galatians 1:10** ~Am I now trying to win the approval of human beings, or of God? Or am I trying to please people? If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a servant of Christ.
- **Ephesians 6:7** ~Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not people
- **John 16:33** ~"I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."
- **Philippians 4:11-13** ~I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do all this through him who gives me strength.

Day 3 - Peace when it's not "FINE"

Many times our peace keeper nature is revealed when it's "not fine". *Prayerfully ask yourself which of these counterfeit peace keeper methods you have used in your life, and ask God to meet you there.*

- **"Fake it til I make it" Peace-Keeper** ~ How many times have you said "It's fine" when it's anything but fine? Why do we hide behind a fake smile and say "It's ok"? We've all been there. Of course, "faking it" never lasts. Anything we try in our own strength is temporary. Eventually, the reality of our broken peace will bubble out in all sorts of destructive ways, whether we like it or not. Stress, anxiety, anger, fear, depression, and all sorts of struggles stem from trying to mask or hide our inner struggles. **READ: 2 Corinthians 12: 9-10, Proverbs 21:29**
- **Co-dependent Peace-Keeper** ~ Especially in our close relationships, we can be tempted to rest our peace on the shoulders of others. Allowing our peace to rely on anything else but God will surely lead to brokenness. Asking someone else to be your peace-keeper is placing them unfairly in the seat of God in your life. They were never created to be in that role, and they are sure to fail. When your peace is controlled by others you begin to attempt peace keeping by enabling, people pleasing, over-functioning or under-functioning, co-dependency, and allowing for unhealthy boundaries in your life. You were created with a need for an unconditional "no strings attached" Godly peace, and no human will ever be able to live up to that. **READ: Galatians 1:10, Ephesians 6:7**
- **Successful Peace-Keeper** ~ Peace keeping based on life's circumstances is sure to shatter. Some of us have had more circumstantial peace than others, but no one has a life without struggle. We tend to use this form of peace keeping when things are going well and we feel successful in our own strength. Of course, this all falls apart when we lose our jobs, receive a devastating health diagnosis, or suddenly realize that achieving more doesn't actually bring us more peace. When we place God's blessings in the place of God in our lives, we are easily lulled back to a place of spiritual sleep. True peace can only be found in the presence of God, not in the blessings of God. **READ: John 16:33, Philippians 4:11-13**

Awakening to the fruit of God's peace in our lives doesn't come from peace keeping or pretending that it's fine when it's not. Godly peace doesn't come from perfection or lack of struggle. Godly peace comes from being awakened to His presence. Allowing His light to heal the broken places inside of us requires honesty, humility, confession, authenticity, and permission for it to not be okay. God in His Word never promises that life will be perfect, easy, or without conflict, instead He promises to never leave you and that He is always working for your good. When our peace comes from God, and His unfailing promises, then we can truly experience peace even when it's not "fine".

Deeper Dive

Scripture for today's study time:

- **Colossians 3:13** ~Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.
- **Matthew 5: 23-24**~
"Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift.
- **Ephesians 4:26-27** ~"In your anger do not sin": Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold.
- **John 2:23** ~But Jesus would not entrust himself to them, for he knew all people
- **Matthew 18: 21-22** ~
~Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?" Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times
- **Mark 11:25** ~And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive them, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins."

Day 4 - Forgiveness in Peacemaking

When peace is broken in our relationships, no matter whose fault, or whether it was intentional or unintentional, we have a choice. We can attempt all these destructive ways of keeping our own peace, or we can face the offense as the true peacemakers that Christ calls us to be. When trust is broken, or an offense has occurred, what does it look like to begin the process of forgiveness as a peacemaker?

1. **How many times?** ~ We all have situations where someone has wronged us, and sometimes it's a repeated offense. In Matthew 18: 21-22, Peter asks Jesus how many times he must forgive someone, and Jesus basically tells him that we are to forgive over and over again, just as Christ forgives us!
 2. **How important is it?** ~ In Matthew 5: 23-24 Jesus places reconciliation and forgiveness above worship and sacrifice to the Lord! He says to go reconcile with your neighbor FIRST before you complete the act of worshipping to the Lord.
 3. **How long should I wait?** ~ In Ephesians 4:26, it says not to let the sun go down on your anger for someone else, thus giving the enemy a foothold for bitterness. We are called to immediately (or as quickly as possible) forgive and let go of the offenses against us.
 4. **What does forgiveness require?** ~ Forgiveness, like love, is unconditional and non-negotiable. It is actually a command of God! Of course, forgiveness is not ignoring wrongdoing, accountability, or consequences, and it doesn't require restoration of the relationship. It simply means that you have surrendered the situation or person to the Lord. It frees you from the bitterness & sin in your life, regardless of what the other person's response is. Forgiveness does not require apology, it does not require restoration of trust, and it does not require repentance. Even if they are still sinning against you, we are still called to continue forgiving.
 5. **What about restoring trust?** ~ God's call for you to be a peacemaker is not at the expense being in an abusive or toxic situation. John 2:23 clearly tells us that even Jesus had those that he did not trust due to the character of their hearts. When trust has been broken, it needs to be proven, earned and restored with discernment from the Spirit. Often in especially egregious broken trust situations wise council or a therapist may need to help mediate this process and re-set those healthy boundaries.
- *Prayerfully spend time today asking the Lord to search your heart for those that you need to surrender to Him in forgiveness. Are there people or situations that you need to release?*
 - *Are there areas that you yourself need to repent and ask for forgiveness for?*

Deeper Dive

Scripture for today's study time:

- **2 Corinthians 5:17-21**

~"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

- **Matthew 5:9** ~Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

- **Galatians 5: 22-25** ~But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.

- **Isaiah 26:3** ~You will keep in perfect peace those whose minds are steadfast, because they trust in you.

Day 5 - Becoming Peacemakers

The first step in becoming a peacemaker is to be made into a new creation in Christ, as it says in 2 Corinthians 5:17-21. This is our AWAKENING!! The reconciliation that we have with God through Christ is the key to bridging the chasm created by Adam and Eve. Once we are reconciled to God, then we can experience the fruits of His Spirit as we awaken to His grace, mercy, love, forgiveness and peace in our lives. We can't be peacemakers, and we certainly can't forgive or face conflict in a healthy way, in our own strength.

As you read through these characteristics and behaviors of a peacemaker, prayerfully ask the Lord what would need to change in your own life for you to become a peacemaker too.

- **Character:** Peacemakers don't avoid conflict, however, they don't seek it or create it either. They are calm & self-controlled, embodying the fruits of the Spirit (*read Galatians 5:22-25*). They listen well, and share with Godly wisdom and grace. They bring peace to their own conflicts, and also serve as mediators for others in conflict. Peacemakers have hearts positioned towards unity and reconciliation. They trust God and keep their thoughts focused on following His guidance in the midst of conflict or disagreement.

- **Response to conflict:**

1. Forgiveness - Peacemakers forgive as an act of obedience to God. They release the bitterness and resentment quickly, freely and completely no matter what.
2. Seeking Reconciliation - Peacemakers work towards healing the relationship. They understand this requires repentance, honest accountability, and working towards the rebuilding of trust. Peacemakers know this process requires participation from others, is not always possible, and are willing to entrust those to the Lord.
3. Encouraging Spiritual Restoration - Beyond relational reconciliation, Peacemakers also encourage spiritual restoration with a spirit of gentleness and humility. Their heart is focused on restoring others to a right relationship with the Lord.

- **Ongoing sanctification:** Peacemakers daily walk with Christ on a continuous journey to become more like Him. This includes a healthy rhythm of spiritual practices such as reading in His Word, prayer, generosity, and fellowship with other believers. Peacemakers consistently seek to maintain a clear conscience with humility, regular confession, repentance, and forgiveness. They understand their peacemaking abilities depend on living as fully awakened in the Spirit of truth.

SHINE

Lent Week 5 | Awaken | Isaiah 60

Isaiah 60: 1-5

Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord rises upon you. See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples, but the Lord rises upon you and his glory appears over you. Nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn. Lift up your eyes and look about you: All assemble and come to you; your sons come from afar, and your daughters are carried on the hip. Then you will look and be radiant, your heart will throb and swell with joy; the wealth on the seas will be brought to you, to you the riches of the nations will come.

Day 1 - Called to shine

Ever struggle with how to tell your faith story? Maybe you grew up in church, did all the "right" things, and it just seems too boring or ordinary to make an impact. On the other hand, maybe you were freed from addiction or have a deeply painful past, and you feel shame or fear judgement from telling your story. The truth is, most of us are probably somewhere in the middle and we still struggle with when and how to share our story with others.

In Acts 1:8 Jesus says "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." This word used for witness in Greek is "martus" which eventually is turned into the modern day "martyr" as so many of the early Christians were killed for sharing their faith story. This word for witness literally means "to speak truth" as in a judicial court system. When Jesus told His followers in Acts 1 that they would be His witnesses to the end of the earth, He meant that they would literally tell their faith story as fully and honestly as they would in a court room, and that they would tell it everywhere they went. This may sound like a bit of an overwhelming command to many of us. However, let's pause and look at the first part of the verse. FIRST, Jesus says that the Holy Spirit would be coming to them. This is key!! We cannot live the life that Jesus calls us to without awakening to the power of the Holy Spirit working in our lives. We are not expected to be His witnesses, or to tell our stories, in our own strength.

This calling to be witnesses is used around 100 times throughout the Bible. It's used in a judicial sense, in the literal "eye witness" sense of sharing the movements of God, and it's also used in instances where the actual blood of those who died for their faith served as a witness to the depth of their faith. In Hebrews it's even used to speak about a "cloud of witnesses" that surround us and encourage us to endure in our faith journey. No matter your story, no matter the audience, and no matter the cost, you are called to be a witness for Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit.

- *What barriers have kept you from sharing your story in the past? What barriers are still keeping you from being a witness for Christ today?*

Deeper Dive

Scripture to meditate on:

- **Matthew 5:14** ~You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden.
- **Matthew 14:25-33** ~Shortly before dawn Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. "It's a ghost," they said, and cried out in fear. But Jesus immediately said to them: "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid." "Lord, if it's you," Peter replied, "tell me to come to you on the water." "Come," he said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!" Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. "You of little faith," he said, "why did you doubt?" And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. Then those who were in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."
- **John 21: 15-17** ~"Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?" "Yes, Lord," he said, "you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my lambs." Again Jesus said, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" He answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Take care of my sheep." The third time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?"

Day 2 - Redemption leads to shining

God calls each of us to be a witness for Him, to shine His light for others to see, and to share the Good News of what He has done for us. There will be amazing days when our light shines like a city on a hill as Jesus calls us to in Matthew 5:14. However, we will also have days when our light feels dim, life gets messy, you doubt, you stumble, and maybe you even deny having the light to begin with? What happens when you know you are called to shine, but you find yourself hiding under a rock in shame? We've all been there, and maybe you are there right now. Let's take a look at Peter's life as we consider how God can use even the dimly lit or dark parts of our stories for His glory.

Peter was called by Jesus as a simple blue collar fisherman, when he asked him to be a "fisher of man" in Matthew 4:19. Peter's journey gave him a front row seat to see Jesus teach, heal, perform miracles, calm storms, and even raise the dead. Peter had opportunities that we can only dream of as he literally walked, talked, ate, slept and prayed with the Word made flesh. Even with all of this incredible experiences, Peter had plenty of dimly lit moments just like we do.

- **Matthew 14** - Peter sees Jesus walking on the water and he boldly steps out of the boat to walk towards Jesus. However, he began to doubt & fear so he begins to sink. He went from this bright moment of faith, to a dimly lit moment of doubt and fear all in one instance. *BUT* Jesus saves him from the water with His love & grace and uses it to grow Peter's faith. *Do you have a "sinking" moment in your story? Did you go from bright overflowing faithfulness, to a dark place all in one moment? How did God pull you out of that place? How did He redeem that sinking moment in your story?*
- **John 21** - Peter's darkest moment of faith was denying Jesus not just once, but 3 times. Peter's fear lead him to fail at being a witness, a friend, and a follower the night before Jesus' death. *BUT* Jesus graciously goes to Peter after the resurrection and allows him to answer 3 times "do you love me?" Going even a step further, Jesus calls him to go and "feed his sheep" as a final redeeming act of calling Peter to be a witness for Christ. *Are you allowing a dark moment in your past to prevent you from accepting God's gift of grace and redemption? Are you letting past denial keep you from what God is calling you to do in order to be a witness for Him?*

Even with these dark moments in Peter's life, God used Peter as a witness and as a shining light to spread gospel far and wide. Peter's story, much like our own, should remind us that Jesus doesn't just use flawless people with flawless stories, He redeems even the darkest parts of our stories to use for His glory. Truthfully it's often the darkest parts that stand as such a powerful witness to the strength and faithfulness of the One who is able to redeem. *When you think about the darkest moments in your story, how has God shown you His grace and redemption? How could you share your story?*

Deeper Dive

• **2 Corinthians 4: 5-15** ~For what we preach is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of Christ. But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may also be revealed in our mortal body. So then, death is at work in us, but life is at work in you. It is written: "I believed; therefore I have spoken." Since we have that same spirit of faith, we also believe and therefore speak, because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus and present us with you to himself. All this is for your benefit, so that the grace that is reaching more and more people may cause thanksgiving to overflow to the glory of God.

Day 3 - Shining HIS light in weakness

As easy as it can be to let our mistakes and dimly lit moments stop us from sharing the Good News, we can also lose our focus and attempt to make our faith story about ourselves. It's important to remember that we don't create our own light, just as it says in Isaiah 60:1-3 "Arise, Shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord rises upon you". We reflect the glory of the Lord shining in us. God is the initiator of all things, including the light that is within us. Being a witness to His light and His glory isn't about self-promotion or proving our spiritual performance, it's about resting in God's glory and allowing His light to shine through us.

We can see this throughout scripture as we may be tempted to take the credit for our journey. In 2 Corinthians 4, Paul speaks about the great treasure of God's glory that we carry in our weak and fragile jars of clay. The fact that we are weak human vessels of clay doesn't make the light dim, it only reveals that the source of our light is not our own. This scripture reminds us that the gospel shines the brightest through humble, ordinary, fragile people. Later in this letter to the Corinthians Paul writes, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness". Imagine our bodies as clay jars with cracks all over as we all have weaknesses and struggles. What happens when you put a bright light inside of a cracked jar? Those cracks become the space for the light to spill out. The areas where we struggle most are the exact areas that God's light can shine the brightest for others to see.

When God calls us to shine a light for His Glory, and to be a witness for His power and goodness, it's not about you. Spoiler - YOU are NOT the main character of your story!! It isn't about hiding our cracks, flaws, and our limited humanity so that we appear self-righteously Holy. It's about pointing beyond ourselves to His light. It's about saying "see this big crack in my jar", look how I've struggled with addiction, with selfishness, with dishonest, with lust, whatever it might be. Now, let me tell you about my savior. Let me tell you how He redeemed this in me, and how He continues to heal. None of us can boast about our story, because we aren't our own saviors. It's only because of God's love and grace that we are saved from all our mess.

- *Take time today to begin writing out your faith journey, including those cracked and broken spaces you struggled with. Then list the ways that God has worked in your life to redeem and restore you.*
- *Are there others in your life that could be blessed by hearing your full story, cracks and all?*
- *Are there situations that you could point to God, instead of your own strength? Have there been times that you have been tempted to put yourself in the spotlight of your story, instead of giving God the Glory? Prayerfully give that over to the Lord today.*

Deeper Dive

Scripture for today's study time:

- **Isaiah 43:10** ~"You are my witnesses," declares the Lord, "and my servant whom I have chosen, so that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he. Before me no god was formed, nor will there be one after me.
- **Proverbs 4:18** ~"The path of the righteous is like the morning sun, shining ever brighter till the full light of day.
- **1 Peter 2:9** ~But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.
- **John 17: 15-17** ~My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth.
- **John 1: 4-9** ~In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. There was a man sent from God whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe. He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light. The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world.

Day 4 - Hide it under a bushel, NO!

Many of us remember the children's song "this little light of mine, I'm going to let it shine, hide it under a bushel - NO!!". We screamed this as kids, but as adults that "no" can turn into a question or a situational decision. Shining your light can be an intimidating and vulnerable calling. What if they reject it? What if they get upset? What if I offend someone? What if I lose a friend, a job, social status, a family member or a relationship with a neighbor by sharing? There are so many fears we face when we think about sharing our faith with those around us. This can lead us to some serious pitfalls.

1. **COMFORT:** Light forgets it's mission when it chooses comfort over calling. We can be tempted to insulate our light among other light bearers. When we live in an echo chamber we don't have to know WHY we believe what we believe. It's comfortable and easy. We can get lazy in our faith, feel immune to temptation, lose our humility, begin to judge those outside of our huddle, and begin to feel that we are "better than" while we sit complacently in our well lit "comfort zone".
 2. **PROTECTION:** We turn our lamps inward to protect them from being blown out. Jesus knew His light couldn't be snuffed out, no matter who He spent time with. In John 17:15-17 Jesus speaks about being IN the world, but not OF the world. He ate with, welcomed, served, healed, feed and loved those that were in darkness. He wasn't afraid to shine His light in the darkest of places. When God is truly the source of your light, then you know that no one can take that away from you. However, if we are depending on self-righteousness, false spiritual superiority, or depending on our own perfection, then that is standing on shaky ground.
 3. **COMPETITION:** We create well lit spiritual seeming alternatives to "compete" with the darkness. Darkness only multiplies when we do this, as competition almost always strengthens opposition. As children of the light, God never calls us to compete with or battle the darkness. The battle is the Lord's and He's already victorious. Fighting or defending the light isn't necessary and it isn't our role. We are called to be present and shine in the darkness, not to be absent from it, or fight against it. We aren't meant to build a culture, but to shine within and through cultures around us.
- *Are you turning your light inward, fearfully huddling together, judging the darkness in the world, or attempting to compete with or battle the darkness? Which of these are you most tempted to do with your light?*
 - *What would help you to turn your light outward like Jesus, and to be IN the world and not OF it?*

Deeper Dive

Scripture for today's study time:

- **John 8:12** ~I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.
- **Romans 10: 13-15**
~"Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!"
- **Acts 26:18** ~to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.
- **1 John 1: 3; 5-7** ~We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.

God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.

Day 5 - Be a light

Living awakened means we are consistently shining as a witness to God's goodness, allowing the redemption of our weaknesses to glorify God, and positioning ourselves as a city on a hill shining brightly without fear for all to see. When we do this, we get a front row seat to watch the Spirit move, and we have the chance to be a part of someone else's story as they welcome in the light!

How do we get there? How do we even begin the conversation?

1. **Praise HIM when He's shining through!** - When you are walking through a tough season, and you get asked questions like: How are you staying so strong through this? How could you forgive them? How did you overcome that? Why are you so calm right now? The Spirit often shines the brightest when we are going through struggles. When someone sees His light shining through our cracked clay, NAME IT!! That's a wide open opportunity to speak His name, and to give Him the glory! Don't hesitate, praise Him in that moment. Be a witness to His goodness.
2. **Look for the "Divine interruptions"** - Jesus often had "divine interruptions" throughout His ministry. Someone touching His hem, a woman at the well, the crowds following Him everywhere He went. Jesus always had the "margin" in His schedule to stop, show compassion, and intentionally shine His light into their darkness. The next time someone at your kids soccer game starts to share their life struggles, a co-worker seems upset and you get a nudge to check on them, your waitress is having a rough night, or maybe a friend texts with a whole lotta drama. It could be an opportunity to listen, love them with a heart of compassion, and to pour the light of Jesus into their situation.
3. **Look for broken clay connections** - God can use our cracked clay, struggles, weaknesses, our heartache and trials for His good purposes. Often God will place people in our lives that are walking through the muddy mess that we just got rescued from. This isn't by accident, God has a plan and a purpose for everything. Our story gives us a voice that others can't have in their life, because we have been in their shoes. Instead of hiding from your past darkness, use your survival story to encourage others to have hope. Allow God to redeem your past darkness by using it to shine the light that you wish you had in that moment. Your salvation story has redeeming POWER!!

God often uses the hard parts of our stories to shape us in order for His good parts to make us who we are.

- *Where could you shine His light, to be a witness for all that He has done for you, and to give Him ALL the glory?*

MISSION

Lent Week 6 | Awaken | Micah 6:8, Ephesians 5

Micah 6:8

He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.

Ephesians 5:1-2

Follow God's example, therefore, as dearly loved children and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

During the time of Micah, Israel was ruled by the wealthy religious elite with their oppressive rules, rituals and power over the poor and vulnerable. There was great political instability, fear, oppression of the vulnerable, social inequality, and corruption among the leaders. God was making it clear through Micah that He doesn't want their self-righteous performance, instead He wants their hearts to be more like His. Micah speaks out against the social injustice and oppression of the poor and marginalized of their time.

Day 1 - Rediscovering our mission

True awakening happens when we stop performing religion for God, roll up our sleeves, and put action to faith by serving. Micah 6 was written at a time when the religious elite were self-righteously performing, while they were neglecting the vulnerable and oppressed all around them. God is much less concerned by religious practice, and much more interested in your heart towards him and serving others. In these verses God tells us exactly what He requires for us to do, "act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly". These instructions are meant to be done together, because justice without love is harsh, love without justice is empty emotion, and either one without humility is self-righteous and judgmental.

- **ACT JUSTLY** - Justice is God's love in action. We are called to defend the vulnerable & oppressed, refuse favoritism, and to live with honor & integrity. It's the "golden rule" of treating others the way we would want to be treated. Sometimes we see injustice in small ways like gossip, exclusion, or manipulation, and sometimes it's in bigger systemic ways in the government and world around us. *Pray today ~ Lord, help me to care about what you care about. Break my heart for what breaks yours. Let my faith move beyond words into action.*
- **LOVE MERCY** - The Hebrew word used here is "hesed" which means steadfast love, loyal mercy, covenant kindness. This isn't a one time good deed, this is a committed posture towards kindness, love, and mercy. We see the perfect example in Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10. This is intentional, costly, consistent, underserved, and unconditional love towards others, no matter who they are.. *Pray today ~ Lord, soften my sharp edges. Let me see others through your loving eyes. Make kindness, love and mercy my first reflex.*
- **WALK HUMBLY** - While justice and loving mercy are expressed outwardly, walking humbly is inward. Humility isn't self deprecation or insecurity, it's understanding our need for and dependence on God. Humility frees us from performing, striving, and trying to prove ourselves. It begins with surrender, and follows through with obedience in following Him. *Pray today ~ Lord, I cannot do this without you. Help me to see where I'm prideful and over-functioning. Help me to find freedom by surrendering control over to you.*

Deeper Dive

- **Hebrews 13:20-21** ~Now may the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.
- **2 Corinthians 3: 4-6** ~Such confidence we have through Christ before God. Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God. He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant
- **Exodus 4: 10-12** ~Moses said to the Lord, "Pardon your servant, Lord. I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor since you have spoken to your servant. I am slow of speech and tongue." The Lord said to him, "Who gave human beings their mouths? Who makes them deaf or mute? Who gives them sight or makes them blind? Is it not I, the Lord? Now go; I will help you speak and will teach you what to say."
- **Judges 6: 14-16** ~The Lord turned to him and said, "Go in the strength you have and save Israel out of Midian's hand. Am I not sending you?" "Pardon me, my lord," Gideon replied, "but how can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family." The Lord answered, I will be with you.

Day 2 - Mission requirements

If you've looked for a job recently, you may have skipped ahead to the "requirements" section. It's logical to assume that if you don't meet the basic requirements, then why try, right? What about serving God with your life? Have you ever questioned whether you meet the job requirements to be on a mission for God? As followers of Christ, we should anticipate being called out of our "qualified" comfort zones. God doesn't typically call those with the perfect resume. He tends to call the ill-equipped, the "underdog", and the un-expected. Just one look at Jesus' disciples and we can see a rag tag group of fisherman with little education and training. However, they literally walked with God, and served alongside Him as the foundation of the early church. As we roll up our sleeves to serve the Lord, let's take a look at HOW we already meet the mission requirements.

- **God equips us:** If you have ever heard the saying, "He equips the called"? It comes from Hebrews 13:20-21. We are never called to be on a mission for God without God's presence, equipping, provision, and strength. In the Old Testament, when God calls Moses to free the nation of Israel, Moses certainly wasn't the obvious choice. Moses had a speech impediment, was the child of a slave, a refugee, raised by foster parents, became a murderer, and basically ended up as a criminal fugitive living in a foreign land. Yet, despite Moses' rap sheet, God equipped Him to literally roll up his sleeves and put faith to action as he served God in rescuing His people in the most amazing and miraculous ways.
- **God strengthens us:** Another familiar saying is that "God will never give you more than you can handle". This is not quite accurate. 1 Corinthians 10:13, is actually saying that *through God's strength*, we can face anything. We are called to operate in His strength, and not pridefully do things on our own. In the book of Judges, God calls Gideon to fight one of the most powerful armies of their time. Gideon served God by leading the only 300 weakened men to fight an army of 100,000 warriors. God strength worked through them to defeat the army, and showed everyone that it was God's power that delivered them.

The truth is, none of us would or could do anything God calls us to without His strength working through us to equip us. Our role is simply to follow Him, and to say YES to the mission that He gives us. We are to serve Him with justice, love, humility, and mercy. Just say YES, and let God do the rest!

- *Have you heard God calling you to move towards Him, or to a specific mission of serving Him during this lenten season?*
- *Have you questioned whether you meet the job requirements? Have you let fear or comfort zones prevent you from saying YES?*

Deeper Dive

- **Ephesians 5: 15-16** ~Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil.
- **Matthew 11:28-30** ~Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light
- **Proverbs 3: 5-6** ~Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.
- **James 3:17** ~But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere
- **Psalms 27:14** ~Wait for the Lord; be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord.
- **Luke 10: 41-42** ~“Martha, Martha,” the Lord answered, “you are worried and upset about many things, but few things are needed—or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.”
- **Isaiah 1:17** ~Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow.

Day 3 - Waiting on mission

There are times that God calls us suddenly and radically outside of our comfort zones like we talked about yesterday with Moses and Gideon. However, there are also times where God says, “slow down and wait”. Sometimes His equipping takes time, and sometimes His plans, purpose, and calling are not in our own rushed timing. Especially in our impatient modern world, the word “wait” can seem like a 4 letter word at times. Before you run ahead to serve God, be sure that you are joining Him, and not asking him to come and join you.

Abraham fell into this temptation as He got ahead of God’s promise for a son. Instead of faithfully waiting on God, Abraham rushed ahead with his own plan and had a child with his wife’s maidservant Hagar. When we get ahead of God, we aren’t following God and that will always lead to consequences. Often when serving God feels heavy and burdensome, or when it produces hurry, chaos, anxiety, exhaustion, burnout, or overextension, you may be running ahead. These are all red flags to pause, pray, and discern. Matthew 11 says that we are to be “yoked” to God when we are serving Him. A yoke was a wooden harness attaching two oxen together as they work alongside each other. The yoke doesn’t allow for one oxen to get ahead of the other. This is exactly how God explains serving Him. It says to take His yoke, learn from Him and we will find rest for our souls. This doesn’t mean it won’t be hard work, and it won’t be messy, but it means that the burden of it will be “easy and light” for our souls. We are called to walk WITH Him through His strength as we obediently follow Him.

Prayerfully look at all the ways you are serving the Lord in your life. Are you so busy DOING for God that you’ve forgotten to BE with God? Have you gone ahead of Him using your own strength? Are you trying to pridefully earn your way to grace? No matter how many wonderful volunteering or serving roles you are involved in, He cares much more about your heart than anything we could ever DO for Him. When we read the story of Mary and Martha in Luke 10, Jesus clearly says that Mary has chosen better. Martha was too busy running around frantically DOING for God, while Mary was patiently sitting at His feet with her heart fully surrendered to BE with God. When we are serving on mission for God, we should sit humbly at His feet, fully yoked to Him, and only picking up the burdens that HE asks us to carry.

- *Am I serving from a place of love and an outpouring of the Spirit, or am I serving from a place of people pleasing, guilt, or obligation? Am I carrying a burden that God hasn’t asked me to carry?*
- *Where might God be asking me to serve more intentionally? Where do I need to sit at His feet like Mary to hear His calling more clearly?*
- *Am I running ahead of God? Is He calling me to wait for Him?*
- *Where are you weary in serving the Lord? Is this an area that you need to be more fully yoked to Him?*

Deeper Dive

• John 4: 7-15; 39-40

~Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about noon. When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink?" The Samaritan woman said to him, "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?" Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water." "Sir," the woman said, "you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his livestock?" Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life." The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water."

Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me everything I ever did." So when the Samaritans came to him, they urged him to stay with them, and he stayed two days. And because of his words many more became believers.

Day 4 - Daily mission field

Often, when we hear the word "mission" we think of going on a "mission trip", or we think about becoming a "missionary". While God does call some of us to dedicate our lives to living in foreign lands to serve and sharing the Good News, we are not all called to that life. Just before Jesus returns to heaven He says "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you." Matthew 28:19-20. When Jesus tells us to go and make disciples, He is speaking to all of us, not just to an elite few. It even says earlier in that chapter in the crowd "some doubted", but Jesus still spoke these same exact words to them. We don't need to know all the answers or have everything figured out to serve Him. We just have to be willing to say YES to serving Him.

Jesus' life is a perfect example of being on mission daily. His ministry was relatively short and stretched only as far as He could walk. He often healed, served, fed, and spoke to those that He encountered during His normal daily life. In John 4, it simply says that Jesus was tired, and sat down for a drink at a well. Even while resting, Jesus chose to SEE those around Him. With love and compassion, He crossed cultural, gender, ethnic, and religious barriers to speak to a woman that came to get water. This was a perfect Micah 6:8 moment of justice, love, mercy and humility coming from Jesus. His heart to SEE her opened the door for Him to tell her (before anyone else) that HE was the Messiah! This not only led to her salvation, but ultimately to the salvation of an entire town as it says many Samaritans came to Him after her testimony and believed. Jesus was on mission in the ordinary, in the day-to-day, in the mundane, and was willing to take the time to really SEE those around Him everywhere He went. He saw their physical needs, emotional needs, future needs, and soul needs. He met them where they were, loved and served their earthly needs, while ultimately sharing the Good News to serve their more important eternal needs..

This is exactly what each of us are all called to do. This is our mission! No matter where we are, who we are around, or what we are doing, we are on mission for Christ. Seeing others through His eyes, and living with a Micah 6:8 posture will open the doors for the Spirit to move, hearts to soften, and the Good News to be shared. This is how we serve the Lord.

- *What's your daily, ordinary, mundane mission field? Is it work, school, kid's sports, the grocery check-out line, or the man on the corner with a sign? Is there someone that God is asking you to meet there?*
- *Where are you being stretched to SEE others with love and compassion? Where are you being called to act justly, love mercy and walk humbly with God in your daily life?*

Deeper Dive

Scripture for today's study time:

- **Isaiah 6:8** ~Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?" And I said, "Here am I. Send me!"
- **Galatians 6:9** ~Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up
- **Isaiah 43:19** ~See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland.
- **Galatians 5:25** ~Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.
- **Ephesians 2:10** ~For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do
- **Hebrews 10:24-25** ~And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching

Day 5 - Ready set GO!

Living awakened means we are walking through our days SEEING those around us through the lens of Christ. When we serve others with a heart like Jesus, not only is their life impacted, but ours is as well. Serving God, and being yoked to Him in furthering His Kingdom helps to keep our souls awake! As we end this season of Lent on Sunday, let's enter fully into this season of Awakening together as we go out on mission for the Lord. Join with us in saying, "Here I am Lord, send me!" *Isaiah 6:8*

When we say YES to a spiritual awakening, we need each other. As it says in Ecclesiastes 4 "Two are better than one...If either of them falls down, one can help the other up...A cord of three strands is not quickly broken." This is not something to do alone. This is a collective YES including you, your family, your small group, and our whole church family. This is how the light of Christ will shine contagiously through us and outward to our community & beyond.

During 2026 we are inviting everyone to a challenge that will stretch us out of our comfort zones as we say YES together. These are acts of consistent, sacrificial surrender to the Lord. BEFORE adding these 4 commitments, be sure you have already said YES to daily time in the Word & prayer. Also, be sure you have said YES to the support, accountability and fellowship of joining a small group where you can continue grow and mature in your faith with others. Then we ask you to prayerfully consider:

1. **20** more minutes of daily prayer (listening as much as speaking)
2. **26** people invited: either to church, your small group, or an event
3. **20** hours of serving
4. **2.6%** in giving (if not already giving regularly)

Awakening to our mission as children of the light, we are choosing to daily seek and follow the Lord in all aspects of our lives. This is true surrender. Our prayer is that our entire church family would say YES send me! Imagine what the Lord will do with our collective voices, fully surrendered to Him.

Wahooo!! Let's GO yall!!

- *Which one of these commitments is the most natural for you, and which is the hardest for you? How could you overcome those barriers to say YES to where God wants you on His mission?*
- *Do you know someone that needs to hear the Good News, or that needs the support of a church fellowship? Is there someone that you need to invite to Easter this Sunday? Pray and seek the Spirit's guidance over your mission field this week. Put Micah 6:8 into action and say YES to following Him.*