



*Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me.”*  
– John 15:4

To **ABIDE** is to remain. Abiding is God’s promise and provision to the followers of Christ. Through the finished work of Christ on the cross, we are bound to Him as we declare our faith in Christ. It is an eternally secure position made possible as a gift to desperate sinners in need of grace.

The posture of abiding, of being in Christ, places us in the skilled hands of Jesus, the vinedresser who protects us, provides for us, and prunes us so that we are blessed to bear good fruit.

To **ABIDE** is to **BE**. And the primary purpose of the 21 days of prayer and fasting is for us to set aside time to **BE**.

For anyone endeavoring to live the Christian life, refreshing our souls by abiding in the presence of God is a must. Without it, our emotional, physical and spiritual tanks run dry. And when that happens, we likely feel depleted, disconnected, powerless and stuck in the daily grind of our everyday lives.

**Ask yourself:** Is your soul satisfied? What do you do to feed your soul?

**And as a church, let’s consider these questions:** Are we depending on God, leaning into Him to lead us and guide us into whatever is next for our church? Are we asking Him to do whatever only He can do, whatever He needs to do, to accomplish the good work that He has prepared us to do in advance?

### **21 Days to Humble Ourselves and Seek God**

We want to invite you to join us on a journey. To set aside time each day and engage in the ancient biblical practices of prayer and fasting. Prayer and fasting work together to draw us near to God.

We don’t enter this season flippantly or mechanically. We do not intend to merely go through religious motions. Our heart is to encounter God in a fresh, life-changing way, which enables us to **BE** with Him and

**BE**come like Him, all while moving toward our remembrance of the death and resurrection of Jesus, the supreme act of self-denial, and the source of real change and real life.

Fasting isn't magic. We aren't somehow leveraging God with our performance. We are denying our flesh to make room for God to be God and do God-like stuff in us as we feast upon his presence.

Fasting is a temporary, but purposeful setting aside of earthly provisions to feast upon heavenly realities. Biblical examples have to do with abstaining completely or partially from food for the purpose of focused attention on God. Historically, many have included non-food items (social media, entertainment, hobbies) as alternatives to food. This may be an option that best fits you and your circumstances.

The important distinction of fasting has to do with the physical sensation of going without something that we are accustomed to having whenever we want, in whatever amounts we desire. Fasting is an act of self-denial. And self-denial makes room in our lives to live the life God intends for us: full, free and forever!

**Matthew 16:24–25** *“Then Jesus told his disciples, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.”*

**So, you're probably wondering, “What's the plan?”**

It's pretty simple: Say “no” to something, so you can say “yes” to spending more time with God. Spend less time preparing to eat and eating, or on social media or watching television, and more time with God. We want you to draw near to God and encounter the Lord in life-giving and life-changing ways.

Begin by determining how you would like to engage the fasting component of this twenty-one-day experience. Decide what you are going to give up or set aside. Skip a meal. Turn off your electronic devices. Eliminate hurry.

Whatever you decide, we encourage you to consciously replace what you have denied yourself with time seeking after God. When you feel a craving for what you don't have, let it prompt you to engage what you

do have in prayer, Scripture reading and/or meditation. Feed on the *Bread of Life!* (John 6:33-58)

The devotional guide you have in your hands is just that, a guide. It's divided into three sections: Abide, Draw Near, and Holy Week. Each day we will provide a biblical text, a devotional thought, a few questions for reflection, and finally, a prayer prompt for you to use.

Big picture, we will all be on a journey to abide and draw near and walk with Jesus.

If you need some help coming up with your plan, please reach out to your Community Group leader, a staff member or an elder. In addition, a few recommended resources are listed below.

- Fasting for Spiritual Breakthrough by Elmer L. Towns
- A Hunger for God by John Piper
- Celebration of Discipline, by Richard Foster
- Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life, by Donald S. Whitney and J. I. Packer

## Days 1: ABIDE in Me

Read: John 15:1-11

Spring is just around the corner! I'm excited to get back in the yard and plant my garden. It brings me joy to care for it, watch it grow and reap a small harvest to eat and share with others.

We are not self-made Christians. We are grace-made Christians, Christ-made Christians. We are not planted nor grown by ourselves, and we don't bear fruit on our own. Like vines on a branch, we were made to abide in Him.

The word *abide* is a great word. It means to remain or to stay. Isn't this amazing!?

Other religions set the rules and step back and say, "Get to work." In Christianity, God comes down to you in Christ and connects you to himself by his Spirit and says gently and seriously, "Let *me* get to work in you." You are not left alone to figure out your spiritual life. You are tended to and gardened by your gracious and merciful God. All he asks of you is what Jesus commands in verse 4, "*Abide in me, and I in you.*"

Abiding with Christ doesn't sound like enough. It sounds too easy. So, we get busy, and we end up busy but barren. My prayer is that during this 21-day journey, you can simply but confidently abide. Rest in the vine and let the vinedresser care for you!

### Reflect:

- Do you find it difficult to BE in Christ – to be still, to be present, to know that he's got you?
- What's the fruit described in John 15? Do you see evidence of fruit in your life? Be specific. What might need to be pruned from your life to make you more fruitful?

**Pray:** Spend time just being in God's presence. Be still and listen!

## Day 2: Created in His Image

Read: Genesis 1:26-27

"You're just like your father." I feel like that is often used in a negative connotation. But it doesn't need to be. It shouldn't be.

I want to be like my Father, like my heavenly Father!

We were created in the image and likeness of God. As lovely, beautiful, colorful, and full of variety as the plant or animal kingdom may be, none of that has been created in God's image. That puts us in a unique and privileged position.

Of all creation, only we were made to abide. We were made for him. To know and be known. To love and be loved. That's why our souls can never be filled, why our hearts can never be satisfied, without his presence in our lives.

In the beginning, God created Adam and Eve in His image. That likeness, however, was soon marred by sin. But because God is gracious and kind, someday we will be fully restored to God's image. In the meantime, the heavenly Father is molding believers into the likeness of His Son. It's a process that will continue until we each receive our new eternal body, and, like a flawless mirror, reflect a true image of our Lord. We will be with him. We will be like him.

### Reflect:

- What does it mean to you that you were made in the image of God? What difference does it make in the way you live and relate to God and others?
- We're all in process. What's God's part and what's our part in the process of becoming more like Christ?

**Pray:** Praise God for making you, you. You are fearfully and wonderfully made in his image. Thank God for his work of redemption in your life and for the promise of full restoration.

### Day 3: New Creation

Text: Revelation 21:1-7

No one has to be persuaded that something is wrong with the world. The latest headlines are almost always stories of brokenness. The nightly news feels like a steady stream of grief and tragedy. And while the internet has made the world smaller in some good ways, it also gives us a clearer view into the darkest corners of humanity.

Hope is one of the most underestimated engines of the Christian life. We ache for the day when all things are made new, yet that future feels so foreign to our daily experience that we can hardly imagine it.

Yet Jesus...seated on the throne...calls us to look. To look at what He has already done. To fix our hearts on what He has promised to do. A day is coming with no more sorrow, no more suffering, no more dark corners.

C. S. Lewis once wrote some of the most beautiful words about this coming reality: *"I must keep alive in myself the desire for my true country, which I shall not find till after death; I must never let it get snowed under or turned aside; I must make it the main object of life to press on to that other country and to help others to do the same."*

#### Reflect:

- Where do you most feel the "dark corners" of this world right now?
- How does the promise of new creation and Jesus making "all things new" speak into those places?

**Pray:** Take a few moments to make a list of all the wonderful things you can't wait to experience in the new heavens and earth...and then pray and celebrate that list with the Lord.

### Day 4: Chosen

Read: Ephesians 1:4-5

I remember every year as a boy being excited when it was time for the North Carolina State Fair. The fair was always something to look forward to, whether it was the rides, the games, or the food. One of the attractions the fair would have every year was called the house of mirrors. The house of mirrors was a maze you had to navigate because all the mirrors on the walls gave you a distorted image of both you and your surroundings.

I am sure on many days you find yourself navigating this world like a house of distorted mirrors. The distorted mirrors are reflecting your need to do more or be more. The only way out seems to be keep pretending and performing.

But thankfully, Scripture is like a mirror that we can gaze into and see a clear picture of ourselves - the truth of who we are in Christ. As we take the time to look into the mirror of Scripture, Paul reminds us of these truths: We are chosen! We are adopted! We are loved!

#### Reflect:

- Why do you think you often do not live the way God sees you?
- What action steps could you take daily to remind yourself who you are in Christ?

**Pray:** Take a moment and give thanks to God who, through Jesus sees you as chosen, adopted and loved.

## Day 5: Forgiveness

Read: Hebrews 12:2

We know, at least in our heads, that when we place our trust in Christ's death on the cross alone for salvation, all our sins are forgiven at that very moment. David celebrates this in Psalms 103:12: our sins are removed *"as far as the east is from the west."* And the prophet Micah 7:19 says God casts our sins into the depths of the sea — and puts up a no fishing sign!

But what we often miss is that Jesus takes real joy in showing mercy to His people, even after we belong to Him. Hebrews 12:2 tells us He endured the cross *"for the joy set before Him."* Part of that joy was redeeming and forgiving His people, bringing them home to Himself.

This is the love we are meant to live from, but the only people qualified to draw strength from it are sinners who keep coming back for mercy that is already theirs in Christ. When we come honestly to Him in the pain of our sin, we are not interrupting His work, we are stepping into His heart. He forgives, comforts, and restores. His joy and our joy rise together.

### Reflect:

- Do I believe Jesus is truly glad to forgive me or do I quietly assume He forgives me reluctantly? What shapes that assumption in me?
- If Christ's deepest joy is showing mercy through forgiveness, how might that change the way I come to Him after I fail?

**Pray:** Jesus, help me trust that your heart is glad to forgive me. Where I feel shame or hesitation to come to you, meet me with the mercy you delight to give and teach me to rest in that grace today.

## Day 6: Transformed

Read: 2 Corinthians 3:18

Transformation is relational, steady and rooted in grace. For a long time, I believed it involved trying harder, praying better, reading more and doing all the right things. I wanted to change.

The moments that shaped me were often unexpected - quiet and simple. Sitting with Scripture open, not rushing. Listening. Whispering prayers throughout the day. Becoming aware that Jesus was near as I worked, rested and went about ordinary moments. Slowly—almost without noticing—I began to change. My heart felt steadier. My trust deeper. My responses softer. And not because I had fixed myself.

Transformation doesn't flow from striving, but from abiding. It happens in relationship. When I think of a close friendship, for example, I don't deepen that relationship by trying harder or putting in more effort—we grow closer by simply being together. Spending time. Talking. Listening. Even sitting quietly in the same space.

Our connection with Jesus works the same way. We're transformed as we sit with Him, listening to His voice and being aware His presence throughout the day. When you place your faith in Jesus Christ, your identity in Christ is secure. You are forgiven, loved, and made new. At the same time, the Spirit continues his work.

Some days, the growth is obvious. Other days, it feels slow or invisible. But even then, God is working, changing us into His likeness.

### Reflect

- What helps you stay present with Jesus throughout your day?
- Where might God be inviting you to trust His ongoing work rather than rush change?

**Pray:** Lord, help me stay connected to You. Thank You for what You've already done and for the faithful work You continue to do in me.

## Day 7: The Holy Spirit

Read: I Corinthians 3:16

One of the great comforts of the Christian life is not merely that God is *for* us, but that He is *with* us. In the work of salvation, the Father ordains, the Son accomplishes, and the Holy Spirit applies redemption personally and powerfully to the believer. The Spirit does not visit temporarily or at a distance—He indwells.

Jesus promised that the Spirit would be with His people forever as our helper (John 14:16–17). This means that in all of life’s seasons, including this time of fasting and prayer, we are never alone. The Spirit illuminates Scripture, convicts us of sin, assures us of our adoption, and strengthens us to persevere. His presence is not dependent on our emotional state or spiritual performance, but solely on God’s gracious promise.

Augustine of Hippo once wrote, “God is closer to us than we are to ourselves.” That truth finds its fullest expression in the Holy Spirit, who dwells within every believer. In fasting and prayer, we are not trying to summon God’s presence—we are learning to become more attentive to the God who is already near.

As we continue in this time of fasting and prayer, may our hunger remind us that our deepest need is not food, clarity, or control, but communion with the living God through His Spirit.

### Reflect:

- How does knowing the Spirit dwells in you shape the way you approach prayer?
- In what areas of your life do you resist dependence on the Spirit?

**Pray:** Ask the Lord to help you walk in greater awareness, humility, and dependence upon the presence of the Holy Spirit.

## Day 8: Draw Near

Read: Psalm 73:28, Hebrews 10:22, James 4:8

I’ve been physically present, but emotionally distant or mentally distracted. I’ve walked into a room empty, with nothing to give. I’ve done that with people. I’ve done that with God.

But God is ready to close that gap the moment we step toward Him. He is ready to close the gap caused by sin or selfishness, by anger or apathy, by pain or shame, or anything else you can think of.

Drawing near is not an occasional retreat but a moment-by-moment posture: turning from sin, turning toward Him, and staying turned.

This week, we want to focus on some of the habits that draw us into His presence. Fasting and prayer go together. Taking off and putting on work together. Each day we encourage you to set aside dedicated time for prayer, for studying His Word, and for worship – to DRAW NEAR!

Our hope and prayer is that as these habits take root, intimacy with God becomes the defining reality of daily life.

To experience intimacy with God, we are invited to seek after Him. In seeking, we find Him! He’s always there...always ready! God will do His part! God is ready to close the gap. As we draw near to Him, God comes near to us.

### Reflect:

- Reflect upon those times you felt especially close and particularly distant from God. What was going on in each of those?
- How does it make you feel that the God of the universe wants to spend time with you?

**Pray:** Pray for the desire and the discipline to seek after God. Ask God to remove barriers. Thank Him for wanting a deep, intimate, genuine relationship with you.

## **Day 9: Be Still**

**Read: Psalm 46:10**

Growing up, being the son of a coach, there was one phrase I heard my dad say more than any other. He would use this phrase when the team he was coaching was moving too fast and making decisions too quickly. I can still hear his voice in my head today, "Slow Down!" My dad was coaching more than a game; he was preparing us for life.

Life has a way of making us move fast with all the daily demands and deadlines. Before we even notice it the word busy is used often used to describe our day. We have been busy spending our day trying to control and manage every outcome. We find ourselves exhausted at the end of the day.

But there is another way! And David in the Psalms tells us the other way, "be still" or "stop striving." It all begins with the posture of slowing down. Maybe even as you are reading this... take a deep breath. Once we slow down, we are still. It is in the stillness that we can make the decision to let go of control. Then control can be replaced with trusting God with the demands and deadlines of the day.

### **Reflect:**

- What are the obstacles you encounter when you attempt to slow down and be still?
  
- What comes to mind today that you could let go and trust God with?

**Pray:** Ask God to help you to slow down amid the demand and deadlines of life.

## **Day 10: His Word**

**Read: Matthew 4:4**

Americans eat very quickly. Dieticians tell us that consuming our food slowly helps our body digest better and reduces the occurrence of health issues like obesity. Yet we continue to dive right in.

Physical sustenance is obviously very important, what we eat and how we eat it. The same is true for spiritual sustenance. We consume a lot of content each day through our devices and all of it affects our spirit. Jesus tells us that the real spiritual food that we need in order to be healthy comes directly from God. It's His word. Trading in digital content for God's word is an immediate upgrade in spiritual nourishment. And when we slow down and meditate on His word, we absorb more of His life-changing message. This is important for us as we seek to experience true spiritual health.

Even if your 21 days of prayer and fasting does not include a break from excessive digital content, perhaps taking a break today would do your spirit a bit of good as you slowly meditate on His word.

### **Reflect:**

- How has your time in the word been for the last 10 days? Are there any changes you feel led to make to get the most out of your study of the word?
  
- What is one thing you have observed in the word recently that grabbed your attention? How is God using that in your life today?

**Pray:** Ask the Lord to help you slow down as you read the word today and to reveal Himself to you as you meditate on what he shows you.

## Day 11: His Word

Read: James 1:22-25

Have you ever purchased an item that needed to be assembled, but rather than following the included instructions, you decided to “do it your way?” I remember buying a trampoline. I took the instructions and read them, sort of. It’s more like I skimmed them, but I felt like I got the gist of it and there was no purpose in wasting any more time. I could figure it out on my own. Then, when I got to the part where I had to attach the springs, I found out that my way created too much tension on one side of the trampoline so I could not possibly stretch the last 20 springs far enough to connect them. As it turns out, that bit of information was included in my discarded instructions!

God’s word is not simply an instruction manual. But it does include God’s design for life. Not just any life, but a life marked by a beautiful relationship with Him. To be doers of His word, and not just hearers, is to experience this life in all its fullness. Surely, we would not read trampoline instructions and then leave it disassembled. Why would we do that with His word?

### Reflect:

- As you read scripture today, what is it that God is asking you to do with the truth He has just revealed?
- This season has been a difficult one for our church. How can being a doer of the word help minister or encourage someone in the church who needs it?

**Pray:** Pray that FBC would be doers of the word and that God would use our faithfulness to make a difference in this community.

## Day 12: Prayer (Praise and Thanksgiving)

Read: Psalm 100

He left after a full day of work and drove an hour to see his mom. It was the day before her birthday. She stared blankly at the flowers he had for her. Dementia has taken his mom from him. The future feels foggy, and his heart is tired.

Gratitude isn’t the first thing that comes to his mind. And yet, in that quiet space, I hear him offer a simple prayer—not thanking God for the loss, but for His nearness, the strength and wisdom to take the next steps and for the reminder that we are not walking through this alone.

The situation is still hard. But something shifts inside him. Gratitude becomes an intentional act of trust—a way of saying, “Even here, even now, I believe God is still good, still faithful, and still in control.”

Psalm 100 reminds us that connecting with God happens through intentional actions. When we choose to praise Him out loud, serve others with purpose, or sing—even when we don’t feel like it—we are stepping into His presence. Our relationship with God grows not by accident, but through daily choices to give Him thanks and acknowledge who He is wherever we find ourselves.

The psalm anchors our worship in a clear truth: the Lord alone is God and we belong to Him. Remembering this helps us put daily decisions, pressures, and struggles in their proper place. When we pause to praise God, our focus shifts away from ourselves and back to Him. Choosing gratitude—especially when life feels heavy—is a deliberate act of trust. It’s choosing to rest in His steady, dependable love—the kind that “endures forever.”

### Reflect:

- What helps—or hinders—you from intentionally entering God’s presence?
- How might gratitude change the way you approach God today?

**Pray:** Lord, help me come into Your presence with thanksgiving. Fix my heart on who You are and teach me to trust Your enduring love.

## Day 13: Prayer (Confession and Intercession)

Read: I John 1:9

Two essential movements of prayer are confession and intercession. In confession, we come honestly before God, acknowledging our sin and our need for His mercy. We do not confess to earn forgiveness, rather we confess because Christ has already secured it. Through the cross, Jesus bore the penalty of our sin, and therefore we approach God not with fear of rejection, but with confidence in His grace.

Confession reminds us who we are—sinners saved by grace—and it reorients our hearts toward humility and dependence upon God.

From confession we move outward into intercession. Having received mercy, we then bring others before the Lord. We pray for family, friends, neighbors, our church, those who oppose us, or have even hurt us (practicing this hard part is key). Intercession reflects the heart of Christ Himself, who now lives to intercede for His people (Hebrews 7:25).

John Chrysostom once wrote, *“Prayer is a mighty weapon... a treasure never exhausted.”* Let that truth move you to act. Take time today to search your heart before the Lord and confess any sin that the Spirit brings to mind. Then intentionally lift others before God—your family, your church, your neighbors, and those who need Christ. Approach the throne of grace boldly, trusting that God hears and delights to respond to the prayers of His people.

### Reflect:

- Is there any sin you need to bring honestly before the Lord in confession today?
- Who has God placed on your heart to faithfully lift up in prayer this week?

**Pray:** Ask the Lord to cultivate a heart of repentance and compassion within you. Pray that He would make you quick to confess sin, grateful for the grace you have received in Christ, and faithful to carry the needs of others before Him in prayer.

## Day 14: Sabbath Keeping

Read: Mark 2:27-28

Practicing Sabbath is another important way to draw near to Jesus. Much like God’s Word, prayer, and other spiritual disciplines are given to us for our benefit, the Sabbath is a gift from God for our good. It is intended to be a liberating, joyful opportunity to restore our souls and delight in the Lord.

The Sabbath isn’t just an excuse to relax with mind-numbing activity or do whatever we please. It is a chance to purposefully slow down and remember that the world will continue to spin on its axis without our help. It is a gracious invitation to breathe deeply without the burden of a to-do list or the anxiety of a hurried pace. It is a rich, soul-quenching gift offered as an opportunity and not an obligation.

Often, we lose sight of what Sabbath is and what it could be, and we are overwhelmed by a legalistic vision of something we can’t achieve. Today, let’s cast that off and accept the invitation to delight in God with soul-satisfying rest. Whether it be a rich conversation with a friend, a long walk, an unhurried cup of coffee, or a lingering prayer time, let’s throw off the things that keep us from delighting today in the Lord and instead choose Sabbath rest.

### Reflect:

- How can you delight in the Lord today and draw near to Him?
- What do you need to throw off to experience Sabbath rest? (Social media? Consumerism? A burdensome chore? Something else?)
- What things threaten to keep you from practicing Sabbath? How can you proactively avoid those things to more purposefully embrace this gift from God?

**Pray:** Ask God to show you where you are stuck, unable to trust Him, or struggling in your approach to the gift of Sabbath. Ask Him to richly bless you and bring Him honor as you draw near through purposeful rest and delight.

## Days 15: Following Jesus

Read: Luke 9:23-26

For three years, Jesus crisscrossed the villages of Galilee, teaching in synagogues, preaching the good news of God's kingdom, and healing the sick. Rumors spread like wildfire. The dregs of society flocked to him — the diseased, epileptics, paralytics, the poor, prisoners, crazy people with demons, and those suffering severe pain. Gawkers trampled each other just to get a look at him. Some people responded positively to Jesus, for reasons that were both good and bad. Many others responded with rejection, resistance, and unbelief. Some of his closest followers stopped following him. His family tried to apprehend him, and his hometown tried to kill him. To say that at the end of those three years, Jesus was a controversial figure would be a gross understatement.

Those three years culminated in the last week of his life, when Jesus set his face toward Jerusalem. During that one final week, Jesus's disciples argued among themselves about who was the greatest, Judas betrayed him, Peter denied knowing him, all his disciples fled and Rome employed all the brutal means at its disposal to crush an insurgent movement.

His invitation – His call – to follow, isn't easy. Walking with Jesus isn't easy. Denying oneself, isn't easy. Taking up the cross, isn't easy.

Take a walk with Jesus this week. Experience his humility, his sacrifice, his power and his love. Follow Him through the streets of Jerusalem, up a hill called Calvary and to an empty tomb. Draw near.

### Reflect:

- What does it mean, in your own words, to be a follower of Christ?
- When has it been hard for you to follow Jesus? What made it hard?

**Pray:** Give thanks for the ways that following Jesus has changed you and blessed you.

## Day 16: Triumphal Entry

Read: Matthew 21:1-11

Yesterday was Palm Sunday, the day Jesus rode into Jerusalem. The crowd welcomed Jesus with joy. They waved palm branches and shouted "Hosanna!". They celebrated the hope of an earthly king who would set them free from Rome.

But just days later, many of those same voices went silent—or worse, they turned on Him.

Why? Because popularity, like a parade, soon passes by? Because fans are fickle? Because the crowds love parties but run from chaos, conflict and controversy?

Why? Because Jesus didn't meet their expectations.

We all have expectations of others, of ourselves, of Jesus. And when those expectations fall short, sometimes we feel disappointed or hurt or betrayed and we grow silent, pull away or worse.

So, let me ask: *Who is Jesus to you when the miracle doesn't happen?* When the prayer goes unanswered? When the healing is slow, or the storm doesn't pass?

If we only see Jesus as good when life is good, our faith will feel like a roller coaster. Even silence has a purpose. Pain has a purpose.

### Reflect:

- What do you "expect" of or from God? Where do these expectations come from?
- Has God ever disappointed you? What did you do with that disappointment? Did you turn toward or away from God?

**Pray:** Give thanks to God that He meets us in those moments of brokenness, confusion and uncertainty. That He redeems the pain.

## Day 17: Judas Betrayal

Read: Luke 22:47-48

When Judas betrayed Jesus with a kiss, it wasn't just cruel, it was personal. A man who had walked beside Him, eaten with Him, learned from Him, then turned on Him. That kind of hurt runs deep. Jesus felt the hurt, yet responded to it without hate or revenge, and kept walking toward the cross.

Betrayal still hits like that today. It knocks the wind out of you. It leaves you wondering how someone you trusted could wound you so deeply.

Jesus understands that pain firsthand. He doesn't tell us to shake off our hurt or to toughen up. He invites us to bring the hurt straight to Him. But He also shows us a better way to respond. We don't have to pretend it didn't hurt, and we don't have to strike back. We can hand the whole bucket of hot mess to God and trust Him to make things right. Forgiveness isn't saying what happened is okay, it's refusing to let bitterness take root in our hearts.

In Jesus, we find strength to grieve honestly, forgive freely, and keep walking forward in trust because holding on to bitterness only poisons our own hearts.

### Reflect:

- When I've been hurt by someone I trusted, do I bring that pain honestly to Jesus — or do I try to bury it, tough it out, or get even?
- Is there any bitterness taking root in my heart right now, and what would it look like to hand that hurt to God and choose forgiveness instead over time?

**Pray:** Jesus, You know what betrayal feels like. Meet me in my hurt, pull out any root of bitterness growing in me, and give me the strength to forgive and trust You with what was done as I learn to trust you in all things, even in betrayal.

## Day 18: Maundy Thursday

Read: Luke 22:14-20

Imagine being at a major sporting event that begins with the national anthem. The crowd rises, the stadium quiets, and the singer starts the familiar tune. But right before "*the rockets' red glare*," the singer adds a couple of verses they wrote themselves. The boos would be deafening, social media would erupt, and everyone would be stunned by the break from something so deeply ingrained in our culture.

Maundy Thursday marks the night Jesus shared the Last Supper with his disciples. In the middle of that sacred meal, he changed the script. Our national anthem is only about 90 years old, but the Jewish Passover had been celebrated for over 1,200 years by the time of Jesus. It was a central act of worship, rich with ceremony and spiritual meaning. The disciples' jaws must have been on the floor as he identified the bread as his body and the wine as his blood.

Only Jesus, God in the flesh, had the authority to redefine what God had established. In that moment, he pointed hearts and minds toward the sacrifice that would come on Friday. He is God...and he was about to do the unthinkable in love for sinners.

### Reflect:

- What are some aspects of this passion week that may be overly "familiar," and how might God be inviting you to see them with fresh awe, the way the disciples did Jesus' words that night?
- What does it mean to you to take the bread and the cup together with the body of Christ?

**Pray:** Praise God for the wonder of the Creator and Sustainer of the universe taking on flesh to reveal himself to us. Thank him that he is continually teaching us and shaping us as we follow him.

## Day 19: Good Friday

Read: Luke 23:44-46

It is remarkable that we call the day of Jesus' crucifixion, "Good" Friday. It is the day when the most heinous act of hate and brutality was bestowed on our Lord. He, of all people, the only one who could claim to be truly and perfectly innocent, was slain for the most selfish reasons. Certainly, we would not call the acts done to Jesus good. And yet, while the actions themselves were the worst, what Jesus accomplished by submitting himself to such shame is good. We could even say it is the most good.

The tearing of the curtain symbolizes the unfathomable change in humankind's relationship with God. Since the garden, people lacked direct access to God, always needing a mediator. The curtain kept people out. It was a physical reminder of the spiritual barrier between God and man created by sin. On Good Friday, Jesus removed that barrier. By being the perfect sacrifice, who was able to deal with the problem of sin for all who would believe in him, access to God was re-established. Life was restored. That is good.

### Reflect:

- Who do you know that needs to hear the "good" of Good Friday? Would you consider inviting them to a Good Friday or Easter Sunday worship service?
- What are some of your most favorite ways of entering through the torn curtain and into God's presence? Prayer, meditation, silence, singing, journaling, etc.

**Pray:** Pray about areas in your life that do not feel good and ask Jesus to show you the good he is doing through them.

## Day 20: Silent Saturday

Read: Luke 23:56 and Psalm 13:1

"...they rested as required by law."

Those words represent not just rest, but a burdened, unsettled rest. Grief sat heavy on the hearts of those who watched Jesus die, and Saturday was deathly quiet. The finality hung as heavy and thick as the curtain that had torn. Christ's followers certainly weren't resting comfortably or quietly on that Sabbath, but we can assume their prescribed rest involved wrestling. They were most likely angry, confused, heartbroken, and wondering... Where was God?

The longer we sit in uncomfortable silence waiting for God to say or do something, the easier it can be to believe that He isn't there – that His silence represents His absence. But we know the whole story of scripture. We know that the stone gets rolled away, and His silence does not mean He has stopped working. God wasn't absent on "Silent Saturday," and He isn't absent in our angry, confusing, grieving moments, either. Even in the longest silences, He is nearer than we know, and He is trustworthy.

### Reflect:

- Where in your life are you experiencing confusion, waiting, or silence? Does that drive you deeper into relationship with God? What can you do to lean into that relationship more?
- Set aside some time today to sit in silence and allow the weight of the in-between to settle on you. Thank God for His nearness even when we can't see Him working.

**Pray:** God, help us to trust you in the silence. Use it to deepen our dependence on You. Remind us of the truth that You are not done working, and the story isn't over. Even when we can't see it, help us to rest and believe in Your goodness.

## **Day 21: Easter Sunday**

**Read: John 20:1-9**

Jesus taught his disciples about the Father, about himself, about the Kingdom, and how to enter it. He performed amazing miracles of compassion and love that validated his credibility and his message. However, it is the resurrection that answers all questions and removes any doubt about Jesus. Jesus claimed that he had the authority to lay down his life and to take it up again (John 10:17-18). That is an authority that can only belong to God and when John enters the tomb and sees that it is empty, he believes.

This is our God. His grace is boundless. He gives everything for those he loves. He has the power and authority to do whatever it takes to bring his people into his Kingdom, even defeating the curse of sin. He is the one who deserves our worship.

You have spent the last 21 days in prayer and fasting, prioritizing him over all else, preparing your heart to rejoice in his resurrection. You have been bringing him your praise, fears, requests, concerns, joys, and hope for three weeks. Let today be the day that you hold nothing back from him.

### **Reflect:**

- Is there anything that you have not said to him during this season that you would like to say now? Whether it is praise, request, or confession, will you bring it to him today?
  
- How has God ministered to you over the last 3 weeks? What are a couple of the most important interactions you have had with him that you want to make sure to remember?

**Pray:** He is risen! Let your prayers be filled with joy and celebration today.