

A person wearing a conical hat is working in a lush green rice field. The field is vibrant and extends to the horizon. In the background, there are rolling green hills and a small structure. The sky is filled with large, dramatic clouds, with light breaking through on the right side, suggesting a sunrise or sunset. The overall scene is peaceful and evokes a sense of labor and sustenance.

Feeding Those Who Feed Us
7 Days of Scripture and Prayer
A Guide to Prepare our Hearts for a Week of Ministry

by Cal Hiebsch

Any day before FTWFU: Preparing for Ministry

Scripture: “Ezra came up from Babylon. He was a teacher well versed in the Law of Moses, which the Lord, the God of Israel, had given. The king had granted him everything he asked, for the hand of the Lord his God was on him. ⁷ Some of the Israelites, including priests, Levites, musicians, gatekeepers and temple servants, also came up to Jerusalem in the seventh year of King Artaxerxes. ⁸ Ezra arrived in Jerusalem in the fifth month of the seventh year of the king. ⁹ He had begun his journey from Babylon on the first day of the first month, and he arrived in Jerusalem on the first day of the fifth month, for the gracious hand of his God was on him. ¹⁰ For Ezra had devoted himself to the study and observance of the Law of the Lord, and to teaching its decrees and laws in Israel.” Ezra 7:6-10

Devotion: Ministry before God is a joy, but it's also a major responsibility. Ezra was the priest, in the line of Aaron, in the right time and the right place to return to Jerusalem from Babylon to lead God's people in worship. Ezra's place in history is unique, God called him to lead his people in worship as they came out of exile. For the nation of Israel, this was a time of joy. Joy without bounds. They were going home! But Ezra is an example for us in his preparation. Leading God's people, even in joyful worship and praise, is not something to be undertaken lightly. Ezra 7:10 states that God's hand was on Ezra because Ezra prepared well. We can easily argue that Ezra held such a unique place in history that there is little direct application to our lives. But Ezra's life of preparation before his ministry is not unique. Ministry before God should be considered a major responsibility. We are not preparing to lead all of Israel in worship. But we are preparing to serve people beloved by God. What a joy! We are preparing to be vessels of God's love, reaching out to others and showing them God's way of life. Oh the joy that the thought of should bring, like the joy Ezra felt packing to leave Babylon and return home to Jerusalem. Preparing for ministry is a calling and commissioning from God himself! What was the result of Ezra's preparation? A nation that came back wholeheartedly to worshipping the God who brought them through so much! People worshipping God together, people who before did not know the love of God having Him indwell them and feel His love working through him! Seeing those faces in Heaven. This responsibility of preparing for ministry is a JOY and an honor! Let's joyfully prepare to follow God's call to ministry!

Pray: Wow, God... this is a big responsibility, preparing my own heart for ministry. I feel so inadequate right now, with this idea looming so big in front of me. But God, one thing I know. You never break your promises and you have promised so much. God, even though I feel unworthy, could you please

Sunday: Holy and Wholly committed

Scripture: “As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. ¹⁵ But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; ¹⁶ for it is written: ‘Be holy, because I am holy.’”

1 Peter 1:14-16

Devotion: Two words come to mind when I read this passage. “Holy” and “Wholly.” Levels of how surrendered we are to God’s calling on our lives. Levels of commitment. These two words are not unique to me. I heard them in a training session while preparing for children’s ministry a number of years ago. So when thinking about Feeding Those Who Feed Us, and this passage in 1 Peter, it’s no surprise that they came back up. The word “holy” is one of my favorites when it comes to my Christian faith. Holy means something set apart. You take the most pure, the most beautiful and the most precious things and you dedicate them, set them aside, consecrated to be used only in the highest and worshipful service to God. This means working without fail to reject sin in our lives. God is without sin. Since God is without sin, you and I must be without sin to effectively be used by God; to be holy. God needs holiness because He is holy. The precious items are you and I. Us. God is calling us to be holy. Us. Our selves. Our bodies. Our minds. Wow! Joy! We are unique, set apart, consecrated before God! And there’s more: God asks us to be obedient as He calls us to work and minister on Planet Earth. Ministry. Obedience in children is easy to see. I think Peter had something like this in mind when he was writing his letter. One kind is when the child obeys and you can see how much the child is only obeying because of the punishment if they don’t. But oozing from every pore is how much they don’t like what they’re doing. Then there is the kind where the child runs, laughing, to the task because of the reward. This is whole-hearted commitment. This is the obedience God is calling us to. Ministry. Serving others. “Holy committed” and “wholly committed.” Two sides of a coin... we as Christians are called by God to consecrate ourselves to a higher purity and a higher meaning than how others around us think of themselves and God calls us to serve others in an unselfish way that the world around us does not understand. We are called by God to be first “Holy Committed” and then “Wholly Committed” to serving others. Let’s commit ourselves to be Holy and Wholly God’s children, praying that God will enable our desires.

Pray: God, I am seeking to be both holy, realizing that I am set apart to be like Christ in a world that values rebellion from all things pure and unique; and wholly committed, seeking joyful obedience of the calling You have on my life here on Planet Earth. Again, I cannot do this without Your strength

Monday: Bearing Witness to the Resurrection

Scripture: “In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach ² until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen. ³ After his suffering, he presented himself to them and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God. ⁴ On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: “Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. ⁵ For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.” ⁶ Then they gathered around him and asked him, “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?” ⁷ He said to them: “It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. ⁸ 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.”

Acts 1:1-8

Devotion: A person is really distractible when they cannot make it to the end of a sentence before they chase a squirrel. My brothers say this is “A.D... O.S.” or Attention Deficit... Oh! Squirrel! The disciples weren’t quite that bad in Acts 1. They thought Jesus command to stay in Jerusalem meant that God would soon restore the political Israel of its Golden Age. The disciples reflected the desire of many Jews to see a new Jewish kingdom like King David’s in the promised land. This is what many thought the prophecies were about. However, Jesus did not let them get distracted by politics. To give the disciples the benefit of the doubt, Christ had spent a lot of time describing the Kingdom during his earthly ministry, and Christ’s disciples were only human. Christ’s ideas of God’s Kingdom were not earth-bound and only political. Christ was talking about a spiritual kingdom. A spiritual harvest. The spiritual weight of millions coming to faith in Christ, believing in His work on the Cross, receiving forgiveness of sin. Most importantly, millions desiring to serve God, bringing Him Glory. After his resurrection, Christ was intent on commissioning his disciples, and through them, us, to bear witness to His resurrection. Being a witness to the resurrection is the main task in our calling from God to serve. Christ repeats this a number of times in the Gospels, and Acts 1 puts a step-by-step chronology to it. When the Holy Spirit comes, God will empower the church to reach the world. Our preparation, our calling, is to share God’s love with the world. Let’s set out to do that today among these people who serve the world and are so rarely the recipients of love or care. Let’s set out to not fall prey to distraction, let’s set out to proclaim God’s love through Christ, the Gospel, to these people, praying for Divine appointments.

Tuesday: Serving the Poor

Scripture: “There will always be poor people in the land. Therefore I command you to be openhanded toward your fellow Israelites who are poor and needy in your land” Deuteronomy 15:11. “The poor you will always have with you, but you will not always have me” Matthew 26:11. “All they asked was that we should continue to remember the poor, the very thing I had been eager to do all along.” Galatians 2:10

Devotion: People get worked up when anyone says something inappropriate in church. Imagine a pastor trying to use “cuss-words” from the pulpit to get his point across... I would wonder if people would be more appalled at his strong language or with the actual problem he’s trying to solve? I read an opinion piece recently where this was the point. The author asked, Which is more appalling, thousands of poor and hungry dying every day or the contrasting inappropriate and offensive words used to describe the problem? I got the hint and I saw in the comments how many people took more offense that a pastor used “inappropriate” or “coarse” words rather than getting upset that people were dying. Throughout the Bible God commands his people to care for the poor, slaves and servants working for us, the hungry, the traveler away from the structure and safety of home and family, for the widow, the orphan. God commands care for the needy and the defenseless. God commands those with ability to care for those who may not have the ability to meet all of their own needs. And an interesting point, which I’ve heard repeated in many conversations, when people are in need, their soul’s hunger for hope opens their eyes to recognizing and believing the message of the Gospel. To me, that’s hugely significant. God commands care for those with needs, in crisis or transition, and that seems to dovetail beautifully with God’s commands to share the Gospel, making disciples. The poor will always be with us. Those seeking God will always be with us. Two types of poverty that God commands addressing. Let’s today set out to serve those with needs, praying that God will bring physical and spiritual needs to our attention as we work.

Pray: Father above, God and Lord of my life, I pray today for your strength and wisdom. You promise these to your children. There are so many needs in this world. I pray for the chance to meet these needs, the wisdom to recognize them and the strength to meet them. Without you, I am nothing. Without your Spirit in my life, I would still be needing your salvation. I pray that my efforts today could be used by you to bring someone into your family. I pray this in the name of my beloved Savior, the one who’s sacrifice saved me, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Wednesday: Who is this God we serve?

Scripture: “You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. ⁸But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. ⁹Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God’s wrath through him! ¹⁰For if, while we were God’s enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! ¹¹Not only is this so, but we also boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.” Romans 5:6-11

Devotion: What’s your answer to the question “who is this God we serve?” This week, we’ve talked about being called to holiness, commanded to serve, and ways to follow God. But if we ask the question “who is this God we serve?” do we have a good answer? I know one part of my answer is how much God loves me. Read our passage from Romans 5 again... God demonstrates how much he loves us by giving His own son to die for us. Christ did not just die for us, Christ died for us not while we were God’s servants, while we were considered good. Christ died for us while we sinful, while were rebelling against God. Christ died for us while we were considered God’s enemies. That’s huge to me. That speaks huge volumes about who God is and about how much He loves me. God’s love makes so much fall into place. It gives motivation for commands to care for the defenseless and needy people the world over. It makes commands to share the gospel totally understandable. If God is willing to send His Son, who had to sacrifice his place with God to become a servant and even die a cursed death on level with the worst criminals, not only does my heart nearly explode with gratitude, but it also gives me a huge amount of motivation. It’s hard for me to keep sitting when I experience a good gift. With one of this magnitude, it makes me want to pass on what I’ve received. Let’s set out today, pondering God and His love, and praying God’s love so overflows us that people see Him in us.

Pray: Lord and God, the phrase I’ve said so many times, “God is love”, means so much more to me when I say it after reading something like Romans 5. It is overwhelming to think how much love you lavished on me. God, through your Spirit, could you empower me to show people love daily? Especially today as we are in the middle of this week, ministering among the servants of all, please let your love in me be obvious as I seek to meet their needs. Oh God! I pray this in the name of Jesus Christ, your precious Son who sacrificed so much for me. Amen.

Thursday: God is the Lord of the Harvest

Scripture: “When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. ³⁷ Then he said to his disciples, ‘The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. ³⁸ Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.’”
Matthew 9:36-38

Devotion: Christ had compassion. If reading about the emotions Christ felt does not inspire deeper response to a story I don't know what will. Christ had compassion on the crowd because they were wandering aimlessly, spiritually wandering. They did not have a Shepherd to guide them and care for them. This affected Christ deeply. People in need brought a deep response within Jesus Christ. It is harvest time now. If the harvest was ready two thousand years ago, it's definitely ready now! Christ was inspired to deep compassion. Think about this for a few moments... What came out of this response deep within our Savior? Christ set out to pray for workers to show these crowds the way. Significantly, Christ called God “the Lord of the harvest”. God is sovereign. God reigns over who comes to Him in faith, and God would have every human come to Him. So, to recap, when we see crowds, to be like Christ, our response should be compassion. Our prayers, the calling of that deep emotion, should be to the only One who reigns supreme over each individual's spiritual condition. In our ministry with these people who are the servants of all, God can work. There are many physical needs that raise compassion. Situations of crisis and transition inspire compassion. These situations are key times of spiritual openness for many people. Times that people let down habits, walls and spiritual defenses and will listen when they feel care and compassion. While I would not wish crisis or transition on anyone, for many that we will be ministering to during our FTWFU time, this is the best time to be calling to the Lord of the Harvest for a “bumper crop” in spiritual terms. For those ministers whose hearts are tuned in and searching for needs this is a time of deep rewards and rejoicing. What does my heart do or feel when I look out and see the people of Marin County, the Bay Area and California? Am I moved to compassion, like Christ, or do I let myself turn a blind eye to needs and spiritual lostness? Our response to seeing crowds of people should be like Christ's, deep compassion, and prayer for a harvest among them. If those in the crowd are suffering, our calling to minister should bring us to action, meeting needs and providing spiritual healing through a relationship with the Lord of the harvest and our own Spiritual Father. Let's pray for workers to be sent out, and let's set out to join them, seeking the joy of an abundant spiritual harvest.

Friday: Look for where God has prepared a harvest

Scripture: “‘Don’t you have a saying, ‘It’s still four months until harvest?’ I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest. ³⁶ Even now the one who reaps draws a wage and harvests a crop for eternal life, so that the sower and the reaper may be glad together. ³⁷ Thus the saying ‘One sows and another reaps’ is true. ³⁸ I sent you to reap what you have not worked for. Others have done the hard work, and you have reaped the benefits of their labor.’” John 4:35-38

Devotion: When it comes to a garden, or to farming, patience is the name of the game. Christ has just met the woman at the well and his disciples are asking about his methods in sharing with her. Christ is teaching them that spiritual harvest, like the woman at the well, and physical harvest, like gardening, does not follow the same rules. In your garden, patience is a royal virtue. You put the seeds in the ground. Occasionally the plot of ground needs water. Maybe some fertilizer, weeding or bug spray. Then after four months comes the real work. Harvest. Where the spiritual world is concerned, Christ sets out to turn this idea of annual seasons on its ear. In the spiritual world of God’s kingdom there is no annual planting season. Instead, God is constantly in the work of preparing hearts. God has already prepared hearts, the spiritual harvest that we are to seek out. A wise man I’ve spent a lot of time learning from said, “Do not assume that the first time you share with someone it’s the first time they’ve ever heard the Gospel!” Christ makes it very plain that there are some who sow. Many times we share the gospel with people whose hearts are not ready to respond. However, this does not mean we do not ask them about the Gospel’s impact on them. Maybe the most important time in a Gospel presentation is asking for a decision. Not only does Christ ask the woman at the well if she wants spiritual water, but Christ is showing the limitations of his application that sharing the gospel is like planting. Christ is working to encourage his disciples to seek out a spiritual harvest, even if this is the first time they’ve ever been to a specific place, or if this is the first time they’ve ever met this particular person. Sensing where God is working takes work. It takes spiritual preparation. It also requires listening, not just preaching. Let’s put priority on seeking out the harvest God has prepared as we minister and sow even if it’s a “first time” encounter.

Pray: Dear God, my Father in heaven! Please show me today where you have been working. As I seek to know you more, to serve you better, I would so love to encounter people you have prepared to be a part of your spiritual family. God, again, I pray deeply, because I cannot do this without your divine intervention in my life, in the ministry you have called me to. Please

