

Day 1/Relationships

The Shovel and the Spoon

Read

I want to ask you a question: *Are you the kind of person who can relate to others?* Let me put this another way. If you are a husband, can you relate to your wife? If you work in an office, can you relate to your coworkers? Are you able to interact with others even if you are not a “people person”?

I believe the health of our relationships and our ability to show mercy to others is directly linked to our ability to receive mercy from God.

When we come to God, he dispenses grace and mercy on us with a shovel. God says, “You need grace? Well, let me give it to you in abundance. You need more today? Well, my mercies are new every single day, so before you even hit the snooze button tomorrow, I will be pouring it into your life.” He’s got lots of shovels, and he’s heaping these big shovelfuls of mercy on us every single day. But what happens if we can’t receive it? We will go to the people in our lives who have messed up and say, “Oh, you need some grace? Sure, let me give you some with this spoon.” We will expect more from them than we want God to expect from us. We will treat them differently than the way we want God to treat us.

This is why our capacity to receive God’s mercy is at the heart of our role in reconciling relationships that have been busted apart. When we are more prone to give the spoon than the shovel, it means we have not really received the fullness of God’s grace. It means we only believe that God has given us the spoonful of grace.

To relate to others, we have to understand how Jesus relates to us. We have to recognize he took on the constraints of entering this world so he could relate to us. We also have to recognize that Jesus does not give us what we deserve. We deserve death, but he gives us life. Also, we need to recognize that Jesus comes all the way to us. He is merciful when we are wrong, gracious when we are stubborn, and loves us before we are lovable. He loves us before we are even able to love him.

So, in the same measure, you receive from God, you will give to others—and this will determine if you are relatable. As John sums up, **“Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God” (1 John 4:7)**. That’s the goal: to love one another and dispense mercy with the shovel—not the spoon—because we recognize what we have received from God.

Day 1/Relationships

The Shovel and the Spoon

Respond

Read 1 John 4:7-9. Only through knowing God can we truly know how to love. Take a moment to look through this passage write down the phrases/sentences that link “God” and “love” together.

If you were asked to personalize the impact of God’s grace/love on your life how would you describe it to someone? _____

How has your understanding of God impacted your relationships with others? Are you more likely to dispense grace to others with a shovel or a spoon? Explain. _____

Is there someone in particular in your life that you constantly struggle only to give a spoonful of grace? Who is it? Why do you struggle with that? _____

Respond: How could you respond towards them with a shovel full of grace? _____

Prayer: Pray for God to strengthen and encourage you to live this out towards that person(s). _____

Day 2/Relationships

The Man/Woman in the Mirror

Read

Outside of your relationship with God; your relationship with you is the most important relationship you have. Sometimes, your relationships with others will be messed up because of the relationship you have with yourself. **You are influenced more by what you think about yourself than by what anyone else thinks about you.**

Before you can start working on relationships with others, you need to start with the person you see in the mirror. **In Matthew 22:37–39, Jesus says you are to love God and love your neighbor as you love yourself.** Often it's easier to focus on loving God and on loving your neighbor, but not put enough emphasis on loving yourself. It's important to understand the essential value of embracing God's love for you and translate that into love for yourself.

If you don't love yourself, you are negating the fact that God loves you. If you don't love yourself, it means you don't really understand God's perception of you. Yes, God will hold you to a high standard, but he is willing to extend mercy and grace to you in appropriate ways so you can fulfill the special purpose he designed for you.

When the truth of God's love sinks into your heart, you can look in the mirror and say, "Well, if God sees me that way, then I'm going to see myself that way." God is reflecting your worth and purpose into the mirror, and you are then receiving and reflecting what God says about you. It doesn't originate with what you think about yourself.

At some point, you have to say, "I love me. I don't have it all together, I know, but I love me just like God does when I'm not perfect. God loved me when I had issues so that I can love me with my issues." You need to be able to be thankful for yourself because God is thankful for you. You need to extend to yourself the same forgiveness and grace that God extends to you.

As you begin to love yourself, you can begin to love the world. Loving the world happens when you start listening to what God says and start seeing what God sees and then start speaking what God speaks over you. Loving yourself is thus critical because if you don't believe that God loves you, you will have an impossible time trying to convince others that God loves them. In the end, what the world understands about Jesus will come from the love that they see you reflect from him in your life.

Day 2/Relationships

The Man/Woman in the Mirror

Respond

Read Ephesians 2:4-5. It is by the mere grace of God that we have been saved and this changes our relationship with God. It isn't by our effort that God is pleased but by the faith we have in what Jesus has done for us. How is that different than trying to earn favor or by being "good enough" for God? _____

Do you believe that God would say he is pleased with you? Do you experience him as someone who cheers for you? Why or why not? _____

"You need to extend to yourself the same forgiveness and grace that God extends to you." Can you relate to this statement? Do you ever beat yourself up? What triggers that kind of behavior? _____

What picture of God's love do you reflect to the people in your life? How would a stronger sense of your value in God's eyes influence others around you? _____

Pray: Write out a prayer based on what you've processed through today's devotional. Whether that be something you need to ask for forgiveness, something God has already forgiven you of but you can't shake the guilt, or the ability to better reflect God's love to others. _____

Day 3/Relationships

A God to Call Father

Read

Outside your relationships with God and with yourself, your relationships with your mom and your dad are the next most important. These are the formative relationships in your life. Your relationship with your dad is especially critical. There are lots of different kinds of dads. Some are amazing and empowering. They dispense love and hugs freely. And some dads . . . are not. Maybe you had an absent dad—due to death, or divorce, or work schedules, or emotional distance. Maybe you had an abusive dad who brought damage into your story.

The enemy knows that God is a perfect heavenly Father. He also knows the way you will perceive God as Father will be impacted by how you view your earthly father. So, if he can disrupt that relationship with your earthly father, he can keep you from fully understanding who God is and how you can live in a relationship with him. The enemy has been quite successful at this.

For many people, trying to understand God as their Father, based on their experience with their earthly father, is like looking through a cracked glass. Their relationship with their earthly father is broken, so the reflection they see of God as Father is broken as well. Their earthly and heavenly relationships need a revolution to succeed.

Thankfully, the gospel is powerful enough to bring healing into all relationships, no matter how messed up they are. Through the gospel, we receive a new identity when we come to know Jesus. **We don't just believe in something; we become someone—a loved son or daughter of God.** It is a family construct where God Almighty becomes your Father, and a new relationship is born. God is not the reflection of your earthly dad; he's the perfection of your earthly dad—the version that you long for deep inside your heart.

Jesus died on the cross so that you could be grafted into a new story with a new Dad and a whole new possibility and a whole new future. You don't have to be afraid of thinking about God as a father. You don't have to dwell in the deficit of your relationship with your earthly father. You can lean into this new possibility and see God as the perfect Father.

Leaning into this gospel relationship with God will allow you to reflect His love back to your parents, even if they are not the reflection of the love of God to you. As you do this, you will honor them in godly ways—even when they aren't honorable—and healing will begin. When others see you reconciling in this way, they will want to know how you are doing it. They will see a reflection of Jesus in you and want to know how this can happen in their lives.

Day 3/Relationships

A God to Call Father

Respond

Describe your relationship with your earthly father when you were younger. How has this relationship influenced your understanding of God as your heavenly Father?

In what ways have you seen your relationship with one or both of your parents affect your relationships with others? Were these impacts positive or negative?

Read Isaiah 64:8. When we come to faith in Jesus, we are adopted as sons and daughters of God. This moves our relationship with God from a distant creator to a loving Father. Would you say you view your relationship with God as a father/child relationship? Why or why not? _____

What does it mean for you to honor your father and mother? How can a restored relationship with your parents attract others to God? How can it demonstrate the power of God to others? _____

Pray/Reflect: What is something that needs to change in the way you currently view God as a Father? Or what is something that needs to be changed in your current relationship with your earthly parents? Take a moment to write out a reflection or prayer. _____

Day 4/Relationships

The Friend Everyone Longs For

Read

We all have a mental picture of the kind of friends we want to have in our lives. We want friends who will be supportive. Who will stick with us when life is tough. Who will encourage us and not tear us down. Who will not judge us. But today we're going to flip this around. We are going to consider how we can become the kind of friend for others that we want to have.

Life always begins with becoming rather than finding. Dating is not about finding the right person for your life. Marriage is not about finding the perfect man or woman. No, it's about becoming the person God wants you to be. In this way, whether you do date and get married... or you don't... you still win, because you are becoming the person that God wants you to be.

So, with this in mind, we need to look at what it takes to be the kind of friend we want to have in our lives. What does friendship look like for a follower of Jesus? First, we need to be a friend who is sincere and not phony. A friend with no hidden agendas. A friend who isn't hypocritical or two-faced. A friend who doesn't just tell others what they want to hear but speaks the truth.

Second, we need to be a friend who extinguishes evil and celebrates good. We do this by de-escalating conflict instead of fanning the flames of conflict. We speak the truth as we extend mercy and forgiveness, just like Jesus did for us.

Third, we need to be a friend who rises above the situation. We don't have to show up to every fight in which we are invited to participate. We can choose to withdraw from conflict politely. To do the unexpected by blessing those who curse us. There is freedom in not having to get even.

Fourth, we need to be a friend who moves freely among all people. A true friend is there in all circumstances, whether we are at the top or the bottom. The gospel doesn't treat people differently, and neither should we.

Fifth, we need to be a friend who is a peacemaker. We need to recognize that while we don't have the power to change others, we can change ourselves. We may not be able to have peace with another person in our lives, but we can have peace toward that person.

So, today try to be the friend you want to have. By doing so, you will find friends who will recognize the power of the gospel in your life and be drawn closer to God.

Day 4/Relationships

The Friend Everyone Longs For

Respond

How would you describe the bulk of the friendships that you have had? What do you look for in a friend? _____

What is the difference between finding a friend and being a friend? What do you find is the most challenging part about being a friend? _____

Read Proverbs 22:24-25; Proverbs 26:5-6; Colossians 3:12-14. In these verses what traits do they tell us to have in our friendships? What traits should we avoid? In your friendships how well are you demonstrating those characteristics? _____

Look at today's devotional at the five characteristics of being a friend followers of Christ are called to have. Is there one you do well? Is there one you struggle with? How could you improve? _____

Pray/Reflect: What is one thing you need to do/change to be a friend that better reflects Jesus to others? Take a moment to reflect or pray. _____

Day 5/Relationships

Becoming Someone vs. Finding Somebody

Read

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus taught a kingdom message about what it means to live in relationship. Jesus, after describing God's care for the smallest parts of his creation—the birds of the air and the flowers in the field—poses this question: "Are you not much more valuable than they?" Jesus says that God is going to provide for us more abundantly than he provides each day for them. We don't have to be anxious about anything.

Unfortunately, anxiety tends to be a huge part of our lives. We worry about what job we will have. What house we will have. How others will perceive us. This anxiety carries into our relationships. We worry about meeting that special person. The wedding we will have. The children we have to raise. But Jesus says don't worry about tomorrow, for you have a Father who promises if you make seeking him a priority, he will make providing for you a priority.

God knows that what you need most is a Maker, not a mate. When you're focused on the Maker, you won't be distracted by the cares of this world. You can't control the people who come into your life and how they respond to you, but you can control how you invest in becoming the person God wants you to be. You can burn a lot of energy seeking that right person and miss what you need to work on in yourself.

The enemy will try to get you to stress about your relationships and whether you will meet that special person. He knows if he can get you to worry about the future, it robs the power of what God wants to do in you today. The power you need is not in what God has done in the past, though you should certainly celebrate that. It is not in what you hope God will do in the future, though you can have confidence in that. The true power is what God, through Christ, wants you to become in the here and now.

There's a whole world of people who think their happiness depends on their ability to get what they think they need right now. But true happiness is rooted in a Father who sees what we need and can bring into our lives at just the proper time. We have the same needs as everyone else on planet Earth. Food. Clothes. Shelter. We all need the same stuff—we believe the solution is in bringing those things to God and trusting that he will provide.

Day 5/Relationships

Becoming Someone vs. Finding Somebody

Respond

Read Matthew 6:31-34. Jesus teaches us that we can trust God to provide. However, that comes with a qualification. What is that qualification in verse 33? What do you think it means? _____

How easy or difficult is it for you to take Jesus' words at face value and not worry about the future? What do you tend to worry about the most? _____

What do you find yourself worrying about more: the past or the future? How does this worry affect your relationship with Jesus? _____

Question for singles: How much of your time and focus do you put on seeking out the right person compared to how much time do you spend on becoming the right person? _____

Question for married couples: How much of your time do you focus on wishing your spouse was a better (fill in the blank) compared to working on yourself to become a better follow of Christ? _____

What does it mean to shift your priority from finding somebody to becoming someone? Where do you need God to shape, sculpt, and form you? _____

Pray/Reflect: What challenged you from today's devotional? Pray for the Lord to equip you to focus on the right thing to become who He is calling you to be. _____

Day 6/Relationships

Leaving Justice to God

Read

There is a tension when it comes to forgiving others who have wronged you. In some cases, the other person won't want peace. Instead, they will elevate conflict, and if there isn't any conflict, they will try to create it.

It is important to remember that the grace of God and the reconciliation process don't abdicate the process of justice. It just reassigns justice. When you forgive, you resign from being the arbiter and the effector of justice against that person. You choose to assign that role to God.

You can seek peace, and if necessary, seek justice, but then you leave the outcome in God's hands. You focus on peace, not on making someone pay for his hurt against you. You refuse to allow seeking retribution to become your mission in life.

Now, being an agent of peace doesn't mean you choose to be blind to danger. If you and/or your family are at risk from someone, your mission is to get yourself and them in a safe place. In some relationships, you may need to adjust some things, set some boundaries, and establish some distance. But from a place of protection, you can still live with an attitude that says, "I have to get away from you right now, but I want to try, by the power of God, to live at peace with you in my heart. If I can do that with you, that's what I'm going to seek. But if it's only possible for me to do that away from you, that's what I'm going to seek."

Always remember that the Holy Spirit is the agent of peace. He brings your spirit to life. And when your spirit comes to life, Christ takes up residence in you, and you have a brand new life. You now live by the power of the Spirit, not by your sinful nature. The fruit of the Spirit includes love, joy and peace, patience, goodness, and self-control—and these are all things you need for reconciliation. These are the gifts you need in relationships where there is real hatred, animosity, bitterness, pain, and big-time wounds.

You can depend on the power of the Spirit as you walk in the Spirit and live in peace, not in war. For what purpose? So that Jesus can be glorified and so that people's lives can be changed. The possibility of peace that God creates in you impacts the people on both sides of reconciliation.

Day 6/Relationships

Leaving Justice to God

Respond

Read Galatians 5:13-26. What is the purpose of the living by the Holy Spirit (v.13-15)?

Which fruit of the Spirit have you most seen grow in you as you've followed Jesus? How so? _____

Which fruit of the Spirit is least evident in your life? How so? _____

What relationships do you feel you need justice? What is your role in seeking peace with those individuals? What boundaries do you need to set up to protect yourself? _____

Where do you need to seek peace in your heart over the pain of a relationship? How can you find peace even if that relationship is not repairable? _____

How might your example of seeking peace in a difficult relationship impact the people in your life? How can the power of the Holy Spirit in your life draw others to faith in Jesus?

Pray/Reflect: What challenged you from today's devotional? Pray for the Lord to change you through the working of His Spirit to better live and love those whom you experience conflict with. _____

Day 7/Relationships

Today is a catch-up day for your devotional or a day for deeper reflection.

Our hope with this devotional isn't that you can check-off a reading goal but that through this devotional you are transformed through the power of God's word and the working of the Holy Spirit.

"I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect." – Romans 12:1-2

If you are caught up, take some time to reflect on your notes from this week.

- Is there anything in particular that jumps out to you that you might need to make a bigger focus than just one day?
- Is there anything in particular that you felt encouraged or challenged by?

Take some time on the next page to dive deeper into what you need to do over the next year to make that a bigger focus in your life.

Day 8/Reading God's Word

The Lord is My Shepherd

Read

Psalm 23—green pastures, quiet waters, right paths. I am an outdoorsy person by nature. I'd much rather get lost in the woods, alone with my thoughts, the trees, and the breeze, than be in any city. So, as I read these familiar verses, I want to go outside, to be witness to the goodness and beauty of the natural world. It also occurs to me that I have something in common with sheep—we can both get lost without hardly trying.

Some years ago, I read about a Merino sheep in New Zealand named Shrek. He had wandered away from his flock and his shepherd and gotten lost. For six years, he lived in nearby caves, eating what he could find and avoiding the shearer's blade. When Shrek was finally found, his wool weighed sixty pounds, and the raw weight of twenty men's suits on his back was threatening his life. He had trouble walking, and his breathing was labored. He needed his shepherd. So do we.

Shepherds take care of sheep—plural—but in this psalm, the relationship is between one sheep and his Shepherd. It's personal, much more personal. "The LORD is *my* shepherd" (v.1, emphasis mine). These words are from David, but I can't help but read them as my own. I think we were meant to, each one of us. ***The Lord is my Shepherd. He guides me, provides for me, protects me from my enemies.***

I don't need to worry. "I have what I need" (v.1). I don't need to struggle or strive. "He lets me lie down in green pastures" (v.2). Weariness does not have the final say. "He renews my life." And I won't ever get lost. (Not really, anyway.) "He leads me along the right paths for his name's sake" (v.3). It is only because the Shepherd is so good that I can be still and rest, that I can have true peace.

I could be happy for eternity being a beloved lamb of the Good Shepherd, but Psalm 23 doesn't leave us as sheep. A shift occurs in verse 5. David begins to address God directly—the song becomes a prayer of thanksgiving. Not only that, but a banquet scene replaces the pastoral imagery. You and I have become honored guests of the King.

The table is set, and though my enemies might rage just outside, none of that matters (v.5). I am in the house of my Maker, the One who knows me and loves me better than anyone else. But the best part? I'm not just a guest. I get to stay in His presence forever—"as long as I live" (v.6), though the Hebrew phrase that's been translated doesn't limit this time to my natural lifespan. It has all come full circle—"I have what I need," because I have the One I was created to know and love.

Day 8/Reading God's Word

The Lord is My Shepherd

Respond

An easy trap for most of us to fall into whenever reading God's Word is to read it as a checklist or as information to be collected instead of a time to connect with God and listen to what he might have to say. Before you continue, take a moment to focus your mind and thoughts. **Pray for this to be a time connecting with God.** That you might hear something from this time today. Even if it's just one small truth.

Read Psalm 23:1-6. Why is the Lord being our shepherd important for us to understand regarding our relationship with God? What does us being sheep teach us about ourselves? _____

Read Psalm 23 again. Pick out one of the verses that stick out to you. Write it down.

Explain this verse in your own words. _____

What are some ways this verse can apply to your life? _____

Write out a way that you can personally respond to this verse. Whether this is a prayer you need to pray. A truth you need to proclaim. Or an action you need to do.

Day 9/Reading God’s Word

The Lord of Armies Is with Us

Read

When I was a kid, I used to be terrified that our house was going to burn down. I would lie awake in my bed, certain that at any moment I would see smoke coming from under my door, a raging fire just down the hallway ready to engulf my entire family, destroying everything in its wake. Before bed, I would ask my parents to close all the doors (to keep the fire from getting into our rooms) and make sure the oven was off, and every so often, I’d ask them to check our smoke detectors—just in case one was malfunctioning. My parents would do all of these things, lovingly reminding me that I was safe, that nothing was going to happen to me. And they would pray with me, inviting me to bring my fears and uncertainties to God, the One who protects me and strengthens me.

This psalm refers to God as the “LORD of Armies.” This name for God appears most often in the Minor Prophets, both before and after Judah’s exile into Babylon. The lives of God’s people were full of fear and uncertainty, and they were constantly reminded of the power their enemies held over them. Referring to God as the LORD of Armies reminded them of His ability to keep them from harm.

This whole psalm is a reminder of God’s unmatched power. The psalmist writes of God’s ability to provide calm and order during chaos. The first stanza speaks of God’s protection from the natural elements, the second of God’s protection from other nations, and the third of God’s protection from fighting and wars. In every stanza, the psalmist reminds us that God is with us—that He is our refuge, that the LORD of Armies is our stronghold. How can we not bow down in praise of such a powerful God? With a God like this on our side, fighting for us, watching over us, our fears don’t stand a chance.

These days, I’m not as scared of my house burning down as I used to be. My fears are more concerned with uncertainty about the future and my need to control things. So although I am not a nation at war, I can still find rest in the fact that the LORD of Armies is with me. He is a refuge for my weary soul, a place of comfort amid chaos. His power is stronger than even the most terrifying of armies, His love deeper than any raging sea. He is strong, He is good, and He will not let me go, even in the fiercest battle.

Day 9/Reading God's Word

The Lord of Armies Is with Us

Respond

Read Psalm 46:1-11. As you read through this passage what attributes does the psalmist give to God that we can press into during times of uncertainty or chaos? Write them down. _____

How does knowing these attributes of God help us trust Him in the midst of difficult or uncertain circumstances? _____

What current situation or circumstance do you feel uncertain about or lack control over and that produces anxiety in your life? _____

Take one of the named attributes you wrote down in the first question and write out a prayer or reflection on how that could help you in the midst of the current situation or circumstance you've written about above. _____

**Bonus: Listen to *Whom Shall I Fear (God of Angel Armies)* by Chris Tomlin for another perspective on this Psalm and truth of God.*

Day 10/Reading God's Word

The Lord Is My Refuge

Read

We all are afraid of something.

Thunder, lightning, roller coasters, car crashes, tornadoes, snakes, spiders, public speaking, being stuck in a conversation with a stranger. We all find ourselves afraid of something. Some realistic and some ridiculous. Underneath it all, everyone has a fear of something crashing into their life and taking away someone or something they love. It can be easy to read Bible verses that promise safety, plucked out of the psalms and use them as spiritual bubblewrap to comfort our fears—verses like these from **Psalm 91**: **“Because you have made the LORD—my refuge, the Most High—your dwelling place, no harm will come to you” (vv.9–10).**

That's a formula I tend to like because it gives me the perception of control; I make the Lord my “refuge,” and no harm will come to me. But many years of walking quietly in sadness with people I love have taught me there is no equation to prevent suffering. Sometimes storms enter our lives quickly like thunderclouds from the west. Sometimes they sneak in, just as the sun rises quietly in the east.

In their book, *The Songs of Jesus*, Tim and Kathy Keller wrote: *“The devil wants us to think that God's promises have failed if he lets us suffer. But the psalm later clarifies that God will save us ‘in trouble’ and not from it.”* In other words, we do not need a refuge from the quiet, the sadness, brokenness, and pain; we need a refuge from the storm that is inevitably coming ([John 16:33](#)). Suffering was sewn into our existence at the fall, but Psalm 91 shouts into the rushing wind:

“The one who lives under the protection of the Most High dwells in the shadow of the Almighty.

***I will say concerning the LORD, who is my refuge and my fortress...
His faithfulness will be a protective shield” (vv.1–2,4).***

I am thankful for the whole of Scripture, and for the ways, it quiets my soul on the hardest of days. The riches of Psalm 91 are vast, with so many metaphors and names for God, calling us backward and forward through the Old and New Testaments. It does so beautifully what the whole of Scripture does: it paints a picture of our hopeless existence apart from God, and it beckons us into the fullness of life in relationship with Him. A life that, though marked with suffering, is ultimately guaranteed and secured by the personhood and work of Jesus Christ.

Day 10/Reading God's Word

The Lord Is My Refuge

Respond

Read Psalm 91. What does it mean to view God as your refuge? How would you define that? _____

Have you ever had a circumstance where you've tried to hide or avoid pain and suffering? What was it? Did you learn anything going through that circumstance?

In the book, *The Songs of Jesus*, it says that God will save us 'in trouble' and not 'from it.' What does that mean? Why is that significant whenever we approach challenges or suffering? _____

Read James 1:2-4. We see that God allows trials and suffering into our lives to mature us in our faith and grow our dependence on trusting God. That only works whenever we allow our circumstances to push us closer to God. When you are in a trial, do you find yourself pulling yourself closer to God or pushing yourself away from Him? Why so?

Read Psalm 91 again. This time write a response/reflection of praise for the fact that God enters into your trials and suffering with you. _____

Day 11/Reading God's Word

The Lord Is Just

Read

On Saturday afternoons in autumn, one of my favorite things to do is find a hearty recipe, throw open the windows, and stream a great playlist of folk music. I once heard someone say that beauty will save the world. I don't think that's entirely true, but I fully believe that savoring the beauty in life attunes our attention to God's goodness. It can help alleviate the darkness pressing in around us by offering a parting of the clouds—a heightened glimpse of light and hope. It can become so easy to focus on the worries of this world, the everyday task, and the busyness that can consume us. We can lose focus on the fact that God is working behind the scenes.

Psalms 92 is said to be a song for the Sabbath. It's a declaration of God's justice (v.15) and His faithful love both in the morning and at night (v.2). We need songs like this, songs of Scripture, to bury inside us and remind us what's true. This way, on an afternoon that doesn't feel very beautiful, we can sing the song that declares God is just and advocating on our behalf for the rightness of all things. When we meditate on these songs, our perspective is shifted. We can find true rest amid the chaos.

In this psalm, we see a lot of interesting metaphors drawn from the natural world to describe the characteristics of the righteous person. The righteous are planted in the Lord like roots of a tree and will live a fruitful life, becoming "healthy and green" (vv.13–14). These arborous metaphors symbolize—the vibrancy of life hidden in Christ and the nourishment He gives us, just like water and sunshine to a plant. As we pursue a life of righteousness, our legacy becomes this anthem of God's faithfulness, declaring "the LORD is just; he is my rock" (v.15).

I love how many layers are woven into this psalm. At first glance, we're told it's a song to accompany our rest. But in reading the lines of verse, we detect the heartbeat behind it: a desire for all things to be made right. The only reason to declare God as "just" is if you've been touched by injustice and, by doing so, participate in the act of rebellion against it.

Psalms 92 is a beacon of light and prayer that fixes our mind on the character of the Lord and the hope of the future to come. It parts the dark and uncertain skies of today and gives us a look ahead to a time when the fullness of God's justice will have its reign on earth, even as we usher in kingdom wholeness today.

We can find true rest in the knowledge that God is just; there is "no unrighteousness in Him" (v.15). But He also chooses to partner with us in confronting the injustices of the world. As we see more clearly, the fullness of the just and right kingdom God is establishing, it compels us to be a partner in building that kingdom. It's why Jesus challenged us to pray. *Oh Lord, Your kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.*

Day 11/Reading God's Word

The Lord Is Just

Respond

Read Psalm 92. As you read through Psalm 92, write out the characteristics of God's justice and faithfulness. _____

As you start this year how does the truth of Psalm 92 and the justice of God give you hope and confidence for your life? _____

This Psalm focuses on the Lord's just and right causes and ultimately how his causes and purposes will win out. How does focusing on that assured future give us rest in our life today? _____

In verses 12-15, we see various metaphors that illustrate how the righteous flourish. Read **Psalm 37:7**. Sometimes in the short-term those who aren't righteous flourish in this world. Have you ever seen an example of this? Has it frustrated you? How do these two psalms give us the motivation to pursue righteousness and forsake selfishness?

Day 12/Reading God's Word

The Lord Is Near All Who Call Out to Him

Read

Remember and proclaim.

Throughout Scripture, we are instructed to recall the ways God has acted on our behalf and to share those stories of triumph and truth with others, with the next generation of believers ([Psalm 145:4](#)). The Israelites' exodus out of slavery from Egypt? Remember and proclaim ([Psalm 105:1–5](#)). The taking of the communion? An act of remembering Christ's life, death, and resurrection—all on our behalf—and proclaiming the infinite gift and power in them for those who believe in the risen Jesus ([1 Corinthians 11:23–26](#)).

So it is in today's reading of Psalm 145, "a hymn of praise," attributed to King David, who determines to "exalt, "bless," and "praise [God's] name forever and ever" (vv.1–2). Not only will *he* declare God's praises, but from one generation to the next, God's works and acts, His character, power, and righteousness will be declared (vv.3–5). But for that to happen, God's "awe-inspiring acts" and faithful love must first be remembered.

There is power in saying something out loud, in speaking truth to ourselves and one another. Researchers in the world of education and psychology call this "the production effect." Studies have shown that memory is improved by literally speaking aloud what we're reading, thinking, and studying. The actual retrieval and recall of both past and new experiences, and the relaying of them to someone else further work to etch our experiences and knowledge into our minds. In short, if you really want to remember something, tell someone else about it. It's incredible to think that God would design us this way to further draw us into community to speak truth to one another ([Ephesians 5:19–20](#)).

In looking back at God's "great goodness and righteousness" in our own lives and in the lives of those we read about in Scripture, we are reminded that He provides what we need "at the proper time" and "[satisfies] the desire of every living thing" (vv.15–16). Verse 20 tells us when we call out to God; He is near. However, His nearness is in no way dependent upon our crying out to Him. No, He is always near, always present. When we draw near to Him, He draws near to us ([James 4:8](#)). He does not need an invitation to come to us, but in our calling out to Him, we remember that He is, in fact, a very real and present help ([Psalm 46:1](#)). Our mighty, compassionate God is delighted to be in our midst now and always. Sometimes we forget this truth, and sometimes we struggle to believe it's true. Either way, God does not change.

So if you have forgotten the goodness of God or if it's grown boring or meaningless. Remember and proclaim His goodness.

Day 12/Reading God's Word

The Lord Is Near All Who Call Out to Him

Respond

Read Psalm 145. As you read through this Psalm count the number of times David praises or gives thanks to God. Write down all the different things that David gives thanks for. _____

Individuals who are intentional about gratitude in their lives experience a higher level of joy than those who either complain or lack gratitude on a daily basis. Take some time to write out all the things in your life that you an opportunity to be grateful for. Be specific. Nothing is too big or too small. _____

With a friend, spouse, or child, spend some time this week talking about the different ways that God has blessed your life. Having multiple perspectives will help you spot ways that you might have missed God's blessings in your life. Who could you have that conversation with? _____

Read Psalm 145 out loud. After you finish reading, pray a prayer of appreciation based on the nature and character of God that you see and read in this passage. Feel free to take notes. _____

Day 13/Reading God's Word

The Lord Is Rest

Read

Throughout this week, we've journeyed through the nature and character of God found in the Psalms. However, there is one attribute we've yet to cover that might be the most important for us to experience God fully:

The Lord is our rest.

We don't rest well in our world. We are over-scheduled, glued to our phones, and we live with this pressure; there is always something else to do. All of this makes it extremely hard for us to take time to stop and truly rest in the Lord.

Today's devotional might be the simplest in theory but the hardest to actually do.

For us to truly experience the fullness of God's character, we must make margin in our schedule, put down the phone, and put away the to-do list for a moment and find our rest in the Lord.

Don't expect this to be easy. Expect random to-do list items to pop up. Expect your mind to wander. Expect a distraction. Write down whatever distracts and put it aside to focus on the Lord for whatever amount of time you decide. 5 minutes? Great. That might be 5 minutes more than normal. 30 minutes? Awesome, allow the Lord to refresh your spirit.

The Lord wants to grant us true rest and restoration, and all He asks is that we stop for a moment and focus on His goodness. It's hard, but it's worth it.

Let's begin.

Day 13/Reading God's Word

The Lord Is Rest

Respond

To begin, take a few moments to pray for the Lord to focus your mind on His word and thank Him for the ability to come before Him. Feel free to name the things that might distract you and pray for your mind to not drift to those other focuses.

Read Psalm 62 out loud. Focus on what each verse is saying as you read it.

Read Psalm 62 again. This time as you read through it, pick out a verse. Write it down.

Explain what this verse is saying in your own words. _____

Where areas in your life do you struggle to have rest or peace? These could be things that came to your mind as you've tried to read through this devotional. These could be areas where you find yourself anxious or worried. These could be what you spend all of your time thinking or working towards. Whatever comes to your mind, write it down.

How does the verse you selected help or challenge you to pursue rest in the Lord compared to worry over the things written out above? _____

Prayer/Reflection: Write a prayer or reflection asking the Lord to help you find rest in Him compared to the busyness or worries of this life. _____

Day 14/Reading God's Word

Today is a catch-up day for your devotional or a day for deeper reflection.

Our hope with this devotional isn't that you can check-off a reading goal but that through this devotional you are transformed through the power of God's word and the working of the Holy Spirit.

"Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit." – 2 Cor. 3:17-18

If you are caught up, take some time to reflect on your notes from this week.

- Is there anything in particular that jumps out to you that you might need to make a bigger focus than just one day?
- Is there anything in particular that you felt encouraged or challenged by?

Take some time on the next page to dive deeper into what you need to do over the next year to make that a bigger focus in your life.

Day 15/Prayer

Is He Safe? No, But He's Good.

Read

Driving a motorcycle with no helmet or headlight on a two-lane highway through the mountains in a snowstorm at night. That's dangerous. Asking a woman her age. That's dangerous. But praying? How is praying dangerous? Isn't praying what sweet grandmas do in the safety of their living rooms? What could we possibly mean by praying is dangerous?

In *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, C.S. Lewis' fantasy fiction about talking animals and kids traveling to other worlds, a little girl named Susan asks Mr. Beaver an important question about Aslan the lion. Aslan, if you didn't know, is the God-like character in the stories. The conversation about Aslan goes like this.

Susan: Is he—quite safe? I shall feel rather nervous about meeting a lion.

Mr. Beaver: Safe? Who said anything about safe? 'Course he isn't safe. But he's good. He's the King, I tell you.

We serve a King who isn't safe, but He's good. **When we pray, our prayers shouldn't be safe; they should be good, big, and dangerous like God.** We tend to come to God with our dirty laundry or our laundry list of what He can do for us. **What if we came asking what we could do for Him? That'd be dangerous.**

True prayer holds in it this tendency to push us beyond our comfort zones. What's a comfort zone? It's the me-circle where everything endlessly revolves around our own needs and wants. It's our kingdom where we are the king or queen. Prayer pulls us out of these me-circles because prayer is about His Kingdom coming and His will being done. Prayer is how we realize, like Mr. Beaver, that He's the King.

Day 15/Prayer

Is He Safe? No, But He's Good.

Respond

Read Matthew 5:9-10. In this passage, Jesus is teaching the disciples how to pray. I'd imagine the disciples struggle to pray in similar ways that we do. Boring. Distracted. Does it do anything? Jesus wants to teach us to pray in a way that is fruitful and compelling. However, it might take us learning to pray in a different way than what feels normal.

How does Jesus start his prayer? What is the focus of the first two verses?

Write down everything you can remember praying for over the past week. How much of those prayers are centered around you and people you love? _____

Now there is nothing wrong with praying for yourself or those you care about, but it isn't the starting point that Jesus gives us for prayer. The starting point of prayer is God and His kingdom. How would your prayer life change if you came asking God what you could do for Him? Or asking Him to push you out of your comfort zone? _____

Close in prayer asking: Heavenly Father, help me to pray dangerous prayers. Father, let the desires of Your heart become the desires of mine. Let Your kingdom come and Your will be done on earth as it is in Heaven. _____

Day 16/Prayer

Search Me And Know My Heart

Read

As scary of a prayer as it might be to ask God what we could do for Him, there is another prayer that might be equally as dangerous. It is one that will continue to pull you out of your me-circle. It will challenge you to live life on the edge, in full submission to the Maker and Master of everything. You want to have a heart that chases after God's own heart. You and King David both.

King David prayed a famously dangerous prayer in Psalm 139 (NIV) when he said, ***Search me, God, and know my heart*** ... Why is this a dangerous prayer? Is it because God might find some bad stuff in King David's heart and then get him in trouble? No, God knows everything, always. He's not going to find anything new in King David's heart. **A "search me" prayer is dangerous not because of what God might find, but because of what He might reveal to us.**

Think of selling a house with a realtor. You clean your house perfectly before your realtor arrives, hoping they'll think your house is a quick sell. Instead, they tell you to get rid of the green velvet couch, clean up the nasty corner of the carpet where the dog sleeps, and please take down that baby cherub wallpaper! Asking God to search us is like that. He comes in and opens our eyes to all the trash we couldn't see. Just like with the realtor, we get to decide whether to keep the junk or to clean the house.

Merely having junk doesn't condemn us. King David committed murder and adultery, and God still called him a man after His own heart. So, let's get over the fear of being found out. God already knows everything in our hearts. Let's ask God to show us what He knows. Let's haul out the junk so we can get the most bang for our buck in our pursuit of God's heart.

Day 16/Prayer

Search Me And Know My Heart

Respond

Why do you think it's important to ask God to search your heart? _____

How does the idea of asking God to search your heart make you feel? Is anything keeping you from praying this prayer? If so, what? _____

Read Psalm 139:23-24. David asks God to search his heart. What is his motive in asking God in this text? _____

David doesn't ask God to search his heart because he fears being condemned. He asks him to search his heart because he longs freedom. David trust God. Do you trust God enough to allow Him to reveal the junk that exists in your own heart? Why or why not? What fears surface when you think about this question? _____

Prayer/Reflect: Read Psalm 139:23-24 again. David prays for specific prayer in this passage. Pray them in your own words.

1) Search my heart: _____

2) Reveal my fears: _____

3) Uncover my sins: _____

4) Lead me in a new direction: _____

Day 17/Prayer

Show Me My Fear

Read

Yesterday we asked God to search us, reveal the hidden things in our lives, and help us to get rid of them. Usually, when we think of God revealing sin, we think of things like sexual immorality, lies, and gossip. These are definitely sins God wants to bring to the light. However, there is often darkness in us that's even better at hiding. Something that is in our heart that we might struggle to see without the help of God showing us.

Is there anything you keep avoiding? Is there a certain responsibility, level of relationship, or step of faith you always run from? You make excuses every time that little voice comes up. You are often really good at justifying why you don't have time. Why it isn't that big of a deal. All of this is often evidence that you might be experiencing fear.

What we fear the most reveals where we trust God the least. Does every single conflict with your spouse freak you out? Maybe you need to learn to trust God with your marriage. Are you a helicopter-parent constantly hovering over your children? Maybe you fear their failure, separation, or death. Do you fully trust God as your protector? Do finances cause you endless anxiety? Do you really trust God as your provider? We all have some hidden fear and trust issues.

God is after our trust because it brings us the greatest joy and Him the greatest glory.

Brennan Manning put it this way in his book, *Ruthless Trust*:

"The splendor of a human heart that trusts it is loved unconditionally gives God more pleasure than Westminster Cathedral, the Sistine Chapel, Beethoven's "Ninth Symphony," Van Gogh's "Sunflowers," the sight of 10,000 butterflies in flight, or the scent of a million orchids in bloom. Trust is our gift back to God, and he finds it so enchanting that Jesus died for love of it."

Fear tries to call God powerless. It says, "You may have God, but He's not enough. You should still be worried." Now, do you see how fear is at enmity with God? There is good news. Perfect love casts out all fear. Who has perfect love? God does. That's what makes Him our good King who's so dangerous to our enemy.

Day 17/Prayer

Show Me My Fear

Respond

Read 1 John 4:18 & 2 Timothy 1:7. What do you learn about the posture that a believer in Jesus is supposed to have towards life and fear in particular? _____

Often it can be hard for us to identify fear in our lives. First, it takes a willingness to truly evaluate your own heart. Secondly, we often need to ask the right questions that will reveal where fear might be hiding. Think through these questions and what they might be showing you.

What are others trying to tell me? What are the areas of my life or character they've brought up? What is something I've rationalized for some time? Where do I find myself most defensive? _____

"What we fear the most reveals where we trust God the least." If this statement is true, where would you honestly say you trust God the least? _____

Pray/Reflect: Often, we have to take the posture of trust long before our hearts and mind truly believe it. Look at the last two questions and pick out one area of your life that you want to give over to God and trust Him. Write out a prayer or reflection inviting God into trusting that area of your life. Cover three areas: 1) Asking for forgiveness for failure to trust. 2) Inviting Him to own that area of your life. 3) Making you aware of when you are slipping back into not trusting.

Day 18/Prayer

Broken And Poured Out

Read

Do you know what doesn't make a whole lot of sense? Asking to be broken. Do you know what else doesn't make sense? A perfect God giving up his innocent Son in exchange for greater closeness to a ragged bunch of sinners like us. So why do we pray this dangerous "break me" prayer? Because it's the only rational response to Jesus, who was broken for us.

During Jesus' last big meal with His closest friends, He picked up some bread, broke it, then passed it around, calling it His body. Later, He poured out some wine, calling it His blood. We now call this sacrament communion. Jesus asked us to continue this in remembrance of Him, and we do. But maybe He didn't want us just to break bread and pour out wine as a tradition in our church communities. Maybe He also wanted *us* to be broken and poured out for the people we're in community with. Maybe when He told us to keep doing what He did, He actually meant He wanted us to keep doing what He did.

Think about it. If following Christ is a journey to become more like Him, then communion should be not only symbolic of what Christ did but also a model for what we still do. Asking God to break us is not just a prayer for some graduate-level Christian. It's where Christianity begins. **Without brokenness, where is the need for a savior?**

A few verses before the story of communion in the book of Mark, is another story of a woman who *broke* open an expensive jar of perfume and *poured* it out over the feet of Jesus. This perfume would've cost a year's wages, and she would've used it for her past career of luring men. In one moment, she broke open her past and poured out her future in worship at the feet of Jesus.

Today, we must do the same.

The brokenness that many of us need is the realization that we're horrible at being our own masters. It's not much different from the way a new horse needs to be broken of its own desires. As we look for ways God is breaking down our pride and self-rule today, let's remember He was first broken for us. The reason He is such a trustworthy Lord is because He is our savior. We can trust Him to break us because He made us, and He knows how to remake us.

Day 18/Prayer

Broken And Poured Out

Respond

Read Mark 14:1-9, 22-25. What point do you Mark was trying to make by putting the story of the woman and the Passover next to each other? _____

Imagine you were in the room when this woman broke the \$20,000 jar. How would you respond? What thoughts would be running through your mind? _____

Read 2. Corinthians 12:7-10. Most of us try to take a posture of strength in front of others. Whether that is through what we portray on social media or when people ask us how we are doing and our response is always “good” or “fine,” and we can take that exact same posture before God as well. We don’t like feeling weak or dependent on anyone or anything. How does Paul speak about weakness or brokenness in this passage? _____

What is one way in your life you could grow in dependence on God this week? Maybe it’s running to Him with the difficult things you face or maybe its just beginning to pray and ask Him to show you areas that you aren’t relying on Him. _____

Pray/Reflect: Spend some time in prayer asking the Lord to help you grow in dependence on Him and not looking at your weakness as something to hide but something to propel you towards Him. _____

Day 19/Prayer

Here Am I. Send Me!

Read

Today's dangerous prayer is the "send me" prayer. We're all about to go from comfy couch to being a missionary in a random country. Or, maybe not. In fact, if you're worried about praying the "send me" prayer because you're afraid God might banish you to some far-away country, then fear not. God is probably not going to send you to a distant land.

Like many of us, you're probably not ready for something like that. I can't speak for God, but for starters, **I bet He'd be happy with sending most of our recliner-shaped rear ends across the street to meet our neighbors.** Read that last sentence again, and smile about God's patience.

"Send me" means leaving the me-circle we talked about on day one. This prayer is about asking God to send us out of our will and into His. **Oh, and just because God won't send you somewhere until He's ready, doesn't mean you'll feel like you're ready.** Look at the disciples. They were fishermen-turned-pastors, and they did and said some slimy and sloppy things in their first few years. Peter lopped off one soldier's ear before denying Christ to another. Then, a few weeks later, he boldly spoke to a crowd of thousands and led them to start the Christian church.

Today's prayer is inspired by Isaiah 6:8 (NIV). The prophet Isaiah had just experienced the voice of the Lord, asking who would go and be a messenger to spread His word to His people. Isaiah responded with, *Here am I. Send Me!* Isaiah had to have a vision to be sent by God. We don't. Jesus used His last words on this earth to ask us to be His messengers to all people. The Great Commission is our send-off. When we pray, "Send me," we're not asking for a new mission—we're accepting the one He already gave us. Like Peter, we may make mistakes, but we've already been sent.

It can be easy to slip into the trap that The Great Commission has been given to the pastors or the church leaders to make it happen, but that wasn't the plan. The Great Commission is for every single person who follows Jesus. Every believer gets to be apart of the mission of reaching the whole world for Jesus.

It's a big mission. But are you willing to say, "Here I am, send me!"

Day 19/Prayer

Here Am I. Send Me!

Respond

Read Jonah 1:1-3, Exodus 3:10-11, & Isaiah 6:1-8. In all three of these verses, you see God calling these people to go somewhere else to be a witness on His behalf, and you get three different answers. Which one do you most resonate with? Why so?

- **Jonah: I'm not going.**
- **Moses: Send someone else.**
- **Isaiah: Send me.**

When is the last time you felt compelled to do something outside of the norm for someone? (Ex. Invite someone over for dinner that you aren't close with. Compelled to ask a question of faith. Meet a tangible need for someone you normally wouldn't.) Did you do it? Why or why not? Could it have been God sending you? _____

Read Matthew 28:18-20. This passage is known as the Great Commission. Jesus gave this command to every follower of His in every generation. If you were to evaluate your life against this passage how would you feel like you are doing? Where are you succeeding? Struggling? What seems hard or uncertain? _____

Being sent to fulfill The Great Commission isn't just something you do once but it's a manner in which you live. Who has God placed in your life that you could be sent to so that they come to know Jesus and grow in their faith? (Note: You don't have to have all the answers to make an impact.) _____

Pray/Reflect: Jesus promises to be with us as we pursue the Great Commission. Spend some time reflecting and praying on how important and encouraging that should be to us. _____

Day 20/Prayer

Set Apart And Sent Off

Read

You've made it to the last full day of the devotional. Congrats! We hope this devotional has been more than a mere New Years' resolution but has been something that could set up this year as one of great growth in your faith, and you are fulfilling what the Lord is calling you to. Chances are high that you used to be worse off at some point in your life. You can probably identify with the old hymn lyrics, "I once was lost, but now am found." You probably wholeheartedly believe that He has washed you clean of your sin and shame, that He's restored you and set you apart. You probably even know what the terms "sanctified" and "consecrated" mean.

Yesterday, we read Isaiah 6:8. Today, let's look at what happened before God commissioned Isaiah. In verses 1-7, Isaiah described seeing the Lord and His angels in a temple. Wait; what? Yes. Incredible, right? Isaiah's response was to say, "Wait a second. I don't deserve to be seeing this. I have unclean lips." Just then, one of the angels brought a lump of hot coal to his lips and told him he was now clean. What happened next? Isaiah 6:8 happened next. After his lips were cleaned up, set apart, consecrated, God then asked him to be His messenger. See where we're going? When we're saved, cleaned up, found, and set apart, it's for a reason. **God doesn't set us apart to be a trophy on a shelf, or to get stale in a corner, or to be a weird loner. God sets us apart to send us somewhere we couldn't have gone with the crowd.**

The message of God has always worked in a simple but extremely powerful way. **The gospel came to you because it was headed to someone else.**

Often, we want to know God's plan for our lives. What if it's far more simple than we make it out to be? What did God do for you? How do you think it sets you up for what He wants you to do for Him? Let's collectively leave the safe life in our rear-view mirrors. What if God's plan for our lives could be broken into three simple steps.

God, search me.

God, break me.

God, send me.

Let's ask God to search us, break us, and send us. Let's realize there's nothing in us He doesn't already know. Let's fix our eyes on our broken-open need for a Lord and savior. And, let's get going because He set us apart to send us off.

Day 20/Prayer

Set Apart And Sent Off

Respond

Take some time today to reflect on this week of prayer. Which of the three prayers is hardest for you pray? **God, search me. God, break me. God, send me.** Why so?

“The gospel came to you because it was headed to someone else.” Put that sentence in your own words. Have you ever thought of your faith in such a way? Why or why not?

How well do you think you are doing at living that out? How so? _____

Look back through the six days in the prayer week is there a certain prayer or concept that really sticks out to you? Which one is it and why do you think it has made such an impact? _____

Prayer/Reflect: Take some time and think through your prayer week. Is there a prayer you need to be praying throughout the duration of the year? What impact could that prayer have on your life and faith? How could you make that apart of your weekly rhythm of life? _____

Day 21/Wrap Up

Today is a catch-up day for your devotional or a day for deeper reflection.

Our hope with this devotional isn't that you can check-off a reading goal but that through this devotional you are transformed through the power of God's word and the working of the Holy Spirit.

“Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, and of instruction about washings, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. And this we will do if God permits.” – Hebrews 6:1-3

If you are caught up, take some time to reflect on your notes **from this entire study**.

- If you could summarize each week (Relationships/Bible Study/Prayer) into a summary idea, what would it be for each week?
- Is there anything in particular that jumps out to you that you might need to make a bigger focus than just one day?
- Is there anything in particular that you felt encouraged or challenged by?
- Imagine it is January 2021, what is one discipline, prayer, or idea from this study you'd love to have in your life. What is it? How can you make it a priority in 2020?

**Small
Group
Discussion
Guide**

Week 1 Guide – Relationships

- How was everyone's Christmas? What was your favorite memory or gift that you either received or gave?
- Before we dive into the devotional guide, what stuck out to everyone in the sermon?
- If you had to grade yourself on a scale of 1 to 10, how good are you at relationships? 10 being every single relationship I have is pretty awesome and I'm the only common denominator. 1 being I'd enjoy a world where I never had to deal with other people.
- What day of the devotional most impacted you? What was it that stuck out or challenged you?
- **Read Ephesians 2:4-5.** It is by the mere grace of God that we have been saved, and this changes our relationship with God. It isn't by our effort that God is pleased, but by the faith we have in what Jesus has done for us. How is that different than trying to earn favor or by being "good enough" for God?
- Our capacity to extend grace to others is directly related to our ability to receive grace from God. How easy is it for you to give grace to others? Is there anyone in particular that you struggle to give grace to? Why is that?
- Whether it be friendship or marriage/dating, it can be easy to take the posture of consumer compared to being focused on becoming a better friend or spouse. How much of your focus is spent thinking about others becoming a better friend or spouse compared to you becoming a better friend or spouse? What is something you could do this year to improve in one of these areas?
- Closing: Whether through the study or discussion, name a relationship that you want to improve this year and what you can do to improve the relationship.
- Lift those relationships up in prayer.

Week 2 Guide – Bible Reading

- Icebreaker: Has anyone made any New Year's resolutions? If so, what are they?
- Before we dive into the devotional guide, what stuck out to everyone in the sermon?
- What day of the devotional most impacted you? What was it that stuck out or challenged you?
- This week focused on the character and nature of God. Is there any portion of the character of God you hadn't thought about, or you found great comfort or confidence in? How so?
- **Read Psalm 23:1-6.** Why is the Lord being our shepherd important for us to understand regarding our relationship with God? What does us being sheep teach us about ourselves?
- On day ten, we covered God being our refuge; it mentioned this quote. *"The devil wants us to think that God's promises have failed if he lets us suffer. But the psalm later clarifies that God will save us 'in trouble' and not from it."* This quote, coupled with **James 1:2-4**, how does this shape your view of suffering and hardship? How does the character of God give you hope in suffering?
- **Read Psalm 62 out loud.** What sticks out to you as you read? The Lord is called our rest. Where areas in your life do you struggle to have rest or peace?
- To close, how often do you read the Bible? What are your typical hangups when it comes to Bible reading? What could we do as a group to create Bible reading as a regular part of our group?
- Close in prayer.

Week 3 Guide – Prayer

- Icebreaker: What is the most unique or odd thing that you can remember praying for?
- Before we dive into the devotional guide, what stuck out to everyone in the sermon?
- What day of the devotional most impacted you? What was it that stuck out or challenged you?
- Can you recall something you prayed for consistently? Why did you pray for it continually? Was the prayer answered?
- Being honest, how often do you pray? What and where do you often pray for? What often prevents you from praying?
- **Read Psalm 139:23-24.** In this passage, David prays four specific prayers: 1) Search my heart. 2) Reveal my fears. 3) Uncover my sins. 4) Lead me in a new direction. Which one of these prayers have you been least likely to pray? Why so?
- This week we talked about three different types of prayers that a follower of Jesus should be praying. Which of the three prayers is hardest for you to pray? **God, search me. God, break me. God, send me.** Why so?
- Closing: Prayer is an essential part of growing closer to God and growing deeper in your faith. How can we, as a group, make prayer a priority both within our group time and during day-to-day life?
- Close in prayer.

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