



EVERGREEN

BEARING FRUIT IN LIFE'S WINTER SEASONS

I N T R O D U C T I O N

*“O Israel, stay away from idols! I am the one who answers your prayers and cares for you.
I am like a tree that is always green; all your fruit comes from me.”*

Hosea 14:8 (NLT)

What is Evergreen?

Some of us may get excited about winter - the first snow, Christmas, cozy sweaters, etc. However, winter is often described as a season that is dry or, even, dead. As the flowering plants are vacant and the trees bare, it seems like life has hit pause. Winter is especially unique and difficult to walk into this year because of the months already devoid of community due to the pandemic. This is why the staff at Christian Student Fellowship have written this book for you.

Cultivate has been a common word at CSF this year, and it is our desire for your soul to continue to be fed and grown this winter season. This is where the idea of Evergreen was born. Most of the plants of the earth are devoid of life in the winter, but the Evergreen tree bears it's beautiful green leaves all year long. Even though the CSF community is apart for two months, the Lord is still pursuing you and seeking to produce good fruit in your life. In Hosea 14:8, God gives his promise of responding and caring for His people - to produce green leaves in our lives even in seasons of dryness.

How to use this book.

In this book, we have provided for you multiple spiritual disciplines that have been practiced by God's people since Biblical times. Think of this book as a cookbook of these disciplines. Each section contains a meal course, the disciplines that are essential to our transformative walk with Christ. Under each course, there are various recipes as to how you can practice this discipline in your life. The courses, or disciplines, we have included for you are prayer, studying scripture, fasting, and silence/solitude. Each of these disciplines contain different recipes. The last section of the book is a personal touch for you. Each staff member has reflected on ways that God has spoken to their lives and written a prompt to guide you into some kind of reflection. A journal will be useful in working through this section!

Our hope for you.

Through the use of this book, our hope for you is to encounter God in deep and intimate ways this winter. God is already pursuing you in this season, but will you respond? Will you allow God the space in your life to grow deeper roots and bear fruit this winter? When you come back for the spring semester, we hope that the whole CSF community can say that we utilized our time off well by seeking to be formed in God's love. But why stop there? Our biggest hope for you is to not only practice these disciplines over the winter break, but for you to carry them with you as a way of life.

*May the Lord bless you
and protect you.*

*May the Lord smile on you
and be gracious to you.*

*May the Lord show you his favor
and give you his peace.*

Numbers 6:24-26 (NLT)



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I N W A R D .

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O 1 P R A Y E R



*Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you.
You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.
Jeremiah 29:12-13 (NIV)*

We begin with the discipline of prayer because of its centrality to our unceasing closeness with God. According to Richard J. Foster, “Prayer goes beyond simple listening. Prayer is also the conversation and communion we enjoy as we travel with God along a pathway that leads to being consumed and transformed by his love.” Prayer leads us into inward, upward, and outward movements. As we seek the internal formative process of prayer, we are prompted into embodying the life of Christ. Prayer shifts our gaze upward, developing a life of intimacy with the Father. As this discipline is embodied in our life, God’s Spirit moves our focus outward in ministry to the world.

T H E L O R D ' S
P R A Y E R
Landon Porter

*Our Father, who art
in heaven,
hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom come;
thy will be done;
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our
daily bread.
And forgive us our
trespasses,
as we forgive those
who trespass against us.
And lead us not
into temptation;
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
the power and the glory,
for ever and ever.
Amen.*

*Matthew 6:9-13
(NMB)*

Love God and love others. Sometimes it really is just that simple. Jesus was the master of quickly getting to the heart of the matter, of saying a lot in a few words. He does exactly that when answering the disciple's question of how they ought to pray. Now referred to as the Lord's Prayer, Jesus' response gives us a clear example of what our prayer lives should consist of. Our prayer lives should seek the heart of the life of a Christian disciple, to love God and to love those around us. This mission starts in the most private places, in our hearts, our bedrooms, our kitchens, or wherever we find ourselves in communion with the Father.

As we approach the Lord's Prayer and seek to use it in our own lives, it's important to view this prayer as less of a formula and more of a model. While reciting the Lord's Prayer both individually and communally can be a rich practice that calls us back to the heart of Christian life, it can and likely has left a lot of us reciting the same words over and over without giving much thought to the heart of Christ when He first prayed these words.

So what is the heart of this prayer? Let's break it down. We begin with reverence, of acknowledging who God is and asking that the world would be ordered in a way that reflects His glory. We ask for daily bread, for our needs and for the needs of those around us. We repent of our sins, reminding ourselves of Christ's redeeming grace and for the strength to extend forgiveness to others. We ask that Christ would free us from the temptations and evils of this world so that we may remain in His love. We close again praising and acknowledging who God is.

So maybe you don't know all the words, or maybe you've said them a million times. Either way, the Spirit hopes to do transformative work in our hearts through the Lord's Prayer. How is He challenging you to incorporate the heart of Christ in the Lord's Prayer into your own prayer life? Which part of this prayer would you like to incorporate into your own prayer life in a deeper way?

P R A Y E R O F E X A M E N

Landon Porter

What's the last thing you do before you go to bed? Check social media one last time? Watch an episode of the Office? Eat a bowl of cereal? While our mornings are often governed by routines and rhythms, our evenings can easily descend into distraction. Especially in this winter season, when the sun sets earlier than ever, our eyelids start to get heavy and we lose the motivation to do anything fruitful or productive in the evening time.

What if we changed that? What if we asked the Holy Spirit to give us strength to spend time in relationship with God in the waning hours of the day? What if there was a practice that allowed us to deepen our relationship with Him each and every day before we drift off to sleep? Allow me to introduce the Prayer of Examen.

The Prayer of Examen is an invitation to reflect on our day in the presence of God. To take 10-15 minutes of time before the Lord and ask pointed questions about how God has been at work that day. What a radical invitation. In our world that is constantly on to the next thing, the Prayer of Examen invites us to counter-culturally slow down and reflect on what God is up to.

The traditional Prayer of Examen consists of 5 easy steps:

01

Ask God for light.

We need to enter the prayer of Examen looking at our day through His eyes, not our own.

02

Give thanks.

Spend a few moments in gratitude, what people, places, and moments are you grateful for?
Thank God for them.

03

Review the day.

What are the moments where you felt God at work? What moments did you resist or turn away from what God had for you?


04

Face your shortcomings.

In what ways have you fallen short today? Ask God for forgiveness for these moments, trusting in his goodness and graciousness.

05

Look forward to the day to come.



There are also themed Examen's available online and through an app called "Reimagining the Examen." Give these a try if you're looking to mix things up! While the Examen works well in the evenings, it can be prayed at any time of day. Having a journal in which to write your Examen reflections may also be helpful for some.

May the Spirit lead us to be people of depth who spend time in His presence reflecting on how He is at work in our lives. May we trust Him with every moment of our day and allow Him to shape our hearts and minds day by day through praying the Examen.

*Praise the Lord, my soul,
and forget not all his benefits—
who forgives all your sins
and heals all your diseases,
who redeems your life from the pit
and crowns you with love and compassion,
who satisfies your desires with good things
so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.*

Psalm 103:2-5 (NIV)

J E S U S P R A Y E R

Rachel Willoughby

“Once, on being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, “The coming of the kingdom of God is not something that can be observed, nor will people say, ‘Here it is,’ or ‘There it is,’ because the kingdom of God is in your midst.”

Luke 17:20-21(NIV)

Upon Jesus’ death and resurrection, we were given the Holy Spirit that allows us to carry the kingdom of God with us. Seemingly simple prayers, such as the Jesus prayer, can center the prayer of our heart and actualize God’s dwelling in us as the core of who we are. This prayer has been utilized by Christians for hundreds of years as a means of seeking extended time in reflection with God. Henri Nouwen puts it this way,

“The Jesus prayer, or any other prayer form, is meant to be a help to gently empty our minds from all that is not God, and offer all the room to him and him alone. But that is not all. Our prayer becomes a prayer of the heart when we have localized in the center of our inner being the empty space in which our God-filled mind can descend and vanish, and where the distinctions between thinking and feeling, knowing and experience, ideas and emotions are transcended, and where God can become our host. *‘The Kingdom of God is within you’ (Luke 17:21)*, Jesus said. The prayer of the heart takes these words seriously. When we empty our mind from all thoughts and our hearts from all experiences, we can prepare in the center of our innermost being the home for the God who wants to dwell in us. Then we can say with St. Paul, *‘I live now not with my own life but with the life of Christ who lives in me.’ (Galatians 2:20)*. Then we can affirm Luther’s words, ‘Grace is the experience of being delivered from experience.’ And then we can realize that it is not we who pray, but the Spirit of God who prays in us.”

For today’s prompt, it would be helpful to find a quiet place you can sit in for 30-45 minutes. When you find your space, recognize the presence of your Helper, the Holy Spirit, in your life and in this moment. Imagine that you are looking at your heart, God’s dwelling place, and repeat the ancient words of the Jesus Prayer either out loud or in your mind,

“Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.”

Repeat this prayer for at least ten minutes while focusing on God’s presence in you. Allow your mind to be emptied and allow all that space to be given to God. Anytime you get distracted by other thoughts, avoid harsh movements that bring you back into focus. Gently guide your thoughts back to the prayer. After you have allowed God to fill the space of your heart, get out your journal and pray with the Holy Spirit.

ACTS PRAYER

Rachel Willoughby

Yes, Acts is a book of the Bible, a wonderful book about the initiation of God's Spirit in the Church. However, that is not what we are talking about with the ACTS prayer. Rather, the ACTS prayer is an acronym that guides us through four components of prayer. Read through and practice praying each segment of the prayer below.

A doration.

This type of prayer seeks to praise God, not for what He has done in your life (we will save that for later), but for who He is. Starting prayer with adoration allows our prayer to establish who God is before we reflect on anything else.

Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come.
Revelation 4:8 (NIV)

C onfession.

Although it's the type of prayer we often try to avoid, confession of our sins is pivotal to our walk with God. In light of who God is and His holiness, we are left to reflect on our own sinfulness. As we confess this sinfulness, we are able to walk in God's divine forgiveness over our lives and therefore in the freedom of the Gospel.

Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord." And you forgave the guilt of my sin.
Psalms 32:5 (NIV)

T hanksgiving.

While adoration is recognizing who God is, prayers of thanksgiving provide us the opportunity to thank God for what he has done in our lives and in the lives of others. Approaching thanksgiving prior to supplication postures our hearts properly prior to making requests.

Let them give thanks to the Lord for his unfailing love and his wonderful deeds for mankind, for he satisfies the thirsty and fills the hungry with good things.
Psalms 107:8-9 (NIV)


S upplication.

The last section of this prayer is supplication, which is when we make requests on behalf of ourselves or others. Supplication is intentionally the last component of the ACTS prayer as the previous three segments prepare our hearts before we make requests. Oftentimes, I end up with less requests by the time I get to supplication when utilizing this prayer format.

My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me.
John 17:20-21 (NIV)


EVERY MOMENT HOLY

Lydia Slayden



A liturgy is a call and response form of worship and corporate prayer. Liturgies are beautiful poems that draw our attention to the sacredness of simple moments. There is a really beautiful book we love around CSF, called Every Moment Holy. It's a compilation of beautiful liturgies for everyday, ordinary life. Every Moment Holy helps to orient and direct our attention to the Lord through our everyday moments.

By now, you are probably either about to put up your Christmas tree or maybe you've had it up for weeks! Take some time to read through this simple liturgy aloud (with a group or by yourself) and reflect on the beginning of the Christmas Season.



A LITURGY TO MARK THE START OF THE CHRISTMAS SEASON

LEADER: As we prepare our house for the coming
Christmas season, we would also prepare our
hearts for the returning Christ.

PEOPLE: You came once for your people,
O Lord, and you will come for us again.

Though there was no room at the inn
To receive you upon your first arrival,
We would prepare you room
here in our hearts
and here in our home, Lord Christ.

As we decorate and celebrate, we do so to mark the memory of
your redemptive movement into our broken world, O God.

Our glittering ornaments and Christmas trees,
Our festive carols, our sumptuous feasts—
By these small tokens we affirm that something amazing
Has happened in time and space—
That God, on a particular night, in a particular place, so many
years ago, was born to us, an infant King, our Prince of Peace.

Our wreaths and ribbons and colored lights, our giving of gifts,
our parties with friends— these have never been ends in themselves.
They are but small ways in which we repeat that sounding
joy first proclaimed by angels in the skies near Bethlehem.

In view of such great tidings of love announced
to us, and to all people, how can we not be moved
to praise and celebration in this Christmas season?
As we decorate our tree, and as we feast and laugh
and sing together, we are rehearsing for our coming joy!
We are making ready to receive the one
who has already, with open arms, received us!
We would prepare you room here in our hearts
and here in our home, Lord Christ.
Now we celebrate your first coming, Immanuel,
even as we long for your return.
O Prince of Peace, our elder brother, return soon.
We miss you so!

Amen.

(Every Moment Holy, Volume I; Written By: Douglas Kaine McKelvey)

For more liturgies, visit everymomentholy.com.

P R A Y I N G S C R I P T U R E

Landon Porter



*The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you--
they are full of the Spirit and life.
John 6:63 (NIV)*

Remember all your favorite shows from back in the day? That's So Raven, Suite Life of Zack & Cody, Hannah Montana, all in their own right so good. Then, every so often, all three shows would align to create "That's So Suite Life of Hannah Montana". The three shows, each with their own following would combine to create one amazing episode of television. Why am I invoking your early childhood Disney channel nostalgia? Well, if you think about it, "That's So Suite Life of Hannah Montana" is kind of like praying scripture.

Oftentimes, we think of prayer and reading scripture as two separate disciplines. We have our time in the Word and our time in prayer, both of which are amazing and help us connect with God and grow deeper in our relationship with Him. Praying Scripture is the incredible crossover discipline that allows us to use scripture as a base to enrich our prayer lives. But what exactly do we mean when we say "praying scripture". Evan Howard, in his book *Praying the Scriptures* says, "To pray the Scriptures is to order one's time of prayer around a particular text in the Bible."

That's a pretty broad definition, and that's because there's a lot of freedom in praying scripture. It can look like praying the words of Scripture word for word, or centering your prayer around a certain Scripture passage or theme. As you enter this winter season, if your prayer life feels dry, repetitive, or you're at a loss for what to say, praying scripture can help you renew and strengthen your prayers.

The Bible is a pretty big book though, where to start? Might I suggest the book of Psalms. It is after all a book of prayers written by King David and others that have been prayed by the church for thousands of years. The best part about Psalms is that they aren't cookie cutter, one size fits all prayers. They are dynamic and wide ranging in emotion and intent, from utter praise to deep lament. Whatever season you're walking through, the Psalms offer words of prayer when you just don't have them. Let's allow the beauty of God's living Word to breathe new life into the dry bones of our prayer lives this winter. A practical way to start could be starting your quiet time today with praying Psalm 1. From there, continue through the book of Psalms every day at the start of your time with the Lord.

JOURNALING PRAYER

Sarah Iranpour

You often see Christians walking around with two things: a bible and a journal. Sometimes it's more common to see someone just with a journal because you can easily access God's word on your phone. The journal remains a physical thing we carry because there is something special about physically writing out our prayers and thoughts as we walk with the Lord. Journaling Prayer can be done in many different ways and can be very beneficial in opening up your heart to the Lord.

Writing out your thoughts to God

Writing out your thoughts can help you process what you just read in scripture, what you heard from God, or an experience you had. It is often easy for us to race through life and not sit and let our mind and heart process what we read or see. When we take time to sit and process, we give ourselves the time and space to remember and discern what God was speaking and doing.

PRACTICE: Next time you're reading scripture, don't just read it and then go on with your day. Take out your journal and write out questions, thoughts, or convictions the Spirit introduced from the scripture you just read.

Prompted Prayer

I have found that I often need to be asked the hard questions or else I won't ask them myself. Yes, you can answer these questions to yourself or out loud to others but writing out your answer encourages you to go deeper with the Lord. If you pray in your mind or out loud, then it is easier to stop where it seems convenient. Writing out your answers encourages you to keep going, giving you the opportunity to be real with the Lord and yourself.

PRACTICE: This can be practiced through journaling prompts! Lucky for you the second half of this book is full of them! As I practice with journaling prompts, I have found that the Holy Spirit prompts me with questions now as I read scripture.

Writing out your highs and lows

This is something I make sure I do everyday. I sit down and write out the good and bad things about my day. This helps me process the day with God. Writing out the good things helps us realize the blessings in our lives. Writing out the bad things helps us bring our dirty laundry to the Lord. We aren't expected to clean ourselves up before the Lord, He invites all of who we are, even the not-so-great parts. God hears the cries of our heart (Psalm 18:6).

PRACTICE: at the beginning or the end of each day, open up your journal and reflect on that day or the day before. Start with writing out the things that you are thankful for and then finish with the things that were hard or made you unhappy.

Writing out Supplication Prayers

We aren't perfect people. We can't remember to pray for all of our friends, family members, or all the important things in the world that need prayer.

We are told to pray without ceasing (1 Thessalonians 5:17). Something that helps me be consistent with the prayers I pray are by listing them out. Not only does this help me honor others by remembering their specific prayer requests but it helps remind me of the Lord's faithfulness. When I write out specific prayer requests it gives me the opportunity to look back on what I've prayed for. Looking at God's promises leads us to praise Him for being a promise keeping God.



PRACTICE:

	Who am I praying for?	Specific prayer requests
Sunday		
Monday		
Tuesday		
Wednesday		
Thursday		
Friday		
Saturday		

V E R B A L P R A Y E R

Lindsey Craddock

“For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons (and daughters), by whom we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’”
Romans 8:15 (ESV)

“Hey Jesus!” she exclaimed in a child-like voice to begin the prayer. Her name was Katie McCrary (it’s now Katie Ekman) and she opened our group time with prayer in a way that I had previously never heard. My freshman year of college, I joined a Shift group at CSF. At the time, there were co-ed groups, so naturally I joined one of those rather than an all-girls group because duh #boys. (Present me shakes her head and cringes at past me.) Katie led our Shift group alongside Seth Stewart. Together, they taught us about the deep love that the Father has for each of us as children of God. Little did I know, I would grow exponentially in my walk with Christ through attending that group, and my desire for a relationship with Jesus would far outweigh my desire for a relationship with a boy.

Before joining that group, my experiences in hearing others pray had been the following: in my church, where we read archaic words aloud together while an organ played in the background; my grandmother with her soft yet strong voice before putting me to bed; and my grandfather, a dignified and faithful man of God, blessing our meal, whether it was a holiday or not. Although these moments each impacted me, Katie’s joyful and simple approach to praying aloud was eye-opening (or you could say soul-opening).

Hebrews 4:14-16 (ESV) says “Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.” Thanks to Jesus, we—sinners, impure, unworthy—can approach the throne of God, the King of Kings and Holy of Holies, with CONFIDENCE. In fact, God wants to invite us in. His heart as a Father is to welcome His children in, no matter where they have been or what they have done. He’s just simply happy to be with us.

One day, I tried it. I prayed aloud with the same kind of tone that Katie had. Over time, I cultivated my own way of praying. I'm not saying there's a perfect formula for praying aloud or having the right words to say, but I do believe that knowing the character of the God you're praying to helps a lot. Our God doesn't expect perfection from us—*He is gentle, kind, and merciful—all He desires is "a broken and contrite heart" (Psalm 51:17). My encouragement to you is to pray aloud in such a way that you're talking with a friend. Say His name, the character He has proven to you, and know that "the LORD sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart" 1 Samuel 16:7 (ESV)*

ACTION STEPS:

Who has God proven Himself to be in your life? Who is God to you? Is He your Best Friend, your Comforter, your Defender, your Refuge, your King? Reflect on who He is to you in this season and pray aloud to Him.

Practice praying aloud. Pick one or two of the following and do it:

Pray aloud to the different parts of the Trinity—pray to God as a Father, pray to Jesus as the One Who cares for you, pray to the Holy Spirit as your Helper.

Write out a prayer to God and then read it aloud.

Pick a passage of Scripture (the Psalms are great for this!) and read it aloud as a prayer. Feel free to expand past the Scriptures and include your own words!

Phone a friend! Contact a friend and plan to pray aloud together weekly.

Record a voice memo of you praying over another person and send it to them!

"... encourage one another and build one another up..." 1 Thessalonians 5:11 (ESV)

PRAYER WALKS

Katie Greene



“Seek my face.” This was the invitation I sensed from Jesus internally at the beginning of quarantine. At this point, everyone was encouraged to stay home and daily walks were becoming the new normal. For the first time, I set out on a walk through my neighborhood. I remember walking back towards my house one day and thinking to myself, “why have I never walked through my own neighborhood before? I’ve lived here for over two years.” Then I felt a nudge from the Holy Spirit as the question that then came to my mind was, “why have I never prayed for my neighborhood? I’ve lived here for over two years...”

I felt what I can best describe as a twinge of pain in my heart as I came to face my own selfishness. The scripture I had been meditating on a lot during those weeks was *Hebrews 7:25 (ESV)* “*Therefore He is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because He always lives to intercede for them.*” Jesus, our risen Savior, continuously intercedes. For me, for you, for the world. I knew, if I am made in His image, I am called to be an intercessor, too. So I repented of the time I had spent not seeing my actual neighbors as Jesus does. As people He loves enough to die for, as people He lives to intercede for. And I began to set out, not just as a way to get out of the house, but as a way to intentionally connect to the heart of God, and seek His face on behalf of my neighborhood. And what happened next?

I gained a love for the people in my neighborhood. Not a love that comes from me, but a love that comes from a deeper understanding of His heart for them. My intimacy with Jesus was deepened. There is a deep companionship in knowing Jesus is interceding, and His Spirit in us helps us to join Him in those prayers. Not just for ourselves, but for others too. What does Jesus say is the most important thing? In Mark 12 Jesus tells us, “*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your mind and with all your strength. The second is this: Love your neighbor as yourself. There is no greater commandment than these.*”(ESV) Before, I am sad to admit that I largely saw my neighbors as people I just passed by. But I found that as I talked with Him on these walks, He was growing my love for Him. And as I listened and prayed on behalf of my neighbors, He was giving me His love for them, too!

Read Jesus’ invitation to us in *Psalms 27:8 (ESV)*, “*Seek my face.*” The beauty of this is that we can seek His face on behalf of others too! Think about that for a moment. This Jesus that we seek is interceding right now, this moment, on your behalf, but also for those around us. Simply ask Him: Jesus, who are the neighbors you are calling me to love as myself? Is it family members, friends, or (like in my case) my actual neighbors? How can I pray for them? Then, whether you’re in your room or out on a walk, you get to respond – “Your face, Lord, I will seek!”

PRAYER OF LAMENT

Landon Porter

*Peace has been stripped away,
and I have forgotten what
prosperity is.
I cry out, “My splendor
is gone!
Everything I had hoped for
from the Lord is lost!”*

*The thought of my suffering
and homelessness
is bitter beyond words
I will never forget
this awful time,
as I grieve over my loss.
Yet I still dare to hope
when I remember this:*

*The faithful love of the
Lord never ends!
His mercies never cease.
Great is his faithfulness;
his mercies begin afresh
each morning.
I say to myself, “The Lord
is my inheritance;
therefore, I will hope in him!”*

Lamentations 2:17-24 (NLT)

Wow, that was a heavy piece of scripture right? Whoever wrote this must've really been going through it. Lamentations is a book written from Israelite exiles in Babylon following the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple by the Babylonian empire. We don't hear from God at all, which sets Lamentations apart from every other book in Scripture.

So why is Lamentations in the Bible? I believe it's because as Christians, we need to know how to lament. A lament is defined as a passionate expression of grief and sorrow. It's an authentic expression through prayer of deep pain that either we or someone around us has experienced.

As we end 2020 and begin 2021, many of us carry burdens. Be it social isolation, the loss of a loved one, strained relationships, or lost opportunity—this has been an especially painful year. We experience this on a societal level too as we wrestle with the pain racism and deep political division has caused for those on the margins.

Thus, it's time we allow our Father to teach us how to lament. As followers of Christ we ought to respond to the pain of our world in a unique way. Instead of withdrawing from our pain and pretending to praise, lament gives us freedom to express our full emotion before our loving Father. In his book, *Prophetic Lament*, Soong-Chan Rah says, “Withdrawal from the world or accepting simplistic answers reveals human effort or human problem solving, while lament acknowledges who is ultimately in control.

In the midst of a crisis, Lamentations points toward God and acknowledges his sovereignty regardless of the circumstances.”

To lament is to choose to place our hope beyond this world. To lament is to bring our pain before our Father. To lament is to advocate for our oppressed and marginalized neighbors. May our heavenly Father teach us to pray prayers of lament for ourselves, our communities and our world. This practice will form our hearts to trust in Jesus as our ultimate hope above all else.

BONUS: If you're interested in learning more about lament, check out *Prophetic Lament* by Soong-Chan Rah.

I N T R O D U C T I O N

We are formed by what we put into our minds. The world calls us to live by its own works, expectations, and patterns. However, God commands us to live by his standards. This isn't a legalistic, "don't do anything wrong" kind of thing. Jesus' incarnation, sacrifice, and resurrection redeemed us of that obligation to the law. However, Jesus nevertheless fulfilled the law and even reinvisioned the law through the Sermon on the Mount. To avoid conforming to the patterns of this world, we seek relationship with God and walk in obedience to him. But how do we know what this looks like?

Scripture. Our minds get stuffed with perverse music, misleading advertisements, and sexualized imaging from our culture that form us in one direction. But, God seeks to form us in the opposite direction through Scripture, filling our minds with love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, and self control. God has revealed himself and his ways to us through his Word. There, we discover who God is, his desire for personal relationship with us, and the way by which we respond in love to him - obedience. In fact, that is God's love language with us. When we respond in relationship to God by seeking him and walking in his ways, we express love to God. So, as Joshua 1:8 indicates, we are called to not just read God's word but to meditate on it. To have imprinted on our hearts who he is and his ways of obedience. In the following pages, we have various practices of seeking Scripture that will guide you in the discipline of imprinting God's Word on your heart and renewing your mind.

0 2

S C R I P T U R E



This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success.
Joshua 1:8 (NIV)

Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.
Romans 12:1-2 (NIV)

LECTIO DIVINA

Lexus McCormick

Lectio Divina is a Latin term which means “Spiritual Reading.” It’s a formative way of reading the Bible that honors the nature of Scripture as God’s revelation of himself to us. This guided way of reading leads us into Scripture with the intention of letting the words permeate our whole lives. Don’t think of Lectio Divina as merely reading God’s Word; instead think of it as a way of letting Scripture read you.

Lectio Divina is reading the Bible in a way that allows it to transform us and become a part of our lived experience. For hundreds of years, Christians have used this guide to lead them into a daily encounter with God. By following these steps and sitting with scripture, or “chewing on it” as we like to say, we allow God to speak to us. The words of scripture are received through reading, they dwell inside of us through meditation, and slowly transform our everyday lives through prayer and contemplation.

“Lectio Divina means to read the Bible with reverence and openness to what the Spirit is saying to us in the present moment...The regular practice of Lectio Divina presents occasions when my story and God’s story meet, and in that moment something surprising can happen.”

Henri Nouwen

The cool thing about this tool is that you can use it for the rest of your life! Some scriptures are listed below for you to work through, but feel free to take Lectio Divina and run with it. I also really encourage you to read these scriptures in your own Bible. Mark them up and see what the Lord has to say to you.

Lastly, as you walk through the guide of Lectio Divina, stay committed. It could be easy to either skip steps or rush through the reading, but staying disciplined to the process will walk you into a deeper revelation of both scripture and God himself.

SUGGESTED PASSAGES:

Luke 15:11-32
Isaiah 55:8-13
Ephesians 6:10-20
Isaiah 6:6-13
Psalm 16
Revelation 22:1-5
Matthew 26:36-46
Psalm 139
Ephesians 3:14-19
Psalm 23

LECTIO DIVINA

REST (Silencio)

2 minutes of silence

Let your heart and mind come to a place of rest

READ (Lectio)

Read slowly 3 times.

Listen for the word addressed to you.

REFLECT (Meditatio)

How is my life touched by this word?

RESPOND (Oratio)

What is my response to God based on what I have read and encountered?

REST (Contemplatio)

Read the passage one last time.

Rest in the Word of God.

RESOLVE (Incarnatio)

Live out the Word of God.

DEVOTIONAL & INSIGHTFUL SCRIPTURE STUDY

Lydia Slayden

There are so many ways to read scripture. Sometimes it can feel daunting or confusing to get started. Here are some helpful questions and perspectives to think about when you read a section of scripture. We've divided it into reading devotionally and insightfully. Reading devotionally helps scripture become personal. Reading insightfully helps to understand scripture in context. God communicates and does transforming work within us as we dig into His word. Reading devotionally and insightfully are important ways that we get to spend time in scripture. Both are ways that we get to hear from and learn from God. The Bible is the living Word of God. When you read scripture multiple times, it is amazing to see the Holy Spirit illuminate something different through the same verses. Take some time to read through a passage of scripture with different lenses!

Devotionally

Pray that God speaks
to you through the text.

Read it through
multiple times.

Pray over and through different lines or
sentences
in the text.

Ask what the passage
says about God.

Ask what the passage
says about you.

Sit in reflection & listen for God to
speak.

Insightfully

Read through the text multiple times and in
different translations

External Context
(who is writing, when, to whom,
and why are they writing, genre)

Internal Context
(how does this verse fit into the paragraph,
paragraph to bigger argument,
bigger argument into full book,
full book into the story of Scripture)

Recurring themes
& Main Point

Consult a commentary
(if possible)

How does the text relate to or
reveal Jesus?

COLOR STUDIES

Lexus McCormick

Some of you may not know this, but my major at UK was Secondary English Education (aka the degree you get to be a High School English Teacher). So in today's edition of studying scripture, we're throwing it back to High School English!

Do you remember when you used to diagram sentences in school and it was basically the worst thing ever? Me too! And just because I studied it, doesn't mean I loved it, but I do have an appreciation for it now. When we're studying the word of God, diagramming sentences can actually help us to see things we may have never noticed had we casually read over it.

I think many times, we don't want to diagram sentences in our Bible because we'll "mess it up" or we "won't like it after it's marked up," and that's okay! We can practice right here in this book! Or if you don't even want to mess up the book, you can go find our scripture and print it out for yourself. Before we do anything though, I want you to go through the scripture printed below at least once and read the story of the Lord calling Samuel.

Then Samuel said,
"Speak,
for your servant is
listening."

In our scripture, the section we're studying is titled, "The Lord Calls Samuel." Therefore, we have two characters speaking: God and Samuel. Not as obviously, Eli, Samuel's mentor, also speaks in this passage. So, your task at hand is finding three separate colors to indicate your three different characters. You could use colored pencils, crayons, markers, or (my personal favorite) highlighters. You can even make a key in the corner with your colors if you're super meticulous like me!

Now for every sentence of dialogue, starting with verse 4, box in the subject (the who), circle the verb (the what), and highlight or underline the dialogue. For example, if I had chosen green for Samuel, when he speaks in verse 10, it would look like this:

After you've finished your boxing, circling, and highlighting/underlining, look back at your work. What do you notice? What sticks out now? Do you ever "dialogue" with God? How does Samuel discern the voice of God? How can you apply Samuel's method to your own life?

THE LORD CALLS SAMUEL - 1 SAMUEL 3 (NIV)

The boy Samuel ministered before the Lord under Eli. In those days the word of the Lord was rare; there were not many visions.

One night Eli, whose eyes were becoming so weak that he could barely see, was lying down in his usual place. The lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the house of the Lord, where the ark of God was. Then the Lord called Samuel.

Samuel answered, "Here I am." And he ran to Eli and said, "Here I am; you called me."

But Eli said, "I did not call; go back and lie down." So he went and lay down.

Again the Lord called, "Samuel!" And Samuel got up and went to Eli and said, "Here I am; you called me."

"My son," Eli said, "I did not call; go back and lie down."

Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord: The word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him.

A third time the Lord called, "Samuel!" And Samuel got up and went to Eli and said, "Here I am; you called me."

Then Eli realized that the Lord was calling the boy. So Eli told Samuel, "Go and lie down, and if he calls you, say, 'Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.'" So Samuel went and lay down in his place.

The Lord came and stood there, calling as at the other times, "Samuel! Samuel!"
Then Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant is listening."

And the Lord said to Samuel: "See, I am about to do something in Israel that will make the ears of everyone who hears about it tingle. At that time I will carry out against Eli everything I spoke against his family—from beginning to end. For I told him that I would judge his family forever because of the sin he knew about; his sons blasphemed God, and he failed to restrain them. Therefore I swore to the house of Eli, 'The guilt of Eli's house will never be atoned for by sacrifice or offering.'"

Samuel lay down until morning and then opened the doors of the house of the Lord. He was afraid to tell Eli the vision, but Eli called him and said, "Samuel, my son."

Samuel answered, "Here I am."

"What was it he said to you?" Eli asked. "Do not hide it from me. May God deal with you, be it ever so severely, if you hide from me anything he told you." So Samuel told him everything, hiding nothing from him. Then Eli said, "He is the Lord; let him do what is good in his eyes."

The Lord was with Samuel as he grew up, and he let none of Samuel's words fall to the ground. And all Israel from Dan to Beersheba recognized that Samuel was attested as a prophet of the Lord. The Lord continued to appear at Shiloh, and there he revealed himself to Samuel through his word.

M E M O R I Z A T I O N

Rachel Willoughby



For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.

Hebrews 4:12 (ESV)

We have made this point multiple times throughout this book because it is an important one; we are formed by what we put into our minds. As Christians, our calling is to be transformed by God's Spirit and into the likeness of Christ. What better way to be formed than by filling our minds with God's own words? As the verse above states, God's word forms us by sharpening us with truth and guiding us in the way of discernment. Scripture helps us to discern where the thoughts and attitudes that appear on our hearts come from. We are called to meditate on the law day and night (Joshua 1:8) and have the law written on our hearts (Jeremiah 31:33). This is why Scripture memorization is an important element of our relationship with God. This practice gives the Holy Spirit the opportunity to form us and guide us. Below are some suggested Scriptures to start your journey in memorizing Scripture.

John 3:16

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

Jeremiah 29:11

For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.

1 Corinthians 13:4

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud.

Romans 8:28

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

Proverbs 3:5-6

Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight

2 Timothy 1:7

For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline.

Matthew 11:28

Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.

James 5:16

Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.

John 14:6

Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

Ephesians 2:8-9

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast.

Isaiah 40:30-31

Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.

2 Corinthians 4:18

So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

Galatians 5:22-23

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.

NIV

FAITH
COMES
FROM
HEARING

LISTENING

Lydia Slayden

*So faith comes from hearing, that is, hearing the Good News about Christ.
Romans 10:17 (NLT)*

If you're anything like I am, I'm not a great reader. I'm so slow. For years, I've said.. "I want to like to read." So often I get stuck on sentences and can't move on. Even in scripture, I can get stuck in the details. One of the most transformative things I've learned about myself is that I love to listen. I can pay more attention when I listen.

Listening has been one of my favorite ways of studying scripture. Scripture has been passed down orally since Biblical times. The apostle Paul sent letters to the churches to be publicly read aloud. When you listen to large sections of scripture, you are joining in with an ancient tradition of understanding scripture. Not only that, but you are able to zoom out and see a bigger picture.

There was a student a few years ago that, during the season of Lent, listened to one gospel (Matthew, Mark, Luke or John) a day. Which is about 1.5-2 hours. Ever since then, I have been so inspired by her story. We waste so many hours of our days scrolling on social media, playing video games, or watching Netflix, what would our lives look like if we used a small portion of the hours we get each day to listen to scripture?

Whether you are solely listening to scripture, getting ready for the day, driving or even just switching over your laundry. Listening to scripture can be an incredible way to steep in the scriptures and allow them to wash over you!

Here are a few resources that are extremely helpful!

Dwell. This is a beautiful app that has themed playlists and music options.
YouVersion Bible App. This app is free! Look for the sound symbol and press play!
The Bible Project. After you've listened to a section of scripture, check out The Bible Project YouTube channel to see how they've looked at the overall picture.

Take some time to explore the scriptures through listening to different versions. Try out the NIV, NLT, ESV, or the Message. You may be refreshed by a new translation.



B E T R A N S F O R M E D

03

F A S T I N G



When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show others they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full.

Matthew 6:16 (NIV)

Richard J. Foster describes fasting as “the voluntary denial of otherwise normal functioning for the sake of intense spiritual activity”. In Scripture, fasting is most frequently displayed as the denial of food. However, there are many ways that we can practice fasting. In the verse above, we are not instructed to fast voluntarily. The verse starts with the word when not if. “When” connotes that we, God’s people, are called into fasting. This is because fasting is a humbling experience that reveals what we are controlled by. Our bodies are dependent on food, however our full functioning is dependent on our Spiritual food. Through fasting, we deny our flesh to seek God’s heart to continually transform us into His likeness. This section will suggest various ways we can seek to deny the ways of this world and be transformed in God’s way.

F O O D

Rachel Willoughby

“Fasting confirms our utter dependence upon God by finding in him a source of sustenance beyond food. Through it, we learn by experience that God’s word to us is a life substance, that it is not food (“bread”) alone that gives life, but also the words that proceed from the mouth of God (Matt. 4:4). We learn that we too have meat to eat that the world does not know about (John 4:32, 34). Fasting unto our Lord is therefore feasting - feasting on him and on doing his will.”

Dallas Willard

Fasting is an ancient practice and, biblically, is most commonly a practice of denying food. As mentioned in the introduction to fasting, we are called to fast as a part of our walk with God. This practice is meant to deepen our spiritual life, reminding us of our need for God. As we experience physical hunger, we are reminded of our need to hunger after God.

To start, ask the Lord why you are fasting? Is the objective to seek healing, pray over a difficult circumstance, or to seek God’s presence? From there, discern how long your fast will last. Will you fast a meal, for a day, or one meal each day for a week? When are you committing to do this fast? If you have not fasted before, it is wise to start with just one meal and grow from there.

Next, it is important to prepare yourself spiritually and physically. To prepare spiritually, confessing sin is essential to your fasting experience. *1 John 1:9* says, *“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness”* (NIV). As you start your fast, pray this verse and allow the Holy Spirit to move your heart into a posture of repentance. To prepare physically, avoid eating high fat and sugary meals beforehand, plan to avoid high amounts of physical activity, and reserve space to rest.

Now go, feast on the presence of the Lord! Do not *“live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God”* (Matthew 4:4; NIV).

P H O N E / S O C I A L M E D I A

Rachel Willoughby

Did you know that your phone turns off? Admittedly, I often forget this fact. I don't know about you, but every Sunday when I get a daily screen time summary notification, I feel embarrassment. How do I end up wasting so much of my time on this tiny little device? Don't hear me say that technology is inherently bad, but its presence in our lives has largely consumed our focus. I decide to take a break, pull out my phone, click on Instagram, start looking at a couple posts, and then two hours later I come back to consciousness. How does this always happen?

What we focus on, is what we are in allegiance to. This is why Hebrews 12 commands us to fix our eyes on Jesus, so that we do not become entangled in sin. When our eyes are fixed on the things of this world rather than God, we are easily consumed by sin and worldly patterns. We can be transformed by God or we can be transformed by all the messages sent to us through social media, the news, etc.

There are a couple ways you can seek to fast from your phone. The first is by turning your phone off completely for a couple of hours or even a whole day. Another way is to fast from the apps on your phone that are consuming your time for a day, week, or month. These could be social media apps, games, etc. We want to invite you to seek the Holy Spirit in discerning what kind of fast you are being challenged into and for how long. It could also be helpful to invite others to come alongside you in this fast.

Take out your journal or assume a position of prayer and ask the Holy Spirit the following questions:

What do I need to throw off to resist the entanglement of sin?

What am I fixing my eyes on in place of Jesus?

How are you recentering my focus on Jesus? For how long?

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith.

Hebrews 12:1-2 (NIV)

NETFLIX AIN'T CHILL

Alli Rankin

Finally brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable -- if there is any moral excellence and if there is anything praiseworthy-- dwell on those things.

Philippians 4:8 (NIV)

No one can serve two masters, since either he will hate one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.

Matthew 6:24 (NIV)

Netflix Ain't Chill. I'd say most of us can raise our hands to binge watching at least one TV series on Netflix. Personally I've watched Grey's Anatomy more times than I care to admit. It's that show that I go to just to 'relax'. It's also the show that I end up spending so much time 'relaxing' with that I miss my quiet time with God.

Matthew 6:24 says we cannot serve two masters, ask yourself if entertainment, specifically Netflix, is something in your life that you are idolizing or being consumed by. As Philipians 4:8 points out, we should be dwelling on the things that are pure, lovely, and praiseworthy. Some of us may have stronger personal convictions than others, but I'd also like us to take some time to reflect on your relationship with Netflix. Are you watching things that you know contain impure plots or segments? Are you watching anything that would cause you to dwell on things that are not of the Lord? Are you open to receiving the Lord's conviction in this area of your life and walking in true repentance?

Ask God to guide you through some time in reflection. Walk through any of these questions that stand out to you. In response to these convictions, try fasting from Netflix for 5 days. Over these five days replace time binging on Netflix with something tangible, like one or two of the many practices outlined in this book that help us know the Lord better. My prayer for you as you seek his face during this fast is that you experience the fullness of His love and you allow Him to move in your life.

FASTING FROM THE FAST LANE

Rachel Willoughby

Then Jesus said, "Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy to bear, and the burden I give you is light."

Matthew 11:28-30 (NLT)

We live in a culture that thrives on busyness. From one meeting to the next, we are constantly on the move and often miss God in the ordinary moments of life. A couple of years ago, I listened to a sermon about our culture of hurry. As we strive for success, we don't slow down our lives as Jesus did on earth. Jesus' life looked much different than our own. As we speed from one thing to the next, Jesus walked. From town to town, person to person, teaching to teaching, Jesus did not rush.

Have you ever heard the phrase Godspeed? People often use this term meaning to, "Hurry! Go at the speed of light! Godspeed!" However, when we really think about the movement of God incarnate, it was not rushed. Jesus moved at three miles per hour, walking from one thing to the next. This is completely counterculture, so how do we seek to imitate this in our own lives?

After the sermon, the pastor challenged the congregation to fast from the fast lane. The way we often move from obligation to obligation is by driving, and admittedly, I exclusively choose the fast lane in this mode of travel. When I heard this challenge, I was in a busy season of life.

Seeking ways to slow down, like fasting from the fast lane, gave God the space to speak into my life as I moved from place to place. This also gave my heart the opportunity to transform away from the culture in which I live. Whether you are in a slow or hurried season, fasting from the fast lane can be an opportunity to create more space for the Lord and seek rest even in the busiest of days.

Jesus promises rest to those who give Him the space to teach them His ways. Whether it be for a day, a week, or a month, fasting from the fast lane can be an intentional way to allow Jesus to teach you how to reject hurriedness and discover rest.



0 4

S O L I T U D E



Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.

Mark 1:35 (NIV)

Time and time again, we see Jesus leave to pray in solitude and silence. Dallas Willard said that “In solitude we purposefully abstain from interaction with other human beings, denying ourselves companionship and all that comes from our conscious interaction with others...of all the disciplines of abstinence, solitude is generally the most fundamental in the beginning of the spiritual life.”

Solitude is the way by which we become more present to God. Through the space given to God in solitude we allow God the opportunity to speak. Within the silence, we can better hear God’s whispers into our hearts.

S O L O I N G

Lexus McCormick

YOU
ARE
NOT
ALONE

I remember the first time I took a solo to be with the Lord. I was a junior in college, and I was in the middle of the 30 Day Journey—a prayer opportunity that CSF had introduced that fall semester to our leaders. I remember being so nervous. I hate to admit it, but up until that point, I almost never actually put my phone away when I was “spending time with God,” and I wasn’t really sure how I was going to last six whole hours without some kind of distraction.

But the truth of the matter is, solos have been the most grounding and directional times with the Lord that I’ve ever had. God led Jesus and Elijah into solos where they were able to remove themselves from the situation at hand and really press into what the Lord had to say to them (Matthew 4:1-11; Luke 4:1-13; 1 Kings 19:1-18). Even though Elijah went through many trials in his wilderness experience, he walked out of his solo with confirmation of his calling and direction for his ministry. Jesus endured hunger and temptation from Satan during his time in the wilderness, but he walked out of his solo with the power of the Spirit (Luke 4:14) and the strength to start his public ministry. I have struggled through solos and walked out with direction, purpose, and calling every single time.

Solos can feel hard and trying, but the best advice about solos I ever heard was from our very own Seth Stewart. He said something along the lines of, “When you start to feel bored during your solo, that’s the precise moment to push through anyway. There’s always goodness on the other side of boredom.” It’s so true! I’ve never been let down when pushing through my boredom.

Now it’s your turn. Ask the Lord how long of a solo you should do. I’ve had great 2, 4, and 6 hour solos that have truly grounded me in the Lord. Then set the date that you’ll solo, find a place (preferably out in nature!), grab your Bible, a journal, and a pen, and really do it! If it’s cold outside, make sure to bundle up! Don’t be afraid to take a lunch or a snack, some water, and a backpack to hold all your things. And lastly, go into your solo with an open mind. Expect that the Lord will show up, but don’t put him in a box. Let him reveal himself to you through your boredom.

C E N T E R I N G P R A Y E R

Landon Porter

*By waiting and by calm you shall be saved,
in quiet and in trust shall be your strength.
Isaiah 30:15 (NABRE)*

Imagine a world in which podcasts aren't a thing. Bluetooth speakers don't exist. Car stereos were never thought of. Suddenly your car rides and showers are devoid of background noise. Is this a beautiful world or a tragedy? Are we better off or missing a crucial piece of our existence?

My guess is that question would get a range of different answers. We hold our music and podcasts and youtube videos near to our hearts and our fingertips. There's nothing like singing your heart out in the shower or while driving with the windows down. The truth is, these are good things. They can enrich our lives by bringing us joy or challenging us to think. The trouble is they can also dominate our lives, steal our time, and distract us from the people around us. Sometimes, the endless cycle of noise keeps us away from our own thoughts.

We weren't meant to live with airpods in 24/7 or to constantly consume the next interesting sound. Sometimes, we're meant to live in silence. For hundreds of years, silence was just a part of human life. Now, we've got to fight for it. One way we can fight for silence in our lives is through the practice of centering prayer.

Here's the move. Find a spot that's quiet and comfortable (but not too comfortable, this isn't nap time). Take a few deep breaths to relax your mind and body, then close your eyes. Next, we need a sacred word. This can be as simple as the name of Jesus, a name for God you connect with, or a simple word like peace or love. Now try to empty your mind, let go of any thoughts lingering in your mind. When you find your mind getting distracted, use your sacred word to return to a still mind.

Believe it or not, Christians over the years have spent 20-30 minutes in centering prayer. Even more crazy, this could be you! However, it may be wise to start with a shorter time period, say 5 minutes, and build up slowly from there.

In my own experience, I've found Contemplative Outreach's Centering Prayer App super helpful. You can even have a gong sound to bring you in and out of your time of prayer, big monk vibes!

Another important thing to know about Centering Prayer is that you might not experience a ton, or feel super connected with God afterwards. That is okay! The work of Centering Prayer is often at a subconscious level we aren't attentive to. However, if we commit to doing the work of fighting for stillness with God day by day over the course of this winter, we will start to see the Spirit forming us into people of peace who know God intimately.

S I L E N C E

Jessica Avery

*Let all that I am wait quietly before God
Psalm 62:5 (NLT)*

Did you know that today you are exposed to more information in one day than the average medieval peasant would encounter in a lifetime? No wonder our brains feel like they are on overdrive. Silence has to be fought for. Not just the auditory kind. Beyond Spotify, podcasts, TedTalks, and YouTube there is the avalanche of written words coming at us nonstop. All of it is noise.

Jesus didn't have an iPhone, but he did have a crowd of people constantly chasing him to learn from him, be healed by him, and even to try to kill him. There was so much chaos, and so much urgency around him all the time. Noise. But Jesus knew that he needed time away from the fray to be with his Father so that he could face the world. Jesus often withdrew to lonely places to pray (Luke 5:16, Luke 6:12, Matthew 14:23, Mark 1:35-36). It seems that the best way to be ready to face the world is to step out of it wisely and regularly. To find silence so the noise could be kept at bay.

Stepping away from our phones and books for even a few minutes allows room at the margins of our minds for God to shape our thoughts. When we first start this practice of silence, our minds will scream and twitch to be satisfied with noise - words in our ears or on our screens. A restlessness will unsettle us. We will instinctively and mindlessly reach for our phones over and over again until we relearn how to be without them for just a few minutes at a time.

Once we settle in silence, we grow in the skill of searching our souls, of listening for the Almighty, of making our minds available to be flooded with thoughts of God. This gets easier over time. It's like working out. When we stay with it, the same workout gets easier, and we can take on more. So it is with learning to sit in silence. Thomas Merton was a monk in Kentucky, and he described growing in capacity for silence like this: "Gradually, after deliberately choosing quiet times with God, our heart begins to sharpen its perception of God's presence. The quiet of God begins to speak and direct us, and our heart becomes more finely tuned to the frequency that God uses to speak to us." Getting finely tuned to the frequency of God is possible for all of us. We just need to start slowly walking that direction.

Start small. Set a timer on your phone and leave it across the room. And sit with some silence. You can bring some scripture and journaling into this time. Part of your growing silence can just be spent doing absolutely nothing but gently redirecting your thoughts toward God as your "silence muscle" bulks up little by little. On day one, try 10 minutes. When that becomes easier, build up to 20 minutes, and finally go for a half hour. Open your time with this scripture as your prayer:

"Let all that I am wait quietly before God" (Psalm 62:5; NLT).

S A B B A T H

Landon Porter



For anyone who enters God's rest also rests from their works, just as God did from his. Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will perish by following their example of disobedience.
Hebrews 4:10-11(NIV)

Write that paper. Study for that exam. Go to that extracurricular that looks good on your resume. Go. Go. Go. Rinse and repeat again and again.

Relatable? Has this past semester left you pulled a thousand different directions and feeling utterly exhausted? We live in a culture where our worth is measured more by what we do than who we are. It's so easy to buy into this false narrative as followers of Christ, to always be doing and never resting. Believe it or not we weren't meant to live this way. This is clearly evidenced in the exhaustion we feel when we don't create space for rest.

Our Heavenly Father is a giver of good gifts, and he desires to give us rest in him. He modeled a vision of Sabbath rest in the creation of the world, creating for 6 days then resting on the 7th. If God, the creator of all things, can choose to rest, surely we can find space to rest from our busy schedules.

The practice of Sabbath is one of the best ways that we can experience and participate in God's grace. The word Sabbath comes from the Hebrew word Shabbat, meaning "to rest from labor" and has been practiced by Jews and Christians for thousands of years. Sabbath rest reminds us that we are not the creator nor healer of this world, God is. Even as we rest, he is still doing his redemptive work. Only by his grace are we invited to partner with him in his purposes for the world.

If we spend a full day resting in the Father, we're going to be filled with his Spirit in a new way into the rest of our week.

Chances are, these days you aren't doing a whole lot. Winter can often bring life to a halt. However, the invitation to Sabbath remains. This season challenges us to give thought to HOW we are resting. Are we mindlessly spending time doing whatever grabs our attention first, or are we intentionally setting time aside for a deeper, truer rest.

But what does this rest actually look like? First off, we need to figure out when this is going to happen. Traditionally, Christians observe the Sabbath on Sundays, but feel free to pick a day that works well with your schedule. Once you have that day or time nailed down, here are some ideas of how to fill your day:

Turn up your favorite worship playlist, Take an extended quiet time, Read a book of the Bible, Take a walk, Coffee with a friend, Create something, Treat yo self (good coffee/food), Go for a drive, Do what gives you rest, Literally any of the things in this here Evergreen book

This winter break, let us rest. More than rest, let us rest WELL in our Father's arms.



GROW

YOUR

ROOTS

0 5

JOURNALING PROMPTS



And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

Hebrew 10:24-25 (NIV)

I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong— that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith.

Romans 1:11-12 (NIV)

With this last section, we as a CSF staff hope to spur you into deep reflection over your relationship with God - where your roots are growing, their depth, and the fruit that they are bearing. Each staff member has reflected on a way God has been revealed in their life and discerned how to invite you into similar reflection. Although we are not meeting together this winter, CSF wants to encourage you to practice the art of processing your heart with God through journaling and to share your thoughts with one another. Have a journal to take with you on this journey, and don't forget to encourage others along the way - text, phone call, groupme, etc.

CREATING SPACE // LEXUS MCCORMICK

I am the lone introvert of my family. My mom, dad, and younger sister are extreme extroverts. So when I go home, you can imagine how rambunctious things can get—and don't get me wrong! I absolutely treasure time with my family. But the one thing that puzzled me all throughout college was how to spend time with the Lord when I went home.

Growing up, I always heard that you should read your bible daily and find ways to connect with the Lord through things like silence or journaling, but no matter how hard I tried, I never could find the time or endurance to meet with the Lord consistently.

But when I came to college, something clicked. I was talking to people around CSF who talked about their daily meetings with Jesus, and I began to become hungry for that same kind of deepness with God. Every day, I came to scripture hungry for more knowledge and more time to be in his presence. I journaled fervently, not wanting to miss a single thing that the Lord was doing in my life day-to-day.

So you can see why it puzzled me that every time I walked into the doors of my home in Northern Kentucky, it seemed like all that passion and fervent pursuit of the Lord was gone. And every time I came back to Lexington, I would repent for forgetting who He was and what he had been doing in my life.

But everything changed during quarantine. When the stay-at-home orders went into effect, I packed my bags and moved home. I figured free groceries and the company of my family was better than having to find my own supplies to survive in Lexington. And I was nervous. Nervous that being home would somehow derail me and carry me far away from the progress the Lord had made in my life.

The thing that changed was my mindset. Instead of going home and playing the victim to my family's plans or not having enough time, I went home with a plan and the power of the Holy Spirit behind me. I decided I would get up every morning by at least 9am and read my Bible and pray and journal. Every morning, I would change my clothes (even if I changed from sweatpants to ~new~ sweatpants), pour my cup of coffee, and start my day. I began to realize that having a small semblance of structure made it easier to create a small clearing in my day that the Lord could work through.

"Lord, you alone are my portion and my cup; you make my lot secure. The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; surely I have a delightful inheritance. I will praise the Lord, who counsels me; even at night my heart instructs me. I keep my eyes always on the Lord. With him at my right hand, I will not be shaken."

Psalms 16:5-8 (NIV)

JOURNAL:

- 1 Read through Psalm 16. Listen to what the Holy Spirit is speaking to you. Prepare your heart for the boundary lines the Lord would like to draw on your winter break.
- 2 Open up your journal and start making a plan with the Lord. How can you pursue God through your break?
- 3 Talk to your family and see what their expectations for break are. Look at your days and figure out what time you'd like to wake up in the mornings. (Maybe you take 2 days out of your week to sleep in and the rest you wake up at 9 and get going. It's YOUR plan with the Lord!) Create a daily rhythm of making breakfast or changing your clothes. But MOST importantly, as you're making your list, make sure your goals are attainable and don't forget to give yourself grace when you mess up.
- 4 Believe that your plan will work. I used to get so hung up thinking that Winter Break would undo everything.
- 5 This is a lie from the enemy! Make your plan with the Lord, and live into the freedom that comes from structure!

COME AWAY WITH ME // KATIE WILSON

Good morning, Holy Spirit
Would You come and stay a while?
I feel like I don't know You yet
I feel just like a child

You've brought me on a journey
And it's just You and me
The more I start to dig
The more that I begin to see

I've known God as a Father
And Jesus as my Lord
But the Spirit was a rumor
That was oftentimes ignored

What do You want to show me?
I can hear it: "Come and see"
You said You'd help us search the depths
Of heaven's mysteries

Come away with Me
Come and taste and see
And the only key
Is to simply be
With Me

You're more than just a power
Or a force to which we're slaves
You're showing me Your personhood
In the fellowship You crave

I'm hungry for this Person
As You open up my eyes
Unexplainable encounters
That "religion" may deny

Jesus thought it best for us
For Him to go away
And send to us the Advocate
To lead us in The Way

You want to come encounter us
And thus be unified
A baptism of fire
Was never meant to polarize

Come away with Me
Come and taste and see
And the only key
Is to simply be
With Me

Give Your Church open eyes
To the power we've received
Inheritance that Jesus paid
With blood upon the tree

Kingdom-building Power
Flowing freely through our veins
You give us gifts to pierce the dark
Till only light remains

Cleanse my heart from anything
That stands opposed to You
Humility must lead me
In the quest of what is true

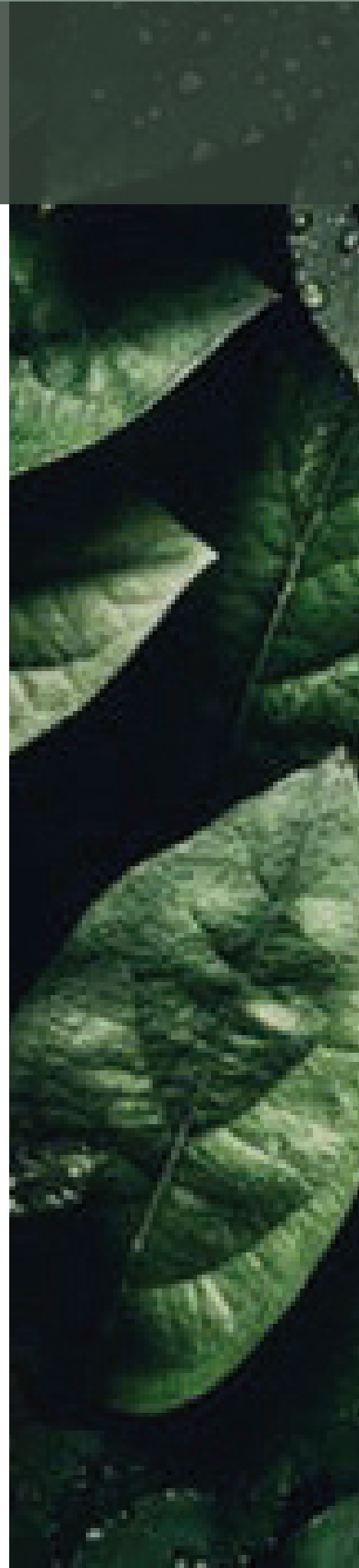
Come closer, Holy Spirit
There's still so much to learn
You loved me first and I was made
To love you in return

Come away with Me
Come and taste and see
And the only key
Is to simply be
With Me

I'm caught up in the wonder
And I'm gazing in Your eyes
Patiently You're teaching me
Your presence is the prize

So here my heart will linger
In the warmth of Your embrace
Holiness perfected
As I look You in the face

My truest self is found here
All else is stripped away
Thank you, Holy Spirit
You met me here today



THE STRUGGLE OF HEALING // PAIGE MENELEE



Healing is a big, scary word—and not easy to go through either. It's not a tiny splinter that you can dig out with tweezers. It's the whole tree. Maybe it even feels like you're stuck in a pitch black cave with only a small candle in your hand. That is what breaking through the mountain of shame that 11 years of a porn addiction had put on me felt like. From the beginning I tried to hide it and set myself free. I grew up in the church, so they made it very clear that it was wrong, but they never showed us how to actually find freedom.

I had so much guilt and shame that I was drowning in it by the time my senior year of college came around. I had gotten good at hiding it too. But I refused to carry this addiction and burden into my adult life because it had already taken over my childhood. I hadn't yet realized that my battle wasn't against flesh and blood. It was (and still is!) *"against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms"* (Ephesians 6:12; NIV).

So I got serious with God. I opened up to the Lord in the most honest way I ever had and allowed Him to take a deep dive into my heart. I literally had to lay myself bare before Him. I would sit with him and write out every possible reason why this could have had a hold on my life. I processed with Him until I was blue in the face. Most days I felt like Jacob wrestling with God, hip broken and all (Genesis 32:22-32). God claimed to be a redeemer and I wasn't going to let Him go until He did just that. I also realized that I couldn't do this healing on my own.

I had to bring someone in on it that I could trust and that I knew would walk me into deep intimacy and truth with the Father. My friend and I met up once a week and opened the floor to whatever lies we were believing and brought them to light. This was really healthy for me because instead of feeling pressure to text an "accountability partner" every time I felt tempted, I knew that once a week I had a space to be completely honest. More than that, I had a friend who wasn't afraid to tell me the truth of God. My friend had full permission to call me out, and she did that while walking alongside me as I entered into wholeness with the Father. This wasn't easy to admit the things I had been believing for so long. Things I had convinced myself that no person could ever hear and think of me the same again. She was filled with so much grace because she also knew the Father intimately and that He is not a God of fear or rejection. He welcomes us as we are, and that's where we find healing.

This is going to look different for everyone, because we all have different moments that have led us into darkness, but we all have the same God that invites us in and clothes us in HIS righteousness and glory. We're called out of the darkness, to lay down our lives and stop running, and are invited to come close to Him. There is a war waging for our souls. We must die to our earthly selves and *"put on the full armor of God"* (Ephesians 6:11; NIV). Spiritual armor for a spiritual battle.

JOURNAL:

Take some time now to sit in Ephesians 6. Go line by line and ask yourself if you have fully let the Lord clothe you in each piece of armor. If not, ask Him what in your heart could be standing in the way? If He reveals something to you (be honest!), then allow God to help you start your own journey of healing. What's holding you back? The Father's heart is for you and for full redemption TODAY! He died on the cross so that you could walk in the glorious freedom that belongs to a child of God. It's yours, go claim it!!

Last year I lived across the street from what I called the “240 house”. There were a couple of girls who lived there that caused me to raise a brow every time I saw them. They wore fish-net stockings with black shirts and Gogo boots as their regular attire. They looked like they stepped straight out of Hot Topic. I’ll confess—I was made uneasy by their appearance from the comfort of my front porch swing.

One day, after two full months of living across from them, I felt convicted about not reaching out to my literal neighbors. I decided to warm up to them by baking them cookies. I rang their door bell, but left the plate at their doorstep when they did not answer. This attempt left me unable to talk to them face-to-face. A few weeks later, I saw them outside and knew this was my moment to have a personal interaction with them. They were beyond thrilled to know I left them cookies on their porch and they expressed that no one shows hospitality like that anymore. I could feel my anxiety slowly being removed when I learned how welcoming and truly friendly they were. Kayla and Jada, my new friends, were caring and generous, and had some of the most affectionate laughs I’d ever heard, which otherwise, I would have been missing out on. Not only were my assumptions about them wrong, but I was withholding the love, kindness, and greatest name above all names from them—Jesus.

From that day on, we started chatting more on my front porch; they began to confide in me about things going on, which led to us developing a sweet friendship. When it was time for them to move out, I was able to give them a book of devotionals for each day of the year. I knew out of any gift I could give to send them off, Scripture would be the most powerful. I wanted them to know they could be themselves and just belong before they had to believe in the same God as me. The Lord changed my view of them by allowing me to see them as eternal souls made in His image rather than a couple of “Hot Topic gals”.

Is there someone you need to show hospitality to but you fear it being awkward or uncomfortable? You do not have to rely on your own strength. If that were the case for me, I would have never left my front porch swing. Spend some time in prayer, reflecting on Galatians 1:10: *“For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ.”* (ESV)

Remember that each person is an image-bearer of Christ. You never know who may be searching for truth but have no one to receive it from. And hey, who doesn’t like fresh baked cookies? That’s always an easy place to start.

HOME OF THE HOLY SPIRIT // ALLI RANKIN

"Everything is permissible for me," but not everything is beneficial. "Everything is permissible for me," but I will not be mastered by anything.

-1 Corinthians 6:12 (NIV)

Tish Harrison Warren, the author of *Liturgy of the Ordinary*, writes, "If we don't learn to live the Christian life as embodied beings, worshiping God and stewarding the good gift of our bodies, we will learn a false gospel, an alternative liturgy of the body."

Most often, if I think about honoring God with my body, I think of abstinence and sobriety, and as of this year, I have realized that my diet needs to be honoring as well.

High School was really the first time I realized there's an issue in turning to food for comfort. At that point in my life, I was not a Christian, so I understood the unhealthy nature of finding comfort in food, but didn't know I had an Almighty Father waiting for me to find solace in Him. So when school got hard or I felt lonely, I would go to the craving that would inevitably make the situation worse. Because on the flip side of searching for comfort at the bottom of a pint of ice cream, I was an athlete and a teenage girl who wanted to feel comfortable in her own skin. The battle of eating to fill a void, and feeling guilty for having eaten the bag of cheetos or the pint of ice cream for the 3rd time in a week wasn't one that I could win on my own.

This struggle that started in high school followed me through a significant portion of college. Making friends isn't always easy and when everyone finds community around a table in college, it's usually at Cookout, Chick-fil-A or McDonald's.

We live in a culture that glorifies food, and we forget that Gluttony is in fact sinful. When I desire pizza more than time with the Lord, that calls for some repentance. Not only that, but when we repent of habitual sin, we get to turn towards our Father and ask for forgiveness and healing.

When we put these disciplines into practice, we start to desire the things of God, the things that He as provider has put before us. Now, I don't know too many people who find comfort in a bowl of spinach, but I do know that the food I can grow in a field has all the nutrients and vitamins I need to sustain my health. If ya catch my drift, you cannot grow Cheeto puffs from the ground.

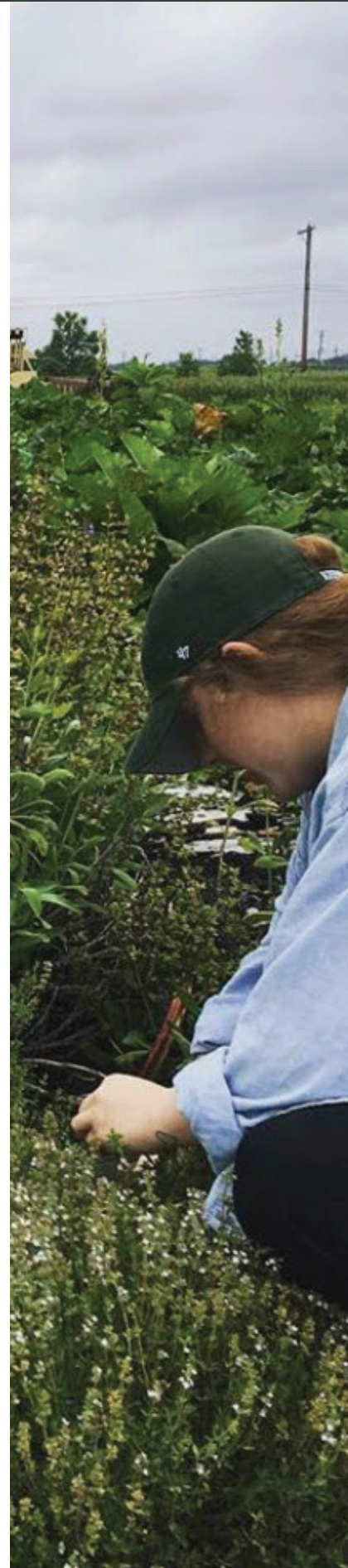
Y'all, Satan does not want us to be 95 years old on our knees in prayer or dancing for the joy of the Lord. Satan wants us plagued with heart disease, diabetes, addictions to sugar and caffeine, and eating disorders.

In this journey of following Christ and surrendering habitual sin to Him, I have learned that one of the most important gifts Jesus gave to us is His spirit. The Holy Spirit lives in us as much as it lives in Him. And guess what? You can ask the Holy Spirit to guide you through your choices. Even the ones as simple as what to eat today. And when you fall short of obedience, remember to always keep grace in stock.

My prayer for you is that you listen to the conviction and discernment of the Holy Spirit, I pray that if your relationship with food in your life is sinful, that you can be assured with peace that the Lord wants to free you from that sin. I pray your heart is open to receiving the healing and teachings that He has for you in this journey.

JOURNAL:

Is there any part of your diet that might not be honoring God? Is there any habitual sin that you need to repent of or ask forgiveness for? Spend some time in prayer asking Him how you can best steward the good gift of your body. Ask for convictions in areas where you haven't been stewarding that gift well.



WHAT THEOLOGY CAN'T DO // CJ CARTER

Recently, sitting around a table with some staff members, someone asked me if I could write any book, what would I write? My immediate reaction—after being assured in this hypothetical that I'd be competent to write—was to say “fiction.” This probably wasn't the expected answer. I get asked a lot of questions on staff, and I do a lot of work with curriculum and projects involving theology. So I think if I were lumped into a rough category, I would be in the brain-on-a-stick crew.

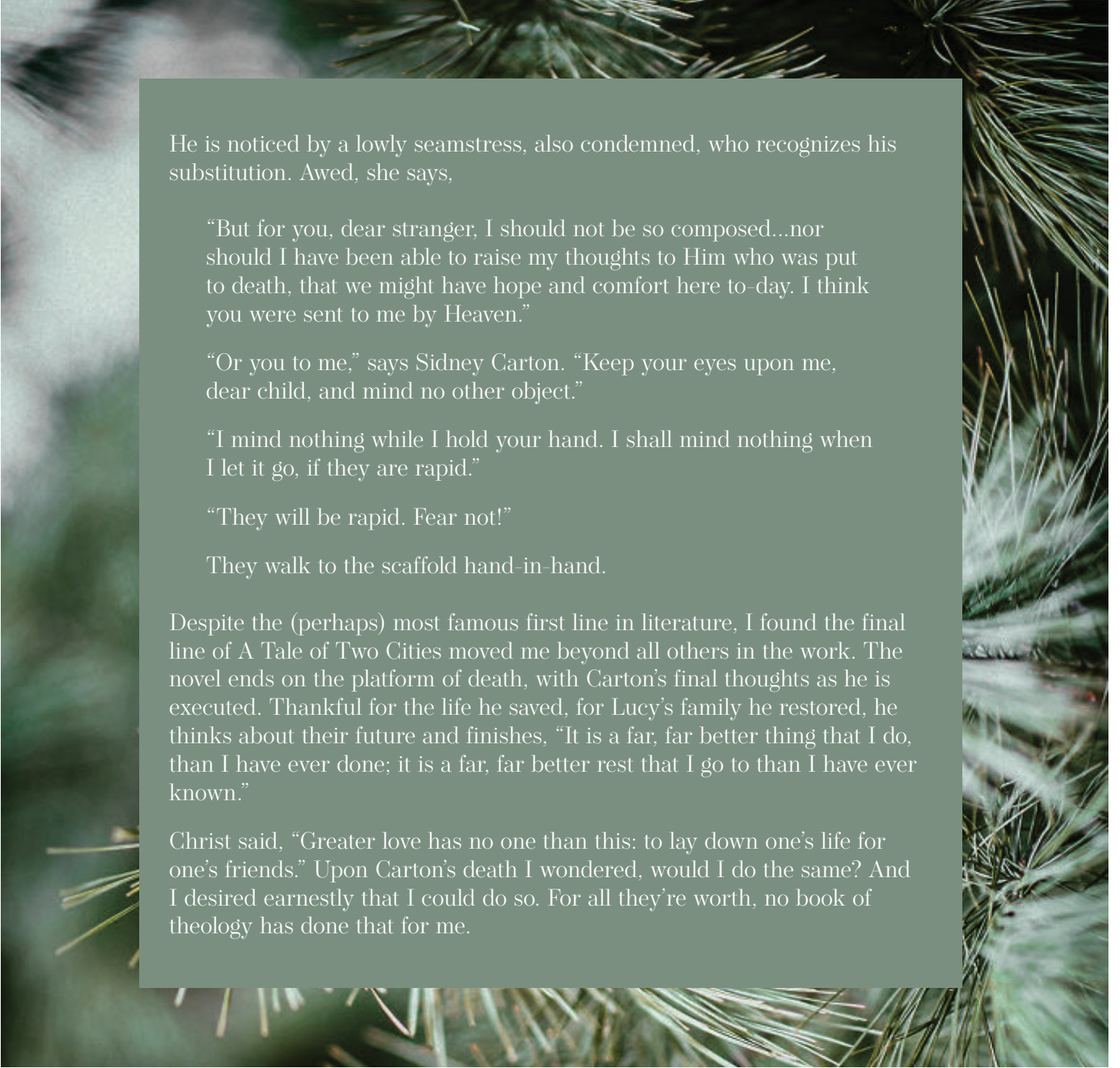
It's true human beings are made to think (and I like to think). But that's not what we are. At our core, humans are lovers. And that's because we are imaginative creatures. Philosopher James K. A. Smith puts it this way: “We are narrative animals, whose very orientation to the world is fundamentally shaped by stories.” And author David Bentley Hart once said, “Imagination is, after all, the wellspring of desire, of personality, of character.” Fiction gets to this level of our being. How?

Literature embodies virtue first, by offering images of virtues in action and, second, by offering the reading vicarious practice in exercising virtue...by which habits of mind, ways of thinking and perceiving, accrue.

That's how literary scholar Karen Swallow Prior puts it. In literature, deep truths are caught, not taught. “A work of literature doesn't assert but presents,” as Prior puts it: “We must imagine what virtue looks like in order to act virtuously.” Literature moves us, making us desire, by burying a vision of the good life in our mind.

“I hope you care to be recalled to life?” This question closes the first part of Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities*, which I recently read. It's a book relevant for our times. Certainly today feels like “the best of times, the worst of times.” The novel follows a handful of characters navigating their way through the French Revolution. Two men—one dissolute and one noble—fall in love with the same woman. She chooses the better man. But the prodigal, Sidney Carton, never expected her to love him as he did her. Professing his love, he turns to go, swearing to her he'll love her to the end, but resigns himself to wander further down his wanton way. Sidney, it seems, is not recalled to life.

As the story progresses, the lady—Lucy—sees her husband arrested and sentenced to the guillotine by the bloodthirsty masses. It's at this point, the night before his execution, that Sidney Carton appears, sneaks into the prison, and changes places with Lucy's husband. On his way to the guillotine, he hears the words of Christ echo in his head: “I am the resurrection and the life, saith the Lord: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in me, shall never die.”



He is noticed by a lowly seamstress, also condemned, who recognizes his substitution. Awed, she says,

“But for you, dear stranger, I should not be so composed...nor should I have been able to raise my thoughts to Him who was put to death, that we might have hope and comfort here to-day. I think you were sent to me by Heaven.”

“Or you to me,” says Sidney Carton. “Keep your eyes upon me, dear child, and mind no other object.”

“I mind nothing while I hold your hand. I shall mind nothing when I let it go, if they are rapid.”

“They will be rapid. Fear not!”

They walk to the scaffold hand-in-hand.

Despite the (perhaps) most famous first line in literature, I found the final line of *A Tale of Two Cities* moved me beyond all others in the work. The novel ends on the platform of death, with Carton’s final thoughts as he is executed. Thankful for the life he saved, for Lucy’s family he restored, he thinks about their future and finishes, “It is a far, far better thing that I do, than I have ever done; it is a far, far better rest that I go to than I have ever known.”

Christ said, “Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.” Upon Carton’s death I wondered, would I do the same? And I desired earnestly that I could do so. For all they’re worth, no book of theology has done that for me.



FINDING SPACE IN EVERYDAY RHYTHMS // BRENDAN WESTERFIELD

So I know being 30 and married puts me in a different stage of life than you, but this is something that has helped me tremendously over the past year or so. I'd begun to notice my prayer life wasn't as strong as it once was, and it was honestly because I hadn't devoted time to it as I did in college. I'm exponentially busier than I was even 5 years ago, and I began noticing on my drive to and from work that I just kinda zoned out listening to podcasts and music. And one day I asked myself, why not use this time to spend with the Lord? I was struggling to find time to pray, and I already had a half-hour of my day waiting to be used for something other than listening to KSR or country music.

So that's what I've been doing. I've been taking my morning and afternoon commute as a time to spend with God, and it's been so cool to experience the strengthening of our relationship during a time that was previously wasted. It's also challenged me to reclaim other times in my daily life that I've been filling with useless things.

And that's my challenge to you. Find those natural rhythms in your everyday life that you can reclaim to strengthen your relationship with God. It could be while you're driving, or when you go for a run/walk, or really anything! Hopefully, this helps you experience more of God, especially during all of this isolation!

SWEET, SWEET COMMUNITY // BAILEE WATSON

If you know me, you know that I love pizookies!! If you don't know what a pizookie is, it's the most delectable deep dish skillet cookie topped with ice cream, chocolate, and whipped cream! Yum!! BJ's Brewhouse is famous for this dessert, and I found out that every Tuesday, pizookies are only \$3. So during my junior year, I posted on our CSF Facebook page and asked if anyone wanted to go with me to get pizookies one Tuesday night. Little did I know, over 30 people would respond and show up to eat pizookies that week. The groupme grew to over 100 members, and it quickly turned into a weekly tradition. There are so many people that I got to meet and form friendships with by just eating pizookies together. We would spend hours eating pizookies, sharing stories, and creating memories together! We even formed friendships with several of the BJ's staff and were able to extend love to them and bless them through generous tips and Christmas gifts! My favorite part of Pizookie Tuesday's isn't the actual pizookie, but the space to simply gather together. I've witnessed people share their testimonies and even pray over each other during those Tuesday nights. Pizookie Tuesday's continued for 2 years and the Lord used it to cultivate deep community. Romans 15:5-7 says:

"May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God." (ESV)

When we live in community together, we are able to bring glory to God together. We have an old saying at Pine Cove that goes, "We are unified. Not uniform." The beautiful thing about Pizookie Tuesday was that the people who came were all very different! There were people from different majors, ages, backgrounds. People who were students, people on staff, people from different schools. One thing we were unified on though, was our love for this dessert. I think this is a picture of what the Kingdom of God looks like. God created His children so uniquely and different, but we are all united under One King. When we live in community, we are able to bring glory to this King. We are able to encourage one another and build each other up in love, just as Scripture tells us to do. We are able to combat the spirit of loneliness that oftentimes falls heavy over the college campus. We are able to bear one another's burdens and encourage others that they are not alone. The Lord is present when we gather, and He has made that so evident to me through a \$3 cookie dessert.

There is no question that we were created to live in community. This has been even harder to do this year, but community is something we should fight for. Spend some time reflecting on the community that you are a part of at CSF. Think of creative ways you can safely connect with others and invite the Lord into it! In the midst of this season of quarantine and isolation, it's even more important to reach out to others. This could look like sending a text, starting a group facetime call, or hanging out socially distanced. Ask the Lord to reveal ways to cultivate community in your own life this season.

"How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity! It is like precious oil poured on the head, running down on the beard, running down on Aaron's beard, down on the collar of his robe. It is as if the dew of Hermon were falling on Mount Zion. For there the Lord bestows his blessing, even life forevermore." Psalm 133:1-3

BASEBALL AND THE FLOW OF SILENCE // DEREK KING

Dwight Schrute once said the power of nostalgia is so great that “baseball can use it to get people to care about that worthless sport.” Interest in baseball is waning among the young. Our attention span is shrinking faster than baseball’s interest, so the slow, ponderous flow of a baseball game is far too boring for most of us.

There’s not enough action. Not enough movement. Too much space.

Although baseball is not the sport America wants, it is the sport America needs. Its place, its flow, is exactly what makes baseball great. So much of the game happens in the margins—in the space between plays—if only we had eyes to see. The positioning, the signs, the lead-off, the head-game between the batter and pitcher. It’s all part of the game within the game.

Life is like this. We are so quick to fill life’s margin with noise—music, social media, podcasts, anything—so we can’t see or hear what happens in the silence. Our attention is like a ravenous monster, devouring all it can get its hands on with no concern with what will happen if it just... stopped.

If we aren’t willing to sit in the stillness, we will miss God’s voice. Students have come up to me complaining about not hearing God’s voice, but then I ask, “when is the last time you just sat and listened?”

I can’t promise that sitting in silence will result in hearing a booming voice from God. But in order to hear, we must listen. One way to listen is to just be. We can’t make God speak, but we can leave spaces in our life just to pay attention.

Today, take 10 minutes of complete, total silence and listen for God’s voice between the innings of life.

"COLORING" SCRIPTURE // CARLA WASHNOCK

A couple of years ago I went to a women's ministry gathering where one of the activities was to do prayer journaling. I went in with an open mind, since I'm not very artsy and I heard it involved drawing. The event was fun, but I wasn't sold on the drawing and journaling idea. However, something must have registered in my brain because that initial experience turned into a combination of journaling, meditating, scripture reading, coloring, and an exercise for my scatterbrained mind.

The first time, I sat down with my Bible, a set of colored pens, and an old journal that was a jumble of seasons of life, since I've never been consistent at keeping one. I wanted to give the idea a try, but didn't like trying to come up with a picture to draw. So, I just started writing a verse here and a verse there in different colored pens. Next, I started copying longer passages from the Bible using a different colored pen for each verse. Only a few months ago, I decided I would start copying the book of John, again, with a different colored pen for each verse.

What I found was a peace of mind that would settle in and stay for a while. Anytime and anyway the Word can enter your mind is good, and this habit allows the scattered parts to focus on remembering the verse, or at least most of it, while I write. I write in cursive, which also requires more concentration. It takes time to read the verse and then copy it, so God's word is slowly, carefully, and in vivid colors being ingrained in my mind. I'm still working on the book of John, but once I finish, I think I'll pick another book to carry on with my version of coloring!

Try it for yourself! Pick a passage of scripture and your favorite set of pens and start copying scripture slowly into a journal. See what happens when you open yourself up to the Word of God!

ORDERING YOUR DESIRES // ELLIE HYNES

Looking at the direction the Lord has taken my life over the past couple of years didn't come from having a perfect plan after college or knowing from a young age that I wanted to be in ministry. The Lord did a great work in my life by ordering my desires to be aligned with His and directing my path to faithfully follow where He was leading me.

A huge turning point in my walk with the Lord came from the time spent between my senior year and my 5th year of school. I had graduated from UK with a degree in Accounting and Marketing in 4 years but I wasn't fully sure of what I wanted to do with those degrees. A clear next step to me was to go back to school for another degree to be eligible to take the exams to become a CPA (Certified Public Accountant). I kept asking myself, "Is this really what I wanted to do?" I didn't feel passionate about it, but by taking these exams it would advance me in a career of accounting and I would make more money by having the CPA than not having it. Money became the driving factor of the decision I made.

My parents honored my decision to go back to school but my mom kept saying to me "Spend this time with the Lord. Make God a priority in your life." Due to the social pressures of feeling like I had to report to my friends and family of what my next steps were, I felt like I had to have more of a plan than "I am spending this time with the Lord." But every time I went to study for the CPA or my classes, I just wanted to spend time with the Lord.

As I walked through the next year, God was doing a great work in my heart. I worked through some sin struggles in my life that were holding me back from fully stepping into all that God had for me. The more time I spent with Him, the more He spoke to me. I started to feel this urge to go on staff at CSF. My intentions were to go back to school to make more money, not to work in ministry (SURPRISE... ministry is not the money making career). As I pressed into what I felt like God was calling me into, I heard him say "You weren't made to serve money, you were made to serve me." WOW WHAT A PUNCH IN THE GUT.

*No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other; or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.
Matthew 6:24 (NIV)*

Everything I thought my life was heading towards was to get a degree, get a well paying job, and live a happy life. I never thought I would be working in ministry. That was never a desire I had for myself. But God knew better. He doesn't ask us to have a perfect plan of what to do next in life but he does ask us to faithfully follow Him.

When you put God first, He will give you the desires of your heart. Not your fleshly desires but the desires He places within you. When your heart becomes aligned with the will of God, your desires become aligned with Him as well. When you learn to trust God with your plans and desires, He will direct you in the way that will give you the desires of your heart. Ones that you may have never dreamed of.

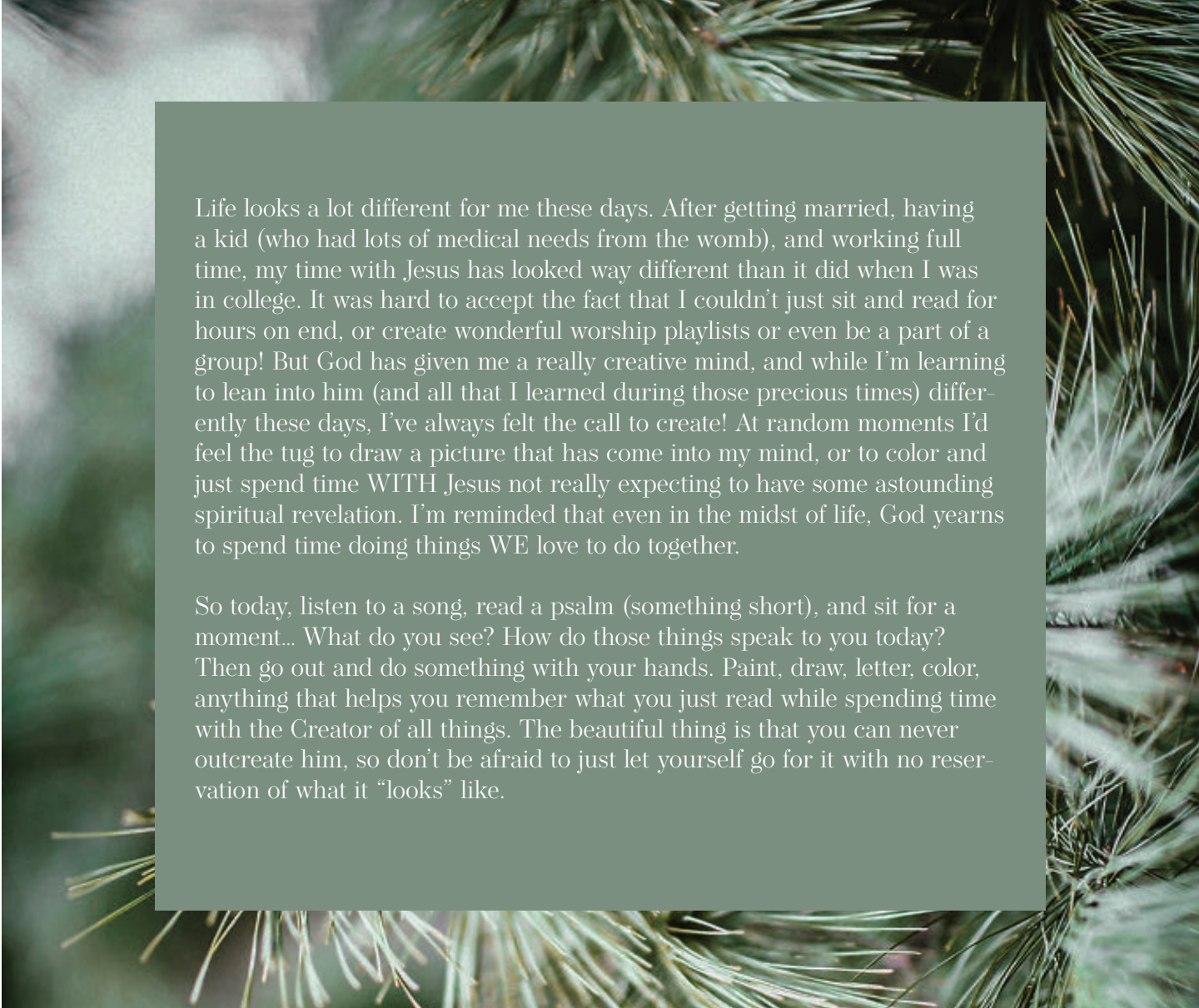
Your next steps might not look like working in ministry. But maybe a next step is fully putting your trust in God. Making God a priority in your life.

*Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not
on your own understanding; in all your ways
submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.
Proverbs 3:5-6 (NIV)*

JOURNAL:

What does it look like to put God at the top of your priority list? Ask God what you've elevated above Him. Can you trust He will give you the desires of your heart? Do your desires align with His? Seek His face!

CREATIVITY IN BUSYNESS // GABBY WOMACK



Life looks a lot different for me these days. After getting married, having a kid (who had lots of medical needs from the womb), and working full time, my time with Jesus has looked way different than it did when I was in college. It was hard to accept the fact that I couldn't just sit and read for hours on end, or create wonderful worship playlists or even be a part of a group! But God has given me a really creative mind, and while I'm learning to lean into him (and all that I learned during those precious times) differently these days, I've always felt the call to create! At random moments I'd feel the tug to draw a picture that has come into my mind, or to color and just spend time WITH Jesus not really expecting to have some astounding spiritual revelation. I'm reminded that even in the midst of life, God yearns to spend time doing things WE love to do together.

So today, listen to a song, read a psalm (something short), and sit for a moment... What do you see? How do those things speak to you today? Then go out and do something with your hands. Paint, draw, letter, color, anything that helps you remember what you just read while spending time with the Creator of all things. The beautiful thing is that you can never outcreate him, so don't be afraid to just let yourself go for it with no reservation of what it "looks" like.

DISCERNMENT // BRI WULFECK

Many people, writers, professors, friends, family, and people all over social media have shared their version of “truth”. We are flooded with opinions on what to believe about who we are and who God is. But as believers, our truth is only found in the Word and character of God.

For today’s time, find a quiet space where it can be just you and the Lord. Turn off everyone else’s opinions and get rid of all distractions of the outside world. Our hope for your time today is for your understanding of the Lord to be based on truth and personal time spent with your Father, not what others have told you about him.

Once your mind is still before God, let your mind and thoughts come to a place of rest. Start by reading Psalm 63:1-11. Focus on the truth that David shares about God.

Journal about what being satisfied in the Lord looks like in your personal life and how that affects what you believe about your Heavenly Father.

Spiritual discernment and understanding only come from the grace of the Lord. It involves paying attention to the wisdom that the Lord gives us through his word and who he is. Discernment needs to remain firmly rooted and grounded in Christ or else we will be at risk of being tossed here and there by the waves, and carried about by every wind of doctrine.

Scripture relates the word of the Lord to a sword in Ephesians 6. Why do you think that is? What is a sword good for in battle? If we hold true to the word of God, then everything we believe must be compared to the Word we have been entrusted with!

Identify the area where fear or lies have taken root in your heart and let the Lord speak clarity over them through his word. Let the Holy Spirit bring to mind verses that speak truth to your situation and bring hope and freedom to you today. True freedom and breakthrough comes from discerning truth and fighting for it!

Father God,
Define my thoughts.

BREAK AND BAKE COOKIES // KATIE GREENE

I remember walking next door with my roommates with a plate of cookies, talking about who was going to break the ice when our neighbors who we've never really talked to and who seem to be living pretty different lives than us, open that door. It seems silly now, but I think we were all nervous. I know I had been earlier that day. So how did we end up outside our neighbor's door with some break and bake cookies on a plastic plate, and why is this story relevant?

Rewind a couple weeks to a conversation with a roommate where we both voiced the same conviction of living in our home and enjoying it for ourselves, but feeling like we weren't fully living out Jesus' call on our lives to love our actual neighbors. As they had moved in weeks ago, and we had not even gotten to know all their names.

We can think about our lives in one of two ways. From a lens of wanting to build our "best lives." Or from a kingdom lens, where we intentionally seek to orient every area of our lives, including where we live, in such a way that it helps us join in the mission of God. God wants to bless us, yes. But just as He told Abraham in Genesis 12 that He would bless His descendants, He immediately follows with: "and you will be a blessing."

Here's where the cookies come in. We decided as a house that we wanted to bake them something. And I wish I could say the next day we waltzed right over. I know for me though, the thought of how they might receive such an out of the blue gift seemed to create a fear that pushed back against the desire to take something over there. Finally, after a couple weeks I knew something had to give. So I threw some leftover store bought cookie dough in the oven, laid down my notions of wanting the baked good to be perfect or "good enough", and went to scripture for the reminder from Paul in 1 Corinthians 3-4 that it's not fear of other's opinions that matters, but it's God's opinion. What does He think? I resolved to take Him at His word that says He loves me, He's blessed me, and He loves my neighbors, too. The rest, what they thought, how they received it, was not up to me.

There's more to the story, and in this case the cookies were received so well! It resulted in us meeting everyone in the home, and them bringing us multiple other dishes in the weeks that followed. But I don't think the whole focus of this story is on what can happen after we obey, because that part, the fruit, is up to the Father to bring.

Prompt:

Grab your bible and a journal. We know God loves us, but He also wants that love to overflow into loving our neighbors as ourselves (Luke 10:27). So first ask yourself the question, do I want this, too? Do I want to be not just a receiver of the blessing of being loved by Him, but also fulfill my role as a vessel of sharing that blessing with my neighbors? If the answer is, yes! Then a good start could be to write these two questions in your journal:

1 Jesus, who have you placed in front of me right now to love?

2 How can I love them?

3 Allow Him to speak. And get creative with Him! It can be something BIG, or it can be something simple. And if fear or doubt starts to push back against the idea, go to scripture that reminds us of His love. His love initiates, and just like in my story, it also casts out fear. Allow Him to do this for you, as you take a step in obedience, and rest in knowing what happens next is up to Him!

*Here now
Still my heart
Let Your voice be all I hear now
Here now
Fix my eyes on the things that I can't see now
Spirit breathe like the wind come have Your way
'Cause I know You're in this place
Here Now (Madness) by Hillsong United*

I love the holidays. Thanksgiving. Christmas. New Years. Along with the other holidays throughout the year, these are times of celebration and joy. Yet, these can also be times of loneliness, sorrow, despair, and hopelessness. Maybe this is the first holiday season for you without a loved one. Or maybe your home isn't really home anymore. Or maybe you're missing the friends you made in college and the new you that you'd become.

My parents divorced when I was in high school and holidays have never been quite the same since. After I graduated high school, I came to UK for college. Each year of my college career, I moved. A new year, a new temporary home. When I would go "home" for breaks, I mostly stayed with my mom. She also moved a few times while I was in college, so I lost any semblance of "home" that I had before my parents divorced. Most of my new college friends were excited to return to their families and their homes, but as much as I loved my family, I dreaded returning to a place, and quite frankly, to people that I no longer felt comfortable with.

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When I was younger (maybe in that preteen phase), I started to love reading. Books quickly became an escape where I could experience adventures and fantasies rather than the reality I was living in. I can't pinpoint exactly when it became something more, but eventually, I started reading more intense literature, like romance novels and erotica, and my imagination ran wild. Fast forward a bit, and my innocent beginnings had turned into a darker path with sin. Between the brokenness in my family and the brokenness within me, I was worn and exhausted. It was so much easier to choose sin rather than love and obedience to God.

The winter break of my freshman year of college, I brought a couple of international friends to my mom's new town-house with me to celebrate Thanksgiving. I loved sharing some of our American traditions with them and inviting them into my family, no matter how messy it was. After they left, I was alone at my mom's new place. Feelings of loneliness, sorrow, and pressure came crashing in. So I did what became my coping mechanism—I read. I didn't have to think about being a good daughter/granddaughter/sister, a good student, a good Christian, when I was the main character in the newest fantasy. I didn't have to dwell on the messiness of my family. I became numb. Which led to lust and sexual sin.

This pattern continued every time a break from school occurred, and sometimes throughout the school year. The new me that I worked so hard to cultivate through my time on campus and at CSF would revert back to the old me that was trapped in guilt and shame. Needless to say, I grew to be afraid of breaks because I didn't want to be lonely and hidden in shame. I prayed to God for freedom—from my sin, my shame, my bad habits—and that my family would be healed and made whole. I prayed for my heart and the hearts of my family members to be changed.

In my life, certain songs have been like guideposts for big moments and seasons that I've walked through. The lyrics written above is one of those songs. The chaos around me—the broken relationships in my family, the lack of faith, the loss of home—and the chaos within me—the tension I constantly felt between the flesh and the spirit, the war raging inside—was no match for my God. Choosing to seek Him and be still with Him, I learned of the depth of His love for me. He didn't leave me in those moments of sin and sorrow, where all I felt was the darkness surrounding me. Everywhere I went—my mom's new apartment, the old house that my dad still lives in but isn't the same after the divorce, the college dorm room I lived in, the campus ministry that became home—He was with me. And He cared for those I loved even more than I could.

You may be like me and view your break with dread or maybe you're excited to be home again. Either way, taking time to choose God and surrender your fears, your sin, your family to Him is never wasted. I'm still learning to trust Him, more and more each day. He wants you to do the same. Trust Him. He won't let you down, and He won't leave you. He is with you, always.

1 Read and meditate on one or more of the following scriptures:

Psalm 107, Matthew 28:20b, Psalm 116, Psalm 118:8, Psalm 121, Hebrews 13:8, Isaiah 42:1-9, Ephesians 4:20-24

2 What do you need to surrender to God over this break? Are there any idols in your life?

3 How can you spend more time with Jesus while on break? (Ex: daily studying Scripture, interceding for others, etc.) How can you grow spiritually right now?

4 What does it look like for you to trust God? Who or what is He calling you to trust Him with? Pray/journal your response and include a portion where you say "God, I release _____ to you."

5 Do you believe that God is for you? That He has good things for you?

What are you expecting God to do in your life over this break? How do you want to see the Spirit move?

COME AND HAVE BREAKFAST // LYDIA SLAYDEN

*Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast."
None of the disciples dared ask him, "Who are you?"
They knew it was the Lord.
John 21:12 (NIV)*

Throughout college, breakfast was always a really sweet time with my friends. Whether it was my roommates or a group we invited over, we would gather, make breakfast together, and create sweet memories.

However, during quarantine earlier this year, breakfast took on a whole new meaning! It was one of the only things that helped me keep a schedule. I would wake up, take a shower, make 2 eggs on a piece of toast with some fruit on the side and a cup of coffee. I'd take that back to my room and have some quiet time with the Lord.

The act of simply making breakfast has not only transformed my schedule, but has created in me a discipline of a steady meal and conversation with the Lord. As I eat my breakfast, I listen to and study scripture to start my days.

A few years back, I had the opportunity to visit Israel. This picture has been my phone background ever since. It is from the Sea of Galilee. When Jesus came back to visit his disciples, he was on the shore and called to them to "Come and have breakfast," Jesus literally rose from the dead and ate breakfast with his disciples! HOW FREAKING COOL.

JOURNAL:

Whether you are at home alone or with your family, take some time to make breakfast and read through John 21. Spend time with the Lord; he wants to meet with you.

FAMILY OVER EVERYTHING // LANDON PORTER

Another semester is in the books. While you're thrilled the challenges of finals are over, you're not quite as excited about moving back in with the parents over winter break. Maybe things were tense before you left, they don't get what's happening in your life, and dinner table conversation always spirals into something resembling a political debate. That's hard. It's often said that the hardest people to love are those closest to us. We see that so clearly exemplified in our relationships with our parents and siblings. They know us best, which means they know exactly which buttons to push to get under our skin. Time to just hunker down in your bedroom, lock the door, and only come out for home cooked meals and the occasional bag of Cheetos, right?

I've been there, and while it's tempting to shut down and keep to myself, I always feel the Spirit's challenge to love my family well while home for the break. After all, we're instructed in Exodus 20:12 as a part of the Ten Commandments to "Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you." It's important to note here that the purpose of loving our family isn't just because we're supposed to, but for the purpose of life. Choosing to love our families well over break, and always, is a life-giving endeavor well worth our time.

So what does it look like to love our families in a Christ like way? Here's a few thoughts:

GO TO CHURCH TOGETHER!

Ask Mom and Dad if you can come with this week, it'd probably mean a lot to them and may even spark some good conversation afterwards. If they don't regularly attend, invite them to come with you!

FOCUS ON THE FAM.

College life and social media connects us with so many people that make our network of friends incredibly wide but lacking depth. Jesus walked closely with just 12 disciples during his time here on earth, and trusted them to carry on his life changing message. We can get so caught up in trying to love everyone, that we forget to love the people right in front of us.

ELIMINATE DISTRACTIONS.

Instead of watching a movie by yourself, pick one to watch with the whole family. Instead of endless scrolling on TikTok, spend some time cooking together in the kitchen.

HANG OUT WITH YOUR SIBLINGS

One of the most life giving things I did over college semester breaks was making time for my brother and I to get out of the house and just grab a meal together. We've found that since graduating high school, we've grown a lot closer. Spending quality time together during our breaks has been a huge part of that!

PRAY TOGETHER.

For your family, community, and your friends back on campus. Asking for the Holy Spirit to intercede as a family will create deep connections.

THE SEASON IN-BETWEEN // MADDIE ROMINES

Even writing this is surreal. The Lord has orchestrated some amazing things in my life the past few months. For the past 6+ years I've felt the call to become a physician. It seemed like the Lord gave me the opportunities, the discipline, and the knowledge to succeed. In May of 2019, I applied to a few medical schools, and come October of that year, I was deferred to the waitlist at all of them. I was somewhat bitter about the decision but was hopeful I would get accepted. Despite having the grades, test scores, and all the other boxes checked, I still didn't get in. In the moment, it felt like God didn't answer my prayers, all of my plans were shattered, my hard work was wasted, and the season of waiting was pointless. I read John 15:7 "But if you remain in me and my words remain in you, you may ask for anything you want, and it will be granted" (NLT).

Hearing those words, I still felt called to become a physician and decided to reapply, knowing God had a plan for my life.

Prayer after prayer was prayed, and the Lord redeemed every set back. I finally got into my dream medical school, but my plans for the next year were nonexistent. As every redemption story goes... But GOD opened up a spot at CSF on the philanthropy team with absolute perfect timing. For the next year, I get to work for a ministry that I'm passionate about, and do work that I might've never gotten the chance to do. On top of that, I get time with family and friends (and a much needed break from studying) before medical school starts.

All of this is to say, lots of times how we thought things would look, end up turning into something we never imagined. Just as *Isaiah 55:9* says, *"For just as the heavens are higher than the earth, so my ways are higher than your ways and my thoughts higher than your thoughts"* (NLT). His plans are so much greater than ours. In His perfect timing I'll become a physician, and until then He will continue to work in me and through me. I've been reminded time and time again that our peace should not come from the affirmation of tomorrow and what it brings. No matter what tomorrow looks like, we are closely held today by our Creator who knows tomorrow.

JOURNAL:

Press into the scriptures above (John 15:7, Isaiah 55:9). What is the Lord speaking to you? What plans or expectations might the Lord be asking you to lay down before Him today?

HANDS HELD TIGHT // SARAH IRANPOUR

I was recently on a run in the Arboretum. I was excited to run through the fallen leaves and the crisp fall air. For the past couple of months, I've challenged myself to run without music, leaving space for God's voice. I started this specific run, and I invited God on my run as usual. It wasn't until a few minutes in that I realized that the last time I had run at the arboretum was my sophomore year of college, pretty much 3 years to date, the same time when I found myself crippled with fear and anxiety. It felt like I was always walking around with a dark cloud over me that I couldn't get away from. That day 3 years ago, my therapist had encouraged me to do some sort of physical activity to help get my thoughts under control. So I decided to go on a run after not running since I was in the 7th grade.

I expected myself to be able to run the whole trail, similar to the way I thought I'd find a way to suddenly not struggle with anxiety. That wasn't the reality though because I found myself having to stop and walk every .3 miles. I was mad. Why couldn't I run? Why couldn't I get over this anxiety? Fast forward to my recent run and God was so kind to remind me of the progress I've made since that time 3 years ago. I kept running past each marker that I had to stop at the last time I ran there. I thought about how He was reminding me of how much I've grown as a runner, but then of course, He went further to remind me how He's healed my mind and redeemed the darkest time of my life, over the past 3 years!

In almost every area of my life I want to automatically sprint to accomplish something or heal. But God has shown me how to show myself the grace He's given me to take the baby steps toward healing and growth. The best news is that we don't have to figure this out on our own, Jesus holds our hands as we walk towards healing!

*"The Lord your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save;
He will rejoice over you with gladness;
He will quiet you by his love; He will exult over you with loud singing."
Zephaniah 3:17 (ESV)*

JOURNAL:

What is something difficult in your life that you want to run from? Are you frustrated that you are still dealing with the same thing from 5 years ago (or less or more)? Invite the Lord into your healing. Go on a walk or take a journal to your favorite place and sit in the hurt and frustration. Let yourself be honest to God but then ask Him for the grace and strength to walk through healing. Ask for patience in the process.



THE LIFE OF PABLO, MY CAT // ETHAN WILLOUGHBY

My burdened
and heavy heart
was refreshed
with new life
and joy.



Before Pablo found his way into my home he had a long journey. He was abandoned by his owners and lived outside for weeks on bugs and mice. It makes me sad to think about how lonely and hungry Pablo was during that time. His whole life completely changed. It wasn't until this hungry and very thin cat pawed outside of a stranger's door that he got a second chance to be safe and secure again. This however was only a halfway point on his journey to me. This stranger to Pablo fed him, housed him, loved him and helped him look for a new home. While this person was a stranger to Pablo they were no stranger to me and Rachel, my wife. The one who opened the door to Pablo's potential for a new life was close friends with Rachel. Seeing a post on Facebook about this cat needing a new home, we made the decision in a Target parking lot to adopt him!

I wanted to share this story for two reasons: 1) I really love my cat and 2) I think Pablo's story can bring us insight into our relationship with God and our lives as believers. Like Pablo I was abandoned by my earthly father and even lived a season of my life outside of the home that God invites us into. It was a lonely season that I thought I could endure on my own strength, but there was a breaking point. Starved from my lack of relationship with God, I reached out to Him (pawed at the door) and found Him waiting for me. My burdened and heavy heart was refreshed with new life and joy.

I want to invite you to reflect on these questions with Pablo in mind! Are you in a season of life where you feel cast out, abandoned and all alone? What is trying to convince you of these things and how does what we know and understand about God speak against these thoughts? Put yourself in Pablo's paws, who in your life has been welcoming to you? What characteristics do hospitable people have in common with God? How can you be more hospitable and open the door for the potential of new life to the strangers around you? Lastly, who has God put in your life to show his love and care unconditionally too?

And...enjoy this picture of my champion cat Pablo!

The Wise and Foolish Builders

Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.

Matthew 7:24-27 (NIV)

Have you ever noticed that all home renovation shows basically have the same plotline? The faces change from Chip and Jo to the Property Brothers, but every episode involves the discovery of a surprise structural problem. We find out that the homeowners are one bubble bath away from having a clawfoot tub crash through the ceiling and land on the dining room table. Usually it's because someone cut corners in construction. They took the easy way out in building or maintaining the home. Someone was unwise in how they approached building practices.

It's just like Jesus to provide an object lesson, and in Matthew's gospel he compares building home with building lives. Wise builders built on a firm foundation of rock. Foolish builders just slap up boards on the sand. And you know what? Storms come. Every time. They always, always do. The house built on the rock endures, but the house built on the sand collapses. So it is with our lives. Lives built on the bedrock of OBEDIENCE can weather a storm, but lives of disobedience will fall apart when the weather turns.

Obedience. That is the key to weathering storms. It's not enough to just hear the words of Jesus. We must put them into practice. Jesus said, "Everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on the sand" (Matthew 7:26). We can be tempted to believe that God is only interested in obedience when it comes to the big decisions: how to spend the summer, what major to select, when to end or begin that romantic relationship. Jesus does care about all of that, but most of our obedience is in the mundane. In the everyday. In how we respond when our roommates leave dishes in the sink. If we tell the whole truth or misrepresent ourselves. On how we respond to the social needs of outcasts. Obedience is usually lived out in small, hidden ways. But pulled together, those many acts of obedience construct a life of obedience, built on the rock, that will be ready for the storms of life.

JOURNAL:

What is the invitation of Jesus toward obedience? What areas of your life are built on the rock of obedience? What areas are being constructed out of disobedience? What would you like to confess and turn from.

MORE THAN JUST CHILLIN

SPENCER JAGOE

If you know me, one of my favorite things on the planet to do is to just chill. What do I mean by chilling? Well here is an unofficial definition, Merriam-Webster confirmation still pending:

Chill (Noun)

1. To simply hang out or relax but in a way that transcends the term “hanging out” itself “What did you do this weekend man?” “Oh you know me. I was just chillin.” “Same bro, it was niceeeee.”

You could sit down and just watch some football on a Sunday, you could stay up until 3am playing video games with your friends, you could fall into a deep gaze while watching A Christmas Story all day long on Christmas Day. All bets are off when it comes to this. Anything is prime for an opportunity to chill. Christmas Break is a time to find rest physically, spiritually and emotionally! Allow yourself to take a breather, kick back, put your feet up, and let the weight you’ve been feeling lift off your shoulders.


But in the midst of this, where can the Lord be found? As guys, we too often default to “just chill” when we hang out. Our incessant focus on video games or fantasy football can often keep us at a surface level with some of our closest friends. We’re conditioned to neglect deep conversation to just chill. The Lord calls us to rest, but how we rest is important. As you rest, think about how you can spend this time of rest with your bros in an intentional way that moves you closer to God.

Matthew 11:28-30 says “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” (ESV)


Jesus reminds us that we don’t rest simply for the sake of rest, but to learn from him. So how do we make sure that our rest over this break bears real fruit?

For me, I find myself playing video games with friends almost every night. I try and pray beforehand to let the Lord be honored in my words. I pray that we find true community, even through my PS4 controller and headset. I also find myself thanking the Lord for bonding moments with my Dad after we spend an afternoon watching football. Sometimes it’s grabbing a meal with a friend and talking about how God is at work in our lives. Find what those moments are for you, and invite the Lord into it. Be intentional this break about chilling, but chilling in a way that carries a depth to it because you know Jesus.

Let’s chill with Jesus over this break.



I W I L L G I V E Y O U R E S T

The background of the entire page is a dense, overlapping pattern of green leaves, likely from a magnolia tree, with prominent veins. The leaves are in various shades of green, from dark forest green to lighter, almost yellow-green, creating a textured, organic feel.

NAMING YOUR SEASON // KENNEDY FITZGERALD

*“For everything there is a season,
and a time for every matter under heaven;
a time to be born, and a time to die;
a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted;
a time to kill, and a time to heal;
a time to break down, and a time to build up;
a time to weep, and a time to laugh;
a time to mourn, and a time to dance;
a time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together;
a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;
a time to seek, and a time to lose;
a time to keep, and a time to cast away;
a time to tear, and a time to sew;
a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;
a time to love, and a time to hate;
a time for war, and a time for peace.”*

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 (ESV)

Did you skip over the scripture and go straight to the prompt? If so, you're like me, and you need to work on your patience. If you read it, you're on the road to success. Either way—go back and reread the eight verses above while asking God this question “What season am I in?”

Life is full of seasons. Literally, each year rotates through four seasons—winter, spring, summer and fall. Fall being the best, of course. But, we have other seasons in life as well. Seasons of joy. Seasons of pain. Seasons of grief. Seasons of contentment. The list could go on. There are many times in my life that I have missed the season that I've been in. I would say currently I am in a season of engagement. I am seeking wisdom from The Lord in this season on how to best prepare for my life ahead in marriage. I could miss this season. I could disregard what God wants to teach me in the here and now because I am looking ahead for what's to come or I could run away from what has been. Corona hit us all differently, but it hit us nonetheless. We have been in—and maybe still are in—a season that doesn't look like anything we've ever walked through. I remember at the beginning of this virus every pastor, teacher, spiritual leader I listened to would say “Don't miss this season! Make the most out of the extra time you have! Spend long hours with God just sitting in His presence because it will never be like this again!” And although I wanted it to be that way and I wanted that season to be marked by hours spent with God...it just wasn't that way for me. And maybe it wasn't that way for some of you. Or maybe it was! Either way, we are walking through times unlike any other, and they need the presence of God in them.

Spend some time today sitting with Ecclesiastes 3 and asking the Holy Spirit to reveal himself to you through the scripture. Maybe get out your journal and write a few questions down:

What season have I been in with you lately, Lord?

What season are you walking me out of, and what season are you walking me into?

What are you trying to teach me through it all?

After you've spent some time journaling with God, take some time to pray. Maybe it's a prayer of turning back after a few months of choosing yourself over Him. Maybe it's a prayer of thanksgiving of all that He is and all that He's been doing in your life. Maybe it's the first time you've really talked to Him in a while and you just want to sit in silence with Him. Whatever it is, He is worthy of our time and attention and He wants to commune with you.

THE CHALLENGE OF TRANSITION // RACHEL WILLOUGHBY

*The Lord himself goes before you and will be with you; He will never leave you nor forsake you.
Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged.
Deuteronomy 31:8 (NIV)*

Transitions are hard, but they are necessary for getting to where we are going. In order to get home from work, I must transition by driving through straining traffic to sit on my comfy couch. When we go to college, we must transition from life with our parents to independence. We have to learn how to function as an adult - get out of bed, eat three meals each day, and follow a schedule - on our own. The outcomes of these transitions are good, but sometimes getting from one place to the next presents unforeseen challenges.

I recently went through a pretty big transition in my own life. Marriage. Many of us long for this moment in our life, a bonding relationship that secures us in commitment and enlivens us with passion. I admit, I love this new step in life. However, I have walked through challenges during this transition from singleness to marriage that I was unaware would arise.


When people started asking me, “what is the thing about marriage you did not expect?”, my most honest answer was loneliness. This feeling has nothing to do with my new husband and the amazing ways he loves me. Rather, this recognition of loneliness has to do with the fact that my friendships outside of marriage are now different. As I have transitioned into a deeper relationship with Ethan, I unknowingly transitioned into a new type of relationship with my friends. One moment I was sitting in the living room with my roommates, talking about life and the Lord, and the next moment it was with someone new. I am living in the same house, sitting in the same living room, and on the same couch, but Jess and Lindsey are no longer the ones I am having these daily conversations with. Instead, I am having them with Ethan - and the conversations are still, so good!

So, why did I all of a sudden feel lonely? The answer is, I had transitioned to a deeper life with Ethan and therefore had a less consistently deep relationship with my friends who I was doing daily life with. Jess and Lindsey are still my friends and are great ones to have! Our relationship just looks different, but it is still so good. So now when people ask me, “what is the thing about marriage you did not expect?”, my answer is the unforeseen challenges that come with transition. In particular, my relationship with my close friends. Transitions can be hard. But, there is so much comfort in remembering that the Lord goes before us in these transitions.

Are you in a time of transition? If so, what challenges, seen or unforeseen, are you experiencing? How can you invite the Lord into walking you through this transition? If not, take some time to reflect on past or future transitions. How have you walked through these transitory moments in the past? How was God present? What does it look like to intentionally seek God in an upcoming transition?

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