

GOD IS WITH US

A 21 Day Devotional



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This 21 Day Devotion is designed to help you begin the new year abiding in the truth that God Is With You. Each devotion entry is written by a Gathering Church Elder, Staff Member, or Member.

LOOK

up the scripture(s)

READ

the devotion

CONFESS

the struggle

PRAY

the prayer

Join us January 25th at 5pm for a time of prayer, praise, and open testimonies regarding how God has used the truths in this devotional to strengthen you in the knowledge God Is With You.

INTRODUCTION, God Is With Us

And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. Revelation 21:3

In this text John is given a glimpse of the future, a vision of the new heavens and earth, where God Himself will one day wipe away every tear. All pain, loss, and suffering will finally stop. This vision comes to John while he is imprisoned on the island of Patmos, cut off, lonely, and suffering for his faith. And yet, in that place of isolation, God draws near. God gives John this vision not to remove his suffering, but to sustain him within it. He wants John, and all of God’s people, to know that suffering is not the end of the story. One day, every tear will be wiped away by God Himself. Every sorrow will be healed. Every loss restored. As Tim Keller writes: “God will not simply give you something different in heaven to make up for your losses; He will actively restore everything that was lost, a million times better than you can imagine.” This is the hope that carries us. Our present pain, heavy as it feels, will one day be swallowed up by glory.

Even more than the promise of healing is the promise of presence. Heaven is heaven because God will be there, dwelling with His people, close and near. From the beginning, this has always been God’s desire. In the garden, God walked with Adam in the cool of the day. After sin entered the world, God did not withdraw His heart from humanity. Even though man was removed from the garden, he provided a way for his presence to come near. He dwelt with Israel in the wilderness in the cloud by day and fire by night. He gave instructions to build a tabernacle in the wilderness and eventually a temple where he dwelt with his people (Exodus 25-40). God made a way to be with those He loved through sacrifices to atone for their sins. In the fullness of time, God came even closer. Jesus was born and given the name Emmanuel, “God with us.” In John 1:14 John tells us that Jesus “dwelt” among us. The word dwelt in the Greek language means that He “tabernacled” among humanity. God did not love us from a distance. He entered our world, took on our flesh, and made His home among us. Jesus is the true temple, the living, breathing presence of God with humanity. And the story does not end there. Because of Jesus, God now makes His home in us. We are the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 3:16).

God has gone to unimaginable lengths, giving His own Son, so that nothing would separate us from His presence. He desires to be near us. He wants fellowship. He enjoys communion with His beloved children. Our God is not like those who are physically present but emotionally distant. He is not distracted, indifferent, or reluctant. He delights in being with us. He listens. He stays. He gives His full attention. Even when we are weak, distracted, or weary, His heart remains open toward us. And yet, we often forget. We fill our lives with noise and worry. We grow busy. Our hearts become closed. Jesus stands at the door and knocks, not in anger, but in love, longing for fellowship. God created us for fellowship and friendship.

Contribution By Eddie Fontanez

DAY 1, God Is With Us In Our Suffering

Read: Romans 5:3-5

At some point in your life as a believer, you will encounter suffering—that's a guarantee and part of living in a sin-cursed world. Suffering doesn't present itself in just one form either; sometimes it comes from the loss of a job, perhaps the loss of a child or a family member, a health condition or diagnosis, or even in the form of mistreatment or abuse. No matter how it finds you, a season of suffering can feel dark, lonely, and discouraging, tempting you to question the goodness and faithfulness of God and leaving you feeling beat up and worn down, like you simply cannot go on. Maybe you try to bypass the season by taking matters into your own hands or numb the pain by searching for temporary hits of joy or pleasure—only to be reminded that you cannot escape it. Sounds encouraging, doesn't it? I've certainly been there more times, and for much longer, than I would have ever wanted. Maybe you've been there before. Maybe you're there now.

Over the course of my life, I have found myself in many seasons of suffering—some caused by others, some from my own brokenness, and some simply from living in a broken world. No matter the reason, the grace and presence of God were always there—always at work, always revealing Himself in His timing. God is with us in suffering. That's also a guarantee.

In every season of suffering, the Word of God has come most alive for me—not always in ways I desired or expected, but always in ways that produced growth, healing, strength, and a deeper love for God with greater gratitude for Jesus, as the Holy Spirit gently revealed what was within me, showing areas in need of sanctification and healing and revealing more of God's character and love than I have ever seen during any mountaintop experience. I often tell people that while I would never ask for suffering, I could never put a dollar amount on what I gained on the other side of those seasons. The kindness of the Lord wastes nothing—not even suffering—and that is something to rejoice in.

I love this quote by Elisabeth Elliot:

“The deepest things that I have learned in my own life have come from the deepest suffering. And out of the deepest waters and the hottest fires have come the deepest things that I know about God.” - Elisabeth Elliot, *Suffering Is Never for Nothing*

Confession: Father, I confess that in seasons of suffering, it is hard to rejoice. Too often, even though I know you are good and faithful, I lose sight of that truth and want to hurry the season instead of entrusting my circumstances—and all that comes with them—to You.

Prayer: Father, in times of suffering, help me to remember Your love and care for me. Help me to trust that You know what You intend to use this season for. Thank You for Jesus, and for the way You suffered, which gives me hope beyond this season and the assurance that You are with me in it. In Jesus' name, amen.

Contributed by Nicci Meng

DAY 2, God Is With Us When We Are Anxious

Read: Zephaniah 3:17

Ever since I was a kid, I have battled Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD), with anxiety being a recurring symptom. I have found some Christian responses to be helpful and others to be less so. In the unhelpful category, one phrase tritely says, “Anxiety is sin because Jesus said not to worry,” and the other resignedly says, “Anxiety is completely normal.” The first response fails to convey the heart of God and the second underestimates His power. How does our Father respond to His sons and daughters when they feel anxious? Zephaniah 3:17 offers a treasure of insights into how God relates to us and what it means in the midst of the anxieties we encounter.

The LORD your God is in your midst. God is always with us, even when we least feel it. Even when our mind is swirling with all the unfinished tasks, unpaid bills, unresolved relationship problems, and unhealed ailments, He promises never to leave us nor forsake us (Hebrews 13:5), and His presence surrounds us (Psalm 125:2) and abides within us (1 Corinthians 3:16).

A mighty one who will save. God isn’t a weak companion. He has actual power to change both our circumstances and our mental state, regardless of how long we’ve had to deal with them. In Philippians 4:6, Paul’s alternative for being anxious about our problems is to present them “by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving”. By praying, we call upon the One who can do the impossible; by thanking Him, we remind ourselves that He is able to do it!

He will rejoice over you with gladness. God is joyful. Think of the happiest little kid on the planet, and then recognize that God is even happier. This is his demeanor when He thinks of you, His beloved son or daughter whom He has saved. When we meditate on God’s joy over us, the cares of this life lose their grip.

He will quiet you by his love; he will exult over you with loud singing. This verse is not a metaphor but a true description of what our Father does. His love, not accusation, is what brings our souls to rest. Apparently, He also sings! Since God is described as being gleefully loud, our hearts and minds are able to be peacefully quiet.

Confession: Father, I acknowledge that I have often forgotten to look to you and have misjudged your character and power. I confess that I have sought to solve life’s problems in my own head rather than trusting in your love for me.

Prayer: Father, thank you that you do not condemn me when I lose sight of your power and goodness. Thank you that you rejoice over me and quiet me by your love. I pray you will train me to rest in your capability in my daily life, both psychologically and spiritually.

Contribution by Jonathan Ford

DAY 3, God Is With Us When We Are Depressed

Read: Psalm 42

To me one of the most wonderful things about the Psalms is the honesty of human emotion that we can find in them. We get this idea sometimes, or at least I did growing up, that the best “Christians” are those that have their feelings all buttoned up, who have it all together and are perfectly assured and perfectly positive in all of life. A quick read through of the Psalms shows us that this is not the case.

Psalm 42 shows us this sort of emotional honesty. The first two verses describe how the psalmist’s soul longs for God and God’s presence in his life. He describes it as a thirst that is not quenched. As he writes on, we see that this thirst is rooted in his depression. There is something happening in his life, we are never told what it is, that has seemingly separated him from the love and presence of God.

If you have ever dealt with depression, as I have, you know how apt a description of it we find here in this Psalm. There have been days and nights in my life where it felt that the only thing I had to sustain myself was my own salty tears (verse 3). There are times when the turmoil (verse 5) in my soul feels like I am stuck in the surf in the middle of a hurricane (verse 7). When I feel this way, I can feel like an absolute spiritual failure, and like the Psalmist, I hear the taunts of the world, “Where is your God?” (verses 3 & 10).

In the very midst of this turmoil, this depression, this spiritual storm, the Psalmist points us to the Way out, for there is only ever one Way, one Truth, and one Life (John 14:6). He preaches to himself, in verse 5 and 11, “Hope in God; for again I shall praise him, my salvation and my God.” It is important that when we find ourselves in the morass of depression that we continue to preach the truth of God to ourselves. That is our Hope. There is only one Living Water that can quench the thirst of our souls, and that is Christ (John 4:14). In the cross, Christ experienced the abandonment (Matthew 27:46) and thirst (John 19:28) that we can so often feel. But, because Christ experienced these things in the cross, and conquered them in the Resurrection, it is possible for us to have our thirst quenched and to know that we never are truly abandoned by God. The night may be dark, but our hope is certain. The Light has come into the world, and the darkness cannot overcome it (John 1:5).

Confession: Father God, I confess there are times when I feel far from you. There are times when it feels as if I am in a desert and can’t get a drink, times that the darkness presses in on me and feels insurmountable, times that I feel absolutely alone and I listen to those that seek to taunt me by asking, “where is your God?”

Prayer: Lord, when my soul is cast down and hope feels thin, remind me that Your steadfast love does not fail, that while there is weeping in the night, hope always comes in that Resurrection morning (Psalm 30:5). Teach me to hope in You alone, not because the darkness is not real, but because it is and Christ has conquered it. Amen.

Contribution by Carter McNeese

DAY 4, God Is With Us When We Are Afraid

Read: Romans Chapter 8

All of us have experienced fear. Perhaps it was a rational fear; a logical response to immediate danger, such as a house fire. Maybe it was a primal fear; innate distress that is hardwired into your brain, such as a fear of falling. Or an irrational fear; intense, illogical terrors, like public speaking that leave you paralyzed. More than likely you have come face-to-face with all three types of fears! So, what are you to do in these emotionally charged circumstances or ongoing states of angst? Here is where, as a volunteer in our children's ministry, the sweet voices of children squeal; "JESUS!" This seemingly elementary answer is correct, but why?

From the time I was a little girl, I have battled the irrational "fear of failure." How did the World help me? Typically, I would receive well-meaning responses such as; work harder, plan, get things in order, prioritize, strive, do not let up, keep going, you can do it! Although not "bad" messages, NONE of these options set me free. If anything, these motivational words only enslaved me more.

As I aged, I drew inward, became self-focused and addicted to achievement. I set up routines for self-protection, isolated from those I deemed "obstacles," and even found myself bull-doing others in order to master the art of "not failing." I had convinced myself these were noble pursuits. The World praised me for a pace and productivity level that was unmatched. I appeared to be on top and was deemed a natural born trailblazer. Yet, despite all the quote "success," this pit in the back of my mind plagued me when the momentum of achievement slowed. Expressions like "if you stop now, you might fail" dominated my thought life. Ironically, I became more fearful. It was no longer the fear of failing at school that fed my illness, but slowly overtime the ugly sin spread into fear of failing in relationships, at my vocation, and in the home.

What has changed today? After an intense season of failing in more ways than one, it was here that the good news of the Gospel set me free from the enslaving, irrational fear of failure. Romans 8 helped me to see the great love God has for me in Jesus. Despite my failures, I cannot be separated from His love. He does not condemn me for my weaknesses but is with me in them. I am his daughter, an heir! My identity and future are not dependent on my successful performance, but on His calling and grace.

Confession: Heavenly Father, I am prone to lose sight of your love for me. I seek to find my security and worth in my successful performance and not in sonship.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for freeing me from fear of failure by redefining my identity in You, and assuring me of Your unconditional love and grace. Remind me each day that my worth is not based on performance, but Your Son's finished work which promises restoration and purpose even in mistakes. Amen.

Contributed by Lisa Burgess

DAY 5, God Is With Us In Our Weariness

Read: Matthew 11:28-30

Life is busy. We live in a time with more access to people, resources, and knowledge than any generation before us. Sometimes I imagine what it would be like if someone from the early or mid-1900s spent a single day in our world. At first, they would marvel at the incredible advancements. But before long, I think they would notice something else: we are a people consumed by busyness.

Busyness isn't always bad—it can mean productivity, opportunity, even blessing. But it often leaves us weary. We've become a world of tired and weary souls, worn down by the constant demands of life.

Too often I find this description to be true in my own life. In seasons of weariness, I try to reevaluate my priorities, hoping that better balance will bring relief. Yet the truth is, not every responsibility can be cut away. It's not simply about managing a calendar more efficiently. It's about remembering that Jesus is better!

Scripture gives us this beautiful picture: a yoke, a tool that binds animals together so they can share the load. The work doesn't disappear, but it becomes lighter because they are not alone. In the same way, Jesus invites us to bring our weary hearts to Him. He doesn't promise to erase every burden, but He does promise to carry it with us.

Much of my weariness comes from trying to shoulder everything in my own strength. But Jesus says, "Come to Me, and I will give you rest." True rest isn't found in empty schedules or fewer tasks—it's found in Him. Rest for our souls is Jesus Himself.

So, if you are tired today, go to Him. Pray. Learn from Him. Open His Word. He is gentle and kind, more than able to carry what feels too heavy for you. His yoke is easy, and His burden is light.

Confession: Father forgive me for trying to carry all my burdens on my own. Forgive me for seeking to find rest in things and activities apart from you.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for being our rest! When I am tired and weary, thank you for carrying my load. Help me not to get so consumed with the busyness of life that I forget that you have called us to yourself first! Even amid seasons of a lot of activity, keep me firmly yoked to you.

Contribution by Lindsey Martin

DAY 6, God Is With Us As We Age

Read: 2 Corinthians 4:16

When I was younger, I would often dream of being older, able to do more things and have more freedom. My children do the same thing. Strangely though, there comes a time when the roles start to reverse, the longing to be young again. As you age your body starts to decay, things don't work like they used to. You think boy, if I were just 20 years younger. As it turns out, getting older isn't as fun as young people hope and dream it would be.

2025 has been a rough year for my wife and I, we both lost a parent. Parts of my body have permanently clocked out. I had to have my gallbladder removed. Immediately following that, I had a case of shingles! Responsibilities change. Now, I'm dealing with teenagers starting to drive...and getting in their first wreck! The enjoyment of a hobby that started just 6 years ago, mountain biking, is already waning and I'm only 46!

What a comfort this 2 Corinthians 4:16 is, knowing that we can find spiritual renewal every morning in the face of a decaying body. It's also comforting to know that God is with us as our minds mature. We are able to reason through the Good News of Gospel lensed glasses. Even though changes are inevitable in our earthly body, God's Word doesn't change, the standard remains fixed. Fix your mind on things above. Fix your mind on the Word of God. Colossians 2:6-8 reads..."as you received Christ Jesus, the Lord, so walk in him, rooted, and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in Thanksgiving. See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ."

The enemy fights a battle for control of your mind, your perspective, your outlook on life. He is quick to point out how the world is passing you by due to your aging body. Too often we're quick to measure our success or our progress by the standards the world uses: beauty, strength, independence, being care-free. The treasures that they store up are fleeting. Let your standard be found in the Word of God and rooted in being a beloved child of God.

Confession: Heavenly father, I confess to you my shortcomings. Too quickly, I look around and compare my life with those around me, their abilities, their possessions, their accomplishments, their health.

Prayer: Help me Lord Jesus to cherish the things that truly matter, to be thankful for the things that you have given me, to realize I still have purpose in your plan of redemption in a lost and dying world. Grant me your grace to accept my lot in life. Give me your peace and let your light shine through me so that I may bless you and others around me. Use me this day Lord, in your power to bring you fame, glory, and honor because you richly deserve it. In the most holy and precious name I know, the name of Jesus Christ, I pray, amen.

Contribution by Keith Bankston

DAY 7, God Is With Us In Failure

Read: Mark 14:27-31, 66-71

Failure. No matter how you define it, failing is the most common experience among people. Even pain and loss are not as well-shared as failure. No matter how hard we try, how conscientious we are, or the levels of our expertise or capabilities, we will all fail in an endeavor, goal, game, or friendship. And the aftermath will in part determine our recovery.

For me, Duncan Locke, my greatest failure occurred vocationally 15 years ago. A small faction in the church I had led for fourteen years became disillusioned with the grace gospel I preached and came against me in my role as pastor. Instigated by an associate pastor, the situation I faced uncovered my unforeseen, yet greatest fear...unemployment! Until this occasion, I had never faced the devastating experience of failing to provide for my family. I felt undone as a man, husband, father, pastor, and son. I have never known such despair in every direction. I wrestled with worthlessness, insignificance, incompetence, and validity. I felt betrayed, victimized, and disgraced. I fought an overwhelming lack of purpose, future, and calling. My world was turned upside down and inside out. I wondered why God would allow such a thing. It was unfathomable failure. It was the end of me!

This is God's favorite place for each of us...the end of our "successful selves." It's not because He enjoys our pain; He does not! But we cannot find out until we're there (and we may wind up at the end of ourselves many times in differing circumstances) that we are safe and secure in Jesus. He is never caught unaware of dilemmas we face and He is always the solution we need. He is likely the only Being with whom we can share the vilest things without need for reconciliation...because He always already knows! He is never shocked, never considers us lost causes; never gives up; never turns away; and never changes His mind about us. Those in Christ by grace through faith are His forever. Even more stunning is the fact that He restores us from inside, rebuilds our lives, renews our vision, and reclaims our mission. In Him we find our true selves. In Him we never fail. In Him we only succeed!

Twelve months later, I followed God into another pastoral position after He moved us closer to Lynda's family, giving us the final year with her father. I anticipated the most difficult reality would be loving and trusting the church again - for to love Jesus is to love His body. And when the first day of the new ministry came, God flipped the light switch on His love and allowed me to relish being His conduit to His people once again.

Confession: Heavenly Father, personal failure is a certainty in life on earth. It might be shocking, debilitating, and unavoidable, but Your great love for me is even more definitive. Help me to be honest with You about my feelings, fears, failures (You know them anyway), to be willing to face the end of me no matter what it looks like or the pain it promises, and to trust You with me for help, healing, and restoration when I do fail - just as Peter did.

Prayer: Thank you, dearest Friend, that you are always with me, always for me, and always in me to face with me my greatest failures. Thank you that there is no condemnation for me in Christ and remind me that I can do nothing apart from Him. You are the fruit-producer; I am the fruit-projector. Let the glory You share with me be seen even in my failures. Amen

Contribution by Duncan Locke

DAY 8, God Is With Us In Disappointment

Read: Luke 24:1-12

I was on my way to a local coffee shop to spend some down time reading. As I pulled into the parking lot, my phone rang. It was one of my best friends from Texas. After answering the phone, he asked a routine question “How are you doing?” Although the question was routine, my response was not. As I opened my mouth to share my current state of affairs, all I could do was cry. After taking a few deep breaths and gaining my composure, I attempted to share again, but no words came out, only tears. After multiple attempts to fashion words, all I could muster was “Donald, I can’t talk, will you.” My tears were not tears of physical pain or tears of joy, but tears that sprung from an immense amount of disappointment. The journey I was on in life had not turned how I anticipated. I was seeking to follow Jesus. I had left my life in Texas behind. After nine months in Florida, I had nothing to show for it. No fruit to display God’s presence and blessing. No clear pathway forward. In that moment it was as if a tidal wave of disappointment crashed down on me. I was like a surfer pinned to the ocean floor by a relentless, never-ending wave. I was suffocating under the emotion of disappointment.

I am confident you can relate. We all experience disappointment. Perhaps it’s something trivial like watching our favorite college football team lose on a Saturday. Maybe it’s much more devastating, like watching a marriage of twenty years come to an end. Where do we go and what do we do during these moments? Even more pressing, where is God and what is he doing in them? For me, there were two graces from the Lord on that day. Grace number one, a good friend who took time to speak words of life into me when I was unable to talk. At the end of our one-sided conversation, he prayed for me. Godly, loving friends are a grace from the hand of God!

The second grace, a phrase that was shared “God is always preparing you for what He has prepared for you.” Even in my disappointment, God was graciously present and graciously strategic. Imagine the disappointment of the disciples after the death and burial of Jesus. God had not failed, nor had He abandoned them. The good news of a sufficient and resurrected Savior would soon be revealed and they would become witnesses of it! God was preparing them for what He had prepared for them. Good news was on the way, for them and for the nations!

Confession: Heavenly Father, I often struggle with disappointment. I am prone to suppress it by quoting biblical platitudes or seeking to drown it away in ice cream or Netflix. At other times I am tempted to give up and give in to my despair, freefalling into depression and apathy.

Prayer: Thank you for your grace to me in my disappointments. Thank you for friends that care. Thank you for your continual presence and sovereign hand that is strategically at work. Thank you for delivering me from the ocean floor, like you did Jonah. Amen.

Contribution by Ryan Burgess

DAY 9, God Is With Us In Our Weakness

Read: 2 Corinthians 12:9-10; Isaiah 40:28-31; Mark 2:17

Many years ago, in a land far far away, I was a heavy weight lifter. I learned quickly that I had a problem though. I had strong muscles but weaker hands. Much of my lifting was going to be limited if I did not improve my grip strength. While it was so much more stimulating to do heavy squats, instead, I had to do small hand squeezes. For it is not our areas of strength which need strengthening, but rather our areas of weakness. We each have areas in life where we feel like rockstars, but it is the areas of weakness that will hold us back, and God wants to meet us in those places.

I have found that God has a way of illuminating these areas. Over and over, I am in situations which challenge me to my very core. My reaction is most often not a pretty sight. In the last several years, I have been struggling with an area of weakness that no matter how much “exercise” I do, I can’t seem to build strength. I can’t seem to “get it together.” And believe me, there have been plenty of opportunities for exercise! But you know what I hear in those statements? A whole lot of “I.”

I have become convinced through experience, and through Scripture, that God allows, and sometimes may even give us, these areas of weakness, so that we can learn to depend on Him. When I have come to the end of myself, I finally look up. Without the weaknesses, I would not need Christ’s power to rest upon me. I would not experience the renewed strength that comes from the Lord, and I would not experience the healing that Jesus came to offer. In weakness there is blessing. I am reminded of the Laura Story song called, The Blessing. I encourage you to listen to it.

In these weaknesses, we have unique opportunities to find joy and gratitude. God wants to give us something of Himself in the place of our weakness. We must come to the end of our own strength, the confidence in our flesh, and our own natural abilities to finally reach for God. God longs to be our source of strength in our weakness. Ironically, our weakest area can become our strongest witness. It becomes clear to us and to those around us that He is the perfect one and the true object of worship.

Confession: Lord, I confess that I try to solve my own problems. When I can’t, I wallow in self-pity instead of looking to you as my source of strength and renewal. I repent of believing that I can handle my life without you. When Jesus was here on Earth, he modeled a life of dependence on God. I confess that I often try to live out of my own strength and ability instead of walking in your strength.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank you for knowing me. You are aware of my strengths and weaknesses. Lord, help me to set aside my pride and drive for independence, and come to you for help. Lord, thank you that your Word states that we can come boldly into your throne room to obtain mercy and find grace in time of need. Thank you, that you want to impart into me your strength. For that is certainly an upgrade from my own! Help me to have a change of heart posture. Instead of wallowing in grief and despair because I feel that I am not enough, help me to rejoice. I can rejoice because you are with me. You are the strong one. You show up in ways I cannot even know to ask or imagine when I am lacking! You are a good Father who only longs to give good gifts to His children. Thank you, Lord, for my weakness. Continue to reveal yourself to me and to others through it, so that you may be the true object of glory.

Contribution by Kari Stouder

DAY 10, God Is With Us In Our Strength

Read: Psalm 139:13-16, Ephesians 2:10, 1 Corinthians 12:4-7

There's a phrase often heard in Christian circles, in one form or another: "I just want to be an instrument in the Lord's hands," or "I want to be a tool God can use." While I believe the heart behind this way of thinking is admirable and God-honoring, I wonder whether the expression itself is actually correct. Walk with me through this line of reasoning, okay?

When God made me, when He formed me in my mother's womb, He wasn't simply considering all the ways I might serve Him efficiently. It wasn't, "We're a little short on musicians these days...better give this girl perfect pitch," or, "Two of my best evangelists are about to head for heaven so let's give this boy a double dose of extroversion and rhetorical skill." God didn't form me to be the perfect instrument or the ideal tool. He didn't ponder whether I should be Milwaukee-grade or merely Ryobi-level decent in order to complete some divine DIY project.

Rather, as the New City Catechism puts it, God made us "to know Him, love Him, live with Him, and glorify Him." The creative God desires irreplicable personal relationships, and so He made you and me different. We're each distinctive, rich with gifts, talents, personalities, emotions, skills, and ideas. So, unlike a handyman who simply replaces a worn-out hammer with a newer one, God gives every person unique, one-of-a-kind gifts. Thus, unlike an efficient, American factory, none of his creatures are exactly alike. No one is replicated, no one is replaced with the same model.

Which brings me to my concluding thought. Far from intending to convince you not to serve God with your strengths, my aim is simply to challenge your motivation for serving. "Obligation" is hardly a word that reflects a personal, loving relationship. Instead, can I suggest that God, through the gift of the Holy Spirit, serves with you by empowering you to do the work that best fits the gifts He's placed within you. Use your strengths and abilities, not under obligation; but eagerly in light of the nuanced and beautiful work of a master artist who designed you in love and partners with you in his work of redeeming the world.

Confession: Sometimes I worry that I'm failing to be the perfect tool in God's hand. I worry that he's upset and wishing that he could replace me with a better, newer, more gifted instrument. I forget that God doesn't see me as something to simply be used up in pursuit of his goals. Instead, his goal includes loving me and delighting in my relationship with him.

Prayer: Direct us, O Lord, in all our doings with thy most gracious favor, and further us with thy continual help; that in all our works begun, continued, and ended in thee, we may glorify thy holy Name, and finally, by thy mercy, have eternal life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Contribution by Liz Synder

DAY 11, God Is With Us When We Rejoice

Read: Psalm 21:2-4, 6 and Ephesians 1:3

The Lord has recently been challenging me to celebrate and rejoice more frequently and meaningfully. In 2025 alone, He fulfilled my lifelong dreams of marriage to my beloved, bold, and beautiful wife Bethany as well as fatherhood to my sweet, unfathomably cute baby Aletheia. God's goodness has been so evident!

While it's true that not everything in life happens how we expect, if we're not careful we can believe lies about God's character. In my case, I had inwardly reversed Psalm 30:5 to make it say that joy may tarry for the night, but weeping comes with the morning. But it says the opposite!

Though David knew the hard knocks of defeat better than most, he was not afraid to celebrate his God-given victories. Psalm 21 is a prayer of gratitude where he celebrates numerous answers to prayer in Psalm 20. Among other things, David praises God for giving him his heart's desire, meeting him with rich blessings, setting a crown of fine gold upon his head, giving him endless life, and gladdening him with the joy of His presence (21:2-4, 6). What if we could celebrate everything God has given us with the same confidence as David?

Thankfully, the Gospel enables us to do exactly that! Romans 8:32 says, "He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?" Not only has God given us eternal life through Jesus, but He has also promised to give us all things because of His unmerited favor. Some may be afraid this line of thinking could lead to "prosperity gospel" theology. To that, I would say that the Bible does in fact preach prosperity, but not in the ways it has been distorted. The biblical view of prosperity frees us to radically celebrate that we have been blessed in every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places (Ephesians 1:3), the greatest of which is a relationship with God. By extension, we have received many earthly blessings that point us to the perfection of heaven, and God is glorified when we enjoy them and praise Him for it.

For me, these truths mean I get to joyfully proclaim God's goodness in granting me a wife and a child, and then using that as a springboard to celebrate our eternal marriage to Christ and unchangeable status as the Father's beloved children. What does it look like for you?

Confession: Father, I confess that I have undervalued your blessings. I have let fear and past disappointments prevent me from fully embracing what you've done for me.

Prayer: Father, thank you so much for sending your Son to save me. Thank you for every blessing you have given me both for this life and the next.

Contribution by Jonathan Ford

DAY 12, God Is With Us In Our Loneliness

Read: Matthew 1:26, 28:20; Romans 8:35-39

We have all felt the deep ache of loneliness. It is more than just being alone; it is the feeling of being profoundly disconnected—a sense that no one truly sees, understands, or cares about the weight we are carrying. Whether you are surrounded by people or physically isolated, the pain can feel overwhelming. In these moments, we often lie to ourselves, believing we are forgotten, insignificant, or fundamentally unlovable. This feeling of abandonment is a deep, painful echo of the first broken relationship in the Garden of Eden, when sin fractured the perfect connection between humanity and God.

The Gospel meets us directly in that feeling of isolation with one profound truth: You are not alone. The greatest promise is found in the name given to Jesus: Immanuel, which means “God with us” (Matthew 1:23). This promise is the ultimate answer to loneliness because it means God did not simply send a message or a representative. He came Himself and took on flesh, lived a perfect life, and suffered the ultimate loneliness, complete separation from the Father on the cross, so that we would never have to experience eternal separation. Understanding this sacrifice reminds us of a vital truth: People can never fill the void that God is meant to fill. The fall separated us from God, but because of Jesus’ sacrifice, we can have a personal relationship with Him. He is the only one who can truly take our loneliness away. Immanuel, God with us, came to walk with us and experience everything we experience. He knows and understands all our feelings and heartaches. When we expect friends, spouses, or children to fix our loneliness, we are putting a burden on their shoulders only God can bear. If you find yourself in a season of loneliness, it may be God gently showing you that you’ve stopped depending on Him to fulfill you and have put others in His place. Use these “valley” moments to see what the Lord is teaching you. The Gospel is alive and active and living in us! Through the Holy Spirit, the promise of Immanuel is a reality right now. The Holy Spirit is interceding on our behalf, even when we don’t know what to pray or why we feel how we feel (Romans 8:26). Christ promised, “And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:20). As a part of the family of God, we are never alone.

To battle the lie of loneliness, we must intentionally grasp the truth of His presence. Remember, the power of the resurrection that conquered death is the same power working to keep you connected to Him. While God is always present, He created us to live in community. Loneliness thrives in silence. If you are in a season of loneliness, commit to reaching out to someone in your small group or church community this week. Ask for prayer or just share a cup of coffee.

Confession: Heavenly Father, the feelings of loneliness are heavy today. Forgive me for believing I am forgotten and in this misbelief further pushing away from you and others.

Prayer: Thank you that the truth of Immanuel is greater than the lie of isolation. Holy Spirit, make the presence of Jesus real to me right now. Help me feel Your peace and give me the courage to reach out to the community you have provided for me. Amen.

Contribution By Lindsey Pinnegar

DAY 13, God Is With Us When We Doubt

Read: Matthew 14:30-33, Psalm 145:18-19, Job 13:15, Psalm 22:19, Isaiah 41:10, Psalm 16:8-11, Romans 8:31-35

Doubting indicates a lack of confidence. So many factors may drive us to this place of losing trust. In his book, *The Benefit of the Doubt*, Craig Groeschel lists several driving forces: circumstances, emotion, intellect, personality, and even conscious decisions. In this chaos of the mind, discerning the truth with perspective challenges us.

One dark winter morning, I texted a staff member here at the Gathering asking for prayer. I had experienced drastic, dramatic upheaval in my life and the ensuing uncertainty sent me into a mental tailspin. I recognized that I had lost perspective and doubt had set in. Within minutes, Dewey Johnson, one of the elders, called. He prayed with me when I had no words. I could not tell you one word he said, but I felt the presence of God in the room, a sense of peace in my soul. My circumstances did not change, but my perspective from myself to God had.

The Bible records real people experiencing doubt as situations arise outside of expectations. 1 Kings 19:4-13 reveals that Elijah struggled with fear and doubt. God was with him. The book of Job tells us that Job struggled with doubt. God did not answer Job's questions, but He gave Job himself. Moses doubted his call five times. God was with him. (Exodus 3-4:17) Peter saw the storm and doubted. "Immediately, Jesus reached out his hand..." (Matthew 14:31). Thomas is famous for doubting, but Jesus was gentle. He was THERE. God is with us when we doubt. How amazing that our doubts don't drive Jesus away but instead draw him in!

Confession: All too often, I find myself doubting God's goodness, His sovereignty, or His love. I desperately cling to my need to control and manipulate. I deny my faith in an attempt to correct the course and solve my own issue. I lack dependence.

Prayer: Creator, you are not surprised by my doubts. Thank you for the great love you have for me, that you are not offended when I question. You see me driven and tossed about by the wind of opinion and circumstance, and yet, you love me. "I know you can do anything and no plan of yours can be thwarted." Job 42:2. I am asking you to strengthen me, to help me, to uphold me with your right hand. Give me peace to rest in You. Amen.

Contributed by Laura Chastain

DAY 14, God Is With Us When Mistreated

Read: Luke 6:27–28

Have you ever been mistreated or at least felt mistreated? I know I have. It is especially hurtful when it is someone you love and do life with: friends, family, spouses, children, church family, small group members, co-workers, or a boss. My wife sometimes mistreats me in the way she responds to things I say (she will admit it). She will take something I say that is meant to be positive and give it the most negative interpretation possible. She then sometimes responds according to that interpretation in a harsh or hurtful way. I feel mistreated in those moments and often respond in kind, or retreat and go silent (mistreat her). So, what should we do? How should we handle it? I think we can break down mistreatment into two categories. 1.) I feel mistreated 2.) Someone has sinned against me (mistreated me).

When we feel mistreated, the first step is always to examine our own hearts and perception. Sometimes, the pain isn't a result of someone else's sin, but our own unmet expectations (they didn't do what I wanted) or a wound in our heart that needs healing. I see this in me at times when someone doesn't respond the way I expect or how I think they should. Maybe I feel disrespected or unloved by their words or actions. When we feel this way our first response should be to look at ourselves. If our own misperception or inner wounding is at fault, not the other persons words or actions, then it would be unfair and inaccurate to hold them liable.

In the event someone does sin against us, the gospel is specific that we should disown them... Wait that's not right. We should forgive (Colossians 3:13, Ephesians 4:32) and love them. The word used in these two passages for forgiving is *charizomenoi*. It is a verb derived from *Charis* ("grace") further described as: to grant as a favor, i.e. gratuitously, in kindness, pardon or rescue -- deliver, forgive, (freely) give, grant. This emphasizes the idea of forgiveness as a benevolent act of release from a moral or relational obligation that flows from favor not obligation.

The Bible also goes so far as to say to love your enemies (Luke 6:27-28). So, forgive them freely and love them all at the same time. Seems easy, right? (sarcasm). Fortunately, the gospel has an answer. Jesus can change our heart. In either case, whether we just feel mistreated or truly were, we are given the Holy Spirit to help sanctify and modify our hearts. Just as we turn to Christ for our own forgiveness for our sin, we can also turn to Christ when we feel mistreated and he can empower us to examine our own hearts and to give true grace and forgiveness to others.

Confession: Heavenly Father, I often feel mistreated. Sometimes that feeling is due to my own misplaced expectations or unhealed wounds. At other times I have been mistreated and feel justified in my hurt and desire to withhold my love from those who hurt me. I am reluctant to forgive and hold animosity towards others. Father, I also mistreat others and sometimes justify it because they have mistreated me.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for your forgiveness and for the perfect example of true forgiveness displayed by Jesus. Soften my heart towards others who have mistreated me. Help me to love them and to gracefully and completely forgive them. Heal my heart of my own sinful thoughts and expectations. Help me see when I mistreat others, repent, and seek forgiveness. Amen.

Contribution by Chris Martin

DAY 15, God Is With Us When Misrepresented

Read: Acts John 18:37; Matthew 28:18-20; and Acts 1:8

The more I talk with others about life and faith in Jesus, the more aware I become that everyone needs to be heard. Apart from body language, our words are the chief means of expressing our ideas and thoughts, and a primary way we share ourselves with one another. Perhaps the only thing harder for humans than hearing each other is...hearing each other accurately! "Communication is a two-way street," so every message has the possibility of being both mis-spoken as well as misheard. And when repeated inaccurately by hearers, these "misunderstandings" result in greater misrepresentations of both message and initiator. The problem with misrepresentation is that it ill-effects many more people than just the hearer. Like a bad game of "Telephone," the initial story changes with every re-telling until it becomes unrecognizable - and so does the initiator!

I believe this presents the greatest damage to relationships. Being heard is critical to being understood; being understood is essential to being known; and being known (and accepted) by others is a base need we all pursue. But this result of being known and accepted is greatly jeopardized through misrepresentation. No matter how perfect one's message or language used, no matter what audience or culture hears it, no matter what subject or truths are posited, misrepresentations will abound. Even Jesus, the most perfect representation of God to man, "...the radiance of God's glory and the exact imprint of His nature," was misrepresented by most of the Jewish religious establishment. Could God have represented Himself in better fashion to mankind? No. Should He have anticipated the reluctance of human ego to believe in His Messiah? He did. Is every hearer responsible for his/her own reception of God's gospel? Yes. Do many need help understanding God's rescue mission or uncovering their own need for salvation? Yes.

Christians are, in effect, "explainers" of God's redemption plan to the world's citizens. None of us are capable to do so apart from God's Spirit in us (one of the reasons He dwells within), and all of us are capable when we follow His lead. None of us are sufficient as God's only explainers, yet all of us have received, are receiving, and will receive the Jesus we're representing to others. No matter how new we are in faith by grace, we know God intimately better than those who have yet to believe Him. Use the words Spirit gives you and don't worry about misrepresenting Jesus...Spirit won't let you! You share His glory!

Confession: Holy Spirit, I am susceptible to going through the motions of life without a constant awareness of the spiritual awakening others need. Help me to regard no one according to the flesh but rather, by the Spirit. Remind me to ask You, "Do they know You yet?" and then follow Your lead in explaining who Jesus really is as Savior of the world.

Prayer: Father in Heaven, Your plan to redeem the world's population is remarkable and accessible through Spirit in me. I cannot save them, but I can describe how You have changed my life through faith in Jesus Christ. Glorify Yourself in me as Your vessel. Amen

Contribution by Duncan Locke

DAY 16, God Is With Us In Our Confusion

Read: Isaiah 55: 8-9; Psalm 119:105; Psalm 23, Proverbs 3:5-6; Psalm 147:5; Matthew 6:8; Philippians 4:19

In 2024, when Jayson, my husband, first brought up moving to Florida, I would be lying if I said I accepted the proposition with ease and excitement. No, instead, there was fear, uncertainty, and all the “what ifs” or “what a bout’s” entered my brain. I couldn’t just make a plan; I couldn’t manipulate my way out. I had to surrender to the process and face all the unknowns. It wasn’t easy, but I learned along the way that hard doesn’t mean bad. I would be stretched in ways I never thought. I would have to confront things that I had been stuffing for years and yet God met me along the path.

Psalm 119 reminds us that He gives us enough light to see the small step we need to take, where we currently are. God showed me that I don’t have to see the entire path before I take a step, I just have to trust the Creator of the path. He sees what I can’t see and knows what I don’t know. (Isaiah 55) A Good Shepherd keeps his sheep moving. He knows the advantage of leading the sheep to new pastures. He knows the disadvantages of the sheep staying in the same place doing the same thing day in and day out. Sometimes God is going to ask us to deal with something that takes time. It may be removing an obstacle (idol) that continually blocks you, stopping and resting, taking time to reflect, but eventually, we will keep moving along the path. God may not be asking you to move to another state, but I think he asks all of us to depend on Him and walk not according to our own understanding, but in all our ways acknowledging Him, and He will make our paths straight. (Proverbs 3:5-6) There will always be seasons of uncertainty, confusion, doubt, or lack of clarity. But in the midst of that we can have peace because we know God is sovereign over it all (Psalm 147) He knows what we need (Matthew 6:8) and has provided all that we need through Jesus (Philippians 4:19), who made a way for us to be in relationship with God. He has shown me no matter what the path looks like, whether fields of green pastures or dark rocky valleys, He is with me! (Psalm 23) I don’t want to be shaken or frightened by the storms of life, but rather have confidence in the Lord to guide me through and lead me to where He wants me to be. And I pray the same thing for you.

Confession: Lord, so often I believe I know better than you how my life should go. I not only question your plan, but in those moments, I question your very heart. I struggle to trust that you are truly loving.

Prayer: Lord we thank you that you see what we can’t. Thank you for the provision of the Holy Spirit, who guides our steps, encourages our soul, and continually points us back to you. You Lord are trustworthy. You Lord are worthy of every part of our lives, including our doubts and fears. Teach us to follow your path and guidance. Remind us daily that we are covered by the blood of Jesus, that everything we need is ready and waiting for us in Jesus Christ—love, faith, wisdom, grace, patience, discipline, joy, peace, security, and hope. Give us eyes to see and ears to hear. Thank you for the depth of your love and grace, which you lavishly pour out on us each day.

Contribution by Shuana Pierce

DAY 17, God Is With Us In Our Confusion

Read: John 11:1-36

One reality of living in a broken and fallen world is that we all experience extreme pain, loss, and mourning at times in our lives. When we lose someone or something close the mourning can be unbearably intense. This pain can be some of the most unnatural feelings our spiritual hearts endure. Experiences such as death, divorce, loss of friendships, jobs, financial struggles, shattered dreams, and sin lead us into mourning. Unfortunately, our culture and the church universal often shy away from the topic of mourning. Personally, I am guilty of bottling up emotions, pushing through the waves of pain, and believing that no one, especially Jesus, can relate to my grief and the situation I am in. However, this is not true.

In John chapter 11, Jesus shows His relatable character and tender heart. He mourns the death of one of His best friends Lazarus. Jesus, the King of Kings, and Lord of Lords (Rev. 19:16), one with the Father (John 10:30), knew that He was going to raise Lazarus at the right time, yet the death of His friend grieved His Spirit. In John 11:35 we read one of the most beautiful verses in all the Bible, “Jesus wept.” Jesus, the King of the universe, who knew He was going to see Lazarus alive again, sat down brokenhearted and cried over the passing of His friend. What a beautiful picture of the humanity and love Christ has for His brothers and sisters. He is truly a God of sorrows acquainted with our pain and grief (Isiah 53:3). Jesus completely understands and experienced our pain and mourning. Jesus expresses similar emotions; in Luke 19 when He weeps over Jerusalem and in Matthew 26 in the garden in the face of His sufferings and death. Jesus models for us how to navigate mourning through lament.

Pastor and author Mark Vroegop defines lament as, “A prayer in pain that leads to trust.” At its core lament is going to God, sharing our emotions, making requests, and choosing to trust God. Look at Jesus’ model; in every situation Jesus goes to God, even in the face of death. Second, He vulnerably expresses His emotions to His Father and others. Third, He makes bold requests. For example, in the garden Jesus asked if the cup could pass from Him. Finally, Jesus chooses to trust God. He trusted God’s timing with Lazarus and He trusted God with His life on the day of His crucifixion. As we mourn throughout our lives, we can rest knowing that Jesus is with us. He understands and relates. Lamenting is how we Biblically heal from the pain of mourning.

Confession: God, I admit I often do not run to you first in my mourning. I tend to hide my pain and rely on my own strength try to push through overwhelming emotions. I often do not trust in your tender loving character or believe that you understand what I am going through. In my pain I struggle to believe that you are still good to me and with me.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for your loving and tender heart. Thank you for understanding my pain and drawing near to me when I am brokenhearted. Thank you for modeling lament and giving us a way to navigate mourning. Teach me to lament. Give me the strength and courage to run to you with my pain and emotions. Help me to see more of your true character and to trust that you are good, you have a plan for me, and that you are working all things out for Your glory. Holy Spirit heal my pain and allow this season of mourning to draw me into a more intimate relationship with You. Amen.

Contribution by Ryan Klug

DAY 18, God Is With Us When We Sin

Read: Psalm 103:1-14

When we mess up, our first instinct is often to hide. Adam and Eve hid in the garden after they sin. We follow their example as we feel imperfection between us and God. We think of our mistakes (the hurtful words, the selfish choices, the things we should have done) as a stain that makes us unfit for His presence. We convince ourselves that God must be disappointed, angry, or even distant.

However, this could not be further from the truth! This is not the picture of God presented in Psalm 103. The Psalmist doesn't begin with a clean slate; he starts by blessing the God "who forgives all your iniquity" (v. 3). Forgiveness isn't a post-script to a holy life. It is not earned by our merit. It is part of God's character! Notice the proximity of God in this passage. He is "slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love" (v. 8). He is the one who chooses not to deal with us according to our sins (v. 10). He doesn't wait for us to clean ourselves up. Instead, He draws near and acts as a compassionate Father (v. 13), remembering that we are weak and "dust" (v. 14).

Our sin, when acknowledged, is not a dead-end. It can be the very path that leads us closer to Him. When we come to the end of our ability to fix things and turn to him, we encounter the boundless love described in verse 12, "as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us." That space, east from west, is an immeasurable distance, illustrating a forgiveness that is total and complete.

God desires our repentance not as a punishment, but to pour out His love and forgiveness. The instant we turn, we find not a judge waiting to condemn, but a Father waiting to forgive and embrace. In our sin, we are not driven away; we are invited to run back into His perfect, loving presence. In our sin, we find our need for Him and a new understanding of His love.

Confession: I struggle with the shame that follows sin. Instead of immediately running to you for forgiveness, I often spend time trying to justify my actions or wallowing in immense guilt. In doing this I push away from you. I forget that your forgiveness is already offered. That you are not standing with a clipboard waiting to mark my failure, but with open arms waiting to forgive me and comfort me. I need to be quicker to confess and trust in your absolute, removing power of mercy.

Prayer: Lord, you are merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love. I praise you for the gift of forgiveness. Thank you that even when I fail, you do not deal with me according to my sins, but according to your great compassion. Thank you for your promise to remove my transgressions from me, as far as the east is from the west.

I confess the times I have hidden from you in my guilt, forgetting that you are closer than my deepest shame. I repent of my sin (name specific struggle or sin here) and ask for your loving forgiveness. Draw me closer to you right now and help me to rest in the truth that you remember my weakness and still love me completely. In your loving name I pray, Amen.

Contribution by Jeremiah Pinnegar

DAY 19, God Is With Us In Our Shame

Read: Genesis 3, Isaiah 53, and Hebrews 10:1-23

As a kid, I remember singing a song on the radio knowing it had a curse word. My mother overheard it. I immediately had this gut-wrenching feeling, shame. My identity as her good son seemingly tampered. My response, “I didn’t know!” I changed the song quickly.

Jon Bloom describes biblical shame as “a potent combination of failure and pride,” a consequence of sin. Where guilt is legally based, shame is the relational impact of sin with God and corresponding self-identity. My story may seem like a silly example, but when (not if) we fall short (Rom 3:23), our natural tendency is to do the same thing as Adam and Eve, no matter the apparent size of the sin.

In Genesis 3, Adam and Eve were deceived and in pride ate the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil; enter sin, guilt, shame, and death. Ashamed of their disobedience and nakedness, they hid and covered themselves with fig leaves. Once in perfect union, they were now exposed before a Holy God but were too proud to confess. Maybe you can relate to this, something as seemingly innocent as not spending enough quiet time with God, or living differently at church than at school or work, possibly even a wrong committed against you? How about a habitual sin that easily entangles you and no one knows? We may attempt to pay for guilt with good works, or cover the shame with distractions, even retreating further into the sin that produced shame. None of these removes the shame nor repairs our relationship with God and impaired self-identity. So, how is God with us in these moments? “But God,” to steal a line from Paul, called Adam and Eve out of hiding to confess their sin before Him. Payment was made for their guilt by the first blood sacrifice of an animal, using the skins to cover the shame of their nakedness. They were removed from the garden, but promised a messiah, a better covering. Isaiah prophesied that the coming Messiah would take on the sins of the world as the eternal atoning sacrifice (Is 53:5). Jesus, Immanuel, fulfilled this, conquering sin by humbling himself to the point of death on a cross, he despised the shame (Phil 2:8, Heb 12:2). He was abandoned by God so that we would not be (Matt. 27:46). His blood the legal guilt payment for our sin and His perfect union with God our covering. By faith, in Christ alone, our shame is removed (Rom. 10:11). We have been given a new identity, built on His actions not ours (2 Cor. 5). In him we are made pure and holy, righteous in God’s sight. In him we return to the garden where we have been named, given purpose, and where God chooses to walk with us.

Confession: Father, I confess that I often hide in shame when I sin instead of turning to you for forgiveness and a brother/sister in Christ for healing. In pride, I try to excuse my actions or cover it up by running to other sources to find identity. I forget the shame Christ paid for and the new identity I have in him, even when I fail.

Pray: Thank you for the gift of Christ who was made sin and despised the shame on my behalf. Thank you for being a God who does not hide your face from me in my sin but calls me out of darkness and welcomes me as a son/daughter because of Christ. Help me lay down my shame and pride today, humbly confessing sin because my identity is rooted in Christ alone by His finished work on the cross. I can cry out to you, Abba father, only by the name of Jesus. Amen

Contribution by Ben Dafoe

DAY 20, God Is With Us When Rejected

Read: Isaiah 43:1, 1 Peter 2:9, Psalm 100:3, and 1 Samuel 12:22

Worldly rejection comes in many forms and levels of intensity. It usually is totally unexpected, and can hurt deeply. It may be real (has already happened), like when someone you have loved for many years says the relationship is over and they are moving on. It may come from a group of people when they learn something about your beliefs, or your position on a topic, your political viewpoints, or even the sports team you like. It may come from not being selected for a promotion at work, a team in sports, or a game. It may be perceived (we think we will be rejected if we do this or that). What you do with the rejection can have a profound negative effect on you mentally, physically, and spiritually.

We have all experienced rejection to some extent. One example for me was that I delayed fully accepting and following Jesus because I feared the perceived rejection of the people around me. Would they still want to be friends? Would they judge me differently and so on? You see how my delayed commitment to the Lord could have had permanent consequences for my spiritual eternity but God is good, and God is persistent!

Even Jesus Christ was rejected. Many today still rejected him. Jesus knew Peter would deny him three times before the rooster crowed, He knew the disciples would scatter at His crucifixion, and He knew mankind would reject Him. Still, He provided a path of reconciliation in His Gospel.

Jesus, Son of God, fully God and fully man, knowing He would be rejected, came to the world as a baby born of a virgin, lived a perfectly sin free life, and died on the cross to purchase eternal life and acceptance for you and I. When we believe in Him we are accepted. Despite the rejection of others, we are valued and loved by Him.

As difficult as it is to realize when we are in the midst of dealing with worldly rejection, worldly rejection is truly temporary and not worthy of the pain it causes to hold on to it.

Confession: Father God, I confess that we are prone to hold on to rejection to the point that it becomes an idol. We can dwell in our rejection and the associated pain as if it defines us even as we know it does not.

Prayer: Father, I pray that if we have not already accepted Jesus as our Lord and Savior, we will do so now. Thank You for Your persistence in breaking through my stubbornness and for the path to redemption You provide to us. You have told us so many times and ways that, in You, we are not rejected. You will not reject Your children. Help us to discern between perceived and real rejection and to forgive those who have rejected us just as Jesus forgave those who rejected Him. Help us live in the fullness You desire for us.

Contribution by Terry Gable

DAY 21, God Is With Us When We Envy

Read: Isaiah 26:3

I've been there... pretty frequently, actually. I wouldn't necessarily say it's trying to keep up with the Joneses, but something different. Envy goes by many names—you may know it as bitterness, coveting, desiring, or resentment. For me, it most often appears as jealousy, and it shows up in many ways: being jealous of friends who make double your salary, the family in your small group who seem to “have it all together,” or the co-worker who got the promotion you believed should have been yours. It can look like driving a 20-year-old car that constantly needs repairs while your brother drives a brand-new one paid in cash, or the quiet ache of a working mom who longs to stay home, or a stay-at-home mom who feels like she's failing while others make it look effortless. The point is, we all face it daily.

Envy has been around since the beginning. Adam and Eve desired knowledge from the tree, Cain was envious of Abel and killed him, Joseph's brothers sold him into slavery out of envy, Saul envied David, and David coveted Bathsheba. In the New Testament, the Pharisees, the Prodigal Son, the Jews' treatment of Paul in Acts 17 and 18, all display envy.

So, how do we deal with this?

1. First, we name the sin in our heart. We must give it a name. “Lord, I am envious of this..” Or, “Lord, I am jealous of that.” “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive...” (1 John 1:9)
2. Repent. We must turn our hearts toward Christ. We can't just name it and be done with it. “Create in me a clean heart, O God...” (Psalm 51:10)
3. Remember your worth is received, not achieved. “You are all one in Christ Jesus.” (Galatians 3:28)
4. Practice Gratitude. Gratitude starves envy by refocusing the heart. “Give thanks in all circumstances...” (1 Thessalonians 5:18)
5. Rejoice In Others' Success. Pray blessings and favor over those you are envious of. “Rejoice with those who rejoice.” (Romans 12:15)
6. Lastly, replace comparison with calling. “Comparison is the thief of joy.”- Theodore Roosevelt. “For we are God's handiwork...” (Ephesians 2:10)

God does not withdraw from us when envy creeps in, He meets us there. When we turn our eyes from comparison to Christ, we find peace, trusting that His presence is constant, His timing is good, and His grace is enough.

Confession: Lord, I often find myself longing for what others have, inversely despising what you have given me. I think that life would be more rewarding, or at least easier, if I only had what someone else has. A disagreeable, competitive spirit is prone to rise up in me.

Prayer: Lord, forgive me of my envy, and create in me a clean heart. Help me to live out of grace and have the confidence that You are enough, in all circumstances. Amen.”

Contribution by Andrew Lanier

A digital copy of this
devotional can be found
on the Gathering Church App

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