

Day 1: The Instructions We Live By

Reading: Matthew 6:9-13 -- The passage where Jesus teaches his disciples to pray, including the petition that God's kingdom would come and his will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Every day, unseen forces shape the way we live. Culture, coworkers, social media, and personal ambition quietly hand us a set of instructions, and most of us follow them without ever pausing to ask whether they are leading us somewhere worth going. The disciples came to Jesus with a simple request -- teach us to pray -- and his answer reoriented everything. Before asking for daily bread or forgiveness, Jesus modeled a posture of surrender to God's agenda over our own. The prayer is not a ritual to recite. It is a declaration of allegiance. Today, consider the instructions you are actually living by. Are they God's, or did someone else hand them to you without you noticing?

Reflection Questions:

- What assumptions about success, purpose, or fulfillment have you absorbed from your surroundings without examining them?
- In what area of your life have you been following a script you never consciously chose?

Practical Application: Spend five minutes writing down the top three priorities that currently drive your daily decisions. Then ask honestly whether those priorities reflect God's kingdom or your own.

Day 2: Whose Kingdom Are You Building?

Reading: Matthew 19:16-26 -- The account of the rich young ruler who asks Jesus about eternal life, and Jesus' response about wealth, the heart, and the difficulty of entering God's kingdom when earthly possessions hold first place.

The rich young ruler was not a villain. He was sincere, morally serious, and genuinely searching. His problem was not his wealth -- it was his allegiance. Jesus did not issue the same command to every wealthy person in Scripture, because the command was never really about money. It was about kingdom loyalty. Jesus put his finger on the one thing this man was unwilling to surrender, and that one thing revealed where his true kingdom lived. We are all natural-born kingdom builders. We accumulate, achieve, and protect. None of that is inherently wrong, but we must regularly ask the honest question: am I more focused on advancing my kingdom or his?

Reflection Questions:

- What is the one thing Jesus would likely put his finger on in your life right now?
- How does your use of time, money, and energy reflect your actual kingdom priorities?

Practical Application: Identify one area where you are holding tightly to your own plans or possessions. Write a brief, honest prayer surrendering that specific thing to God today.

Day 3: Take Up Your Cross and Trade Up

Reading: Matthew 16:21-26 -- The moment after Peter's great confession, when Jesus explains that he must suffer and die, Peter rebukes him, Jesus responds sharply, and then calls his followers to take up their cross and lose their life in order to find it.

Peter had just gotten the greatest answer right -- Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God. Moments later, he was trying to talk Jesus out of the very plan that would make that confession matter. It is easy to want the kingdom of God as long as it aligns with the kingdom we already had in mind. But Jesus makes it plain: the path to finding your life runs directly through losing it. This sounds like loss until you understand what is being offered in return. Jesus endured the cross, Scripture tells us, for the joy set before him. He was not asking Peter to trade something valuable for nothing. He was asking him to trade sand for treasure.

Reflection Questions:

- Where in your life are you resisting God's direction because it conflicts with a plan you have already built?
- What would it look like practically to take up your cross in your current season of life?

Practical Application: Memorize Matthew 16:25 in your preferred translation. Recite it each morning this week as a declaration of intentional surrender before the day begins pulling you in its own direction.

Day 4: The Sandcastle Problem

Reading: Matthew 6:25-34 -- Jesus' teaching about anxiety, the care God shows for creation, and the call to seek his kingdom and righteousness first, trusting that everything else will follow.

Every kingdom built by human hands eventually meets the tide. History is filled with empires that rose with great ambition and fell without warning. We know this, and yet we keep piling up sand, reinforcing walls, rallying ourselves and each other to build higher and stronger. Jesus does not call us to stop planning or stop working. He calls us to reorder what we are working toward. Matthew 6:33 carries one of the most clarifying promises in all of Scripture -- seek his kingdom first, and provision follows. The issue is not whether God can take care of you. The issue is whether you trust him enough to stop white-knuckling the things you were never meant to carry alone.

Reflection Questions:

- What are you currently gripping so tightly that you cannot receive what God may be trying to place in your hands?
- In what area of your life does anxiety reveal a deeper struggle to trust God's provision?

Practical Application: Practice what the sermon called "open hands." Take one specific worry you are carrying today and physically open your hands as you pray, releasing that concern to God as a tangible act of trust.

Day 5: Hidden Treasure and the Great Exchange

Reading: Matthew 13:44-46 -- Jesus' twin parables of the hidden treasure and the pearl of great value, in which individuals who discover something of surpassing worth joyfully sell everything they have in order to obtain it.

The man who finds treasure in the field does not experience selling his possessions as devastating loss. He sells everything in joy, because he has already seen what he is getting. The sacrifice looks extreme from the outside and feels like nothing from the inside, because the value of what he is gaining dwarfs the value of what he is releasing. This is the heart of what Jesus is inviting us into. God's kingdom is not a consolation prize for people who could not make their own plans work. It is the treasure that makes everything else pale by comparison. The question is not whether the kingdom of God is worth it. The question is whether you have seen it clearly enough to believe that it is.

Reflection Questions:

- Have you ever caught a genuine glimpse of what God's kingdom offers? How did it change the way you held your own plans?
- What would it look like for you to go "all in" on God's kingdom in your current circumstances, not someday, but now?

Practical Application: Write down one concrete step you can take this week to prioritize God's kingdom over your own -- in your schedule, your finances, your relationships, or your ambitions. Share it with one person who will follow up with you and hold you to it.