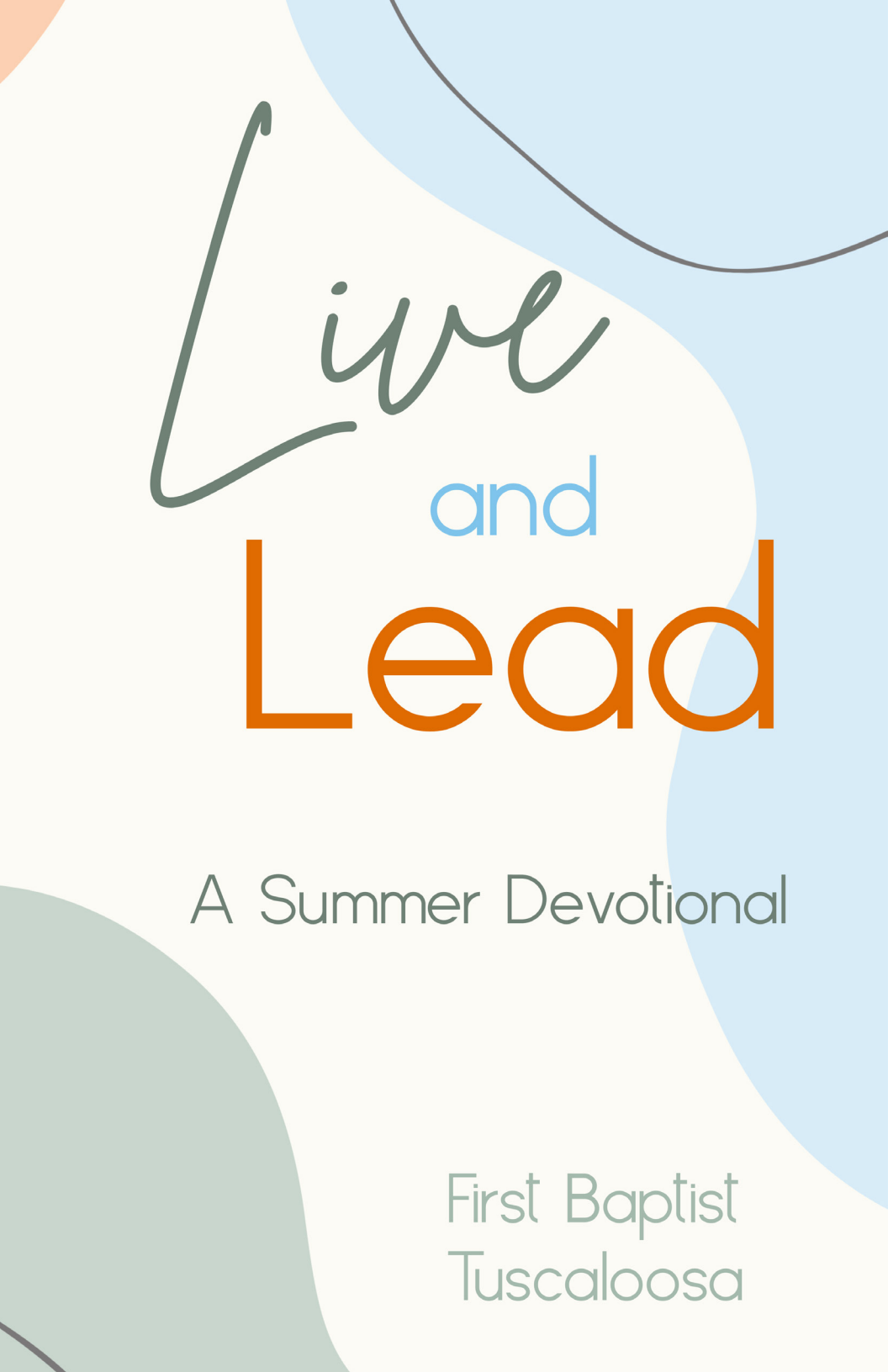




Live and Lead

A Summer Devotional

First Baptist
Tuscaloosa

Before You Begin

Our church has named eight **Measures** of a maturing believer; they are not a checklist to pass, but the areas where God is at work growing us up into Christ. Four describe how we **Live** before God; four describe how we **Lead** others toward him. This devotional walks through all eight over four weeks. Each week pairs one **Live** Measure with one **Lead** Measure, and each day takes up a single practice under that Measure.

Week 1 — Live Dependent + Lead Visibly

- **Live Dependent** — Relying on God's Word for truth, strength, and direction each day (Matthew 4:4)
- **Lead Visibly** — Modeling Christ through actions, attitudes, and words (Matthew 5:16)

Week 2 — Live Joyful + Lead Humbly

- **Live Joyful** — Choosing joy through the Spirit regardless of circumstances (Philippians 4:4)
- **Lead Humbly** — Serving others first and leading with a teachable heart (Philippians 2:3)

Week 3 — Live Connected + Lead Generously

- **Live Connected** — Building deep, accountable relationships within biblical community (Proverbs 27:17)
- **Lead Generously** — Giving time, talent, and resources to bless others and advance the mission (1 Timothy 6:18)

Week 4 — Live Sent + Lead Somebody

- **Live Sent** — Engaging people locally and globally with the gospel and calling them to follow Jesus (Matthew 28:19-20)
- **Lead Somebody** — Investing in others to help them grow in their walk with Christ (1 Corinthians 4:16-17)

Weeks 1 and 4 by Nathan Verghese
Weeks 2 and 3 by Miranda Cox

Introduction

Sanctification, the process by which God continues to save us through the Holy Spirit, is God's project from start to finish. We don't manufacture growth. God grows us. When Paul writes to the church at Philippi, he says it plainly: "I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ" (Philippians 1:6). He is the one who began it in us, and he is the one who will finish it. The progress we make in becoming like Christ is not something we generate by willpower or measure by mood. It is the slow, patient work of the Spirit, conforming us to the image of the Son. Paul can love that church the way he does because he is trusting God's work in them, not their performance.

And yet sanctification is not passive. We come alongside the Spirit. Paul says it just as plainly: "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure" (Philippians 2:12-13). Notice the difference between working for a salvation you are trying to earn and working out a salvation you have already been given. We are not laboring to win God's favor. We are living out the life he has already placed in us. God works; we work. He sets the direction and supplies the power. We walk the road.

Hold both of those together and neither one cancels the other. If God is the one doing the work, that does not make our effort pointless. It makes it possible. The same verse that commands us to work tells us why we can: it is God who works in us. So the joy and the love and the obedience that grow in the Christian life are not things we drum up. They grow because God is at work, and our part is to walk with the Spirit as he produces the fruit.

That is why these eight measures matter, and why they can also be dangerous. They are the marks of spiritual maturity our church has named, the areas where believers should be making progress. They are easy to read as a checklist: score yourself, move on, repeat next summer. Read them that way, as a test, and they will either crush you with what you are not or inflate you with what you are. Read them as signs of life, and they will do the work they were meant to do. They will show you where God is already growing fruit in your life, and where he is inviting you in.

Week 1:

Rooted in the Word, Lived in the Open
Live Dependent and Lead Visibly

DAY 1:

LIVE DEPENDENT

Spending Time in the Bible Daily

Hebrews 4:12

For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

Most of us treat the Bible like a reference book, something you consult when you need an answer and then close and shelve. Hebrews will not let us leave it there. “For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart” (Hebrews 4:12). It is alive. When you open it, it opens you. That is why a daily habit of reading matters. You are not maintaining information; you are coming under a living voice.

And that voice is not locked away for scholars. You do not need a degree or years of study to hear it. You can pick up the Bible, start reading in the Gospel of Mark, and meet the truth of who Jesus is, because Scripture is clear and accessible. God gave us his Word and the tools to understand it. It is “profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness” so that we are “complete, equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16-17), and it speaks not just to people in general but directly to you, into your actual life.

You also do not read it alone. Jesus promised the Helper, the Holy Spirit, who would “teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you” (John 14:26). So the daily call to open your Bible is not a test of your discipline or your intelligence. It is an invitation to sit under a living Word with the Spirit himself as your teacher. Come with prayer. Come on the full days and the empty ones. The Word is alive whether or not you feel it that morning.

And every day you open it, it is pointing you to one person. The whole Bible, law and prophets and gospel, weaves the story of Jesus from

beginning to end. The living and active Word leads you to the Word made flesh, the Christ promised to David, foretold by Isaiah, and born of Mary. We do not read to master a book. We read to keep meeting him. Even our coming is a gift, because the God who gave the Word is the one who opens us to receive it.

REFLECT: Do you come to the Bible expecting a living voice, or a dead reference? What would change this week if you opened your Bible expecting God to actually speak?

PRAY: *Father, thank you that your Word is living and active, and that through it you speak directly to me. By your Spirit, teach me and bring your words to my remembrance. Give me a daily hunger to open it, not to merely read or study but to meet you, and through it lead me to your Son our Savior. Amen.*

FIRST STEP: Commit to five minutes in God's Word every day this week. If you do not know where to start, open the Gospel of Mark and read until you meet Jesus.

DAY 2:

LIVE DEPENDENT

Weekly Applying a New Lesson from the Bible

James 1:22-25

But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.

James does not leave any daylight between hearing and doing. "Be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves" (James 1:22). To hear the Word and stop there is not a lighter version of obedience. James calls it self-deception. We can sit under good teaching, underline the right verses, even feel moved, and walk away unchanged, all the while believing we are fine.

He gives us a picture for it. A man looks intently at his own face in a mirror, then walks away and immediately forgets what he looks like (verses 23-24). That is what hearing without doing does to us. The Word shows us exactly who we are and what needs to change, and the moment

we close the book the image fades. Nothing holds. Set against him is “the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres” (verse 25). He does not just glance. He looks in, stays, and acts, and James says he will be blessed in his doing.

This is why applying what we read, one lesson at a time, is a mark of a life that leans on God. It is the difference between reading the Word and being formed by it. Jesus said as much at the end of the Sermon on the Mount. Two men hear the very same words. One does them and builds his house on rock; the other only hears and builds on sand (Matthew 7:24-27). The dividing line was never who heard. It was who did. You do not have to apply everything at once. One lesson actually put into practice this week will shape you more than a month of hearing that changes nothing.

And here is what keeps this from turning into one more performance to fail at. The doing is not how we earn the life; it is how the life God has already given us begins to show. The path begins with him, not with us. Christ is the one who heard the Father perfectly and did everything the Father asked, and it is his obedience, not ours, that saves us (Romans 5:19). So we do not apply the Word to make God love us. We apply it because he already does, and because his Spirit is at work in us to will and to do (Philippians 2:13). Look in, stay, and act, and trust that the God who gave the Word will be the one to grow the fruit.

REFLECT: What is one thing you have already heard from God’s Word and not yet done? What would it look like to actually do it this week, before the memory fades?

PRAY: *Father, keep me from the self-deception of hearing your Word and walking away unchanged. Help me look in and stay there, and give me grace to act on what I see. Thank you that Christ did perfectly what I do poorly, and that your Spirit is at work in me to make me more like You. Amen.*

FIRST STEP: Pick one thing from Scripture this week, a single verse or lesson, and do it. Not five things. One. Put it into practice before the week is out.

DAY 3:

LIVE DEPENDENT

Memorizing Verses to Shape My Thinking

Psalm 119:11

I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you.

The psalmist writes, “I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you.” Stored up. Tucked away ahead of time, before the moment of need. The word is not fetched from a shelf when the crisis arrives. It already lives inside him.

Think of how Jesus met temptation in the wilderness. He had fasted 40 days, he was hungry, and the tempter came at the point of his weakness. Jesus did not argue or improvise. He answered each temptation with Scripture he already knew: “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.” When the devil twisted Scripture against him, Jesus answered again with the Word, “You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.” And at the last, “You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve.” The Word was already in him, ready, before the test began.

Jesus makes an amazing case for allowing Scripture to shape us and memorizing it so that it becomes part of who we are. That is the slow, unfashionable work in front of us. Not the storing up of trivia, but the kind of stored word that has had time to settle in and shape how we think, so that when the pressure comes we are not scrambling. We are trusting in the Word of God that dwells within us.

This is what it means to live dependent. We do not generate strength in the moment of testing. We draw on the Word of God to give us strength. And the Word we store points us back to the one who is the Word made flesh. Jesus remained faithful where we fail, refused the easy path, and chose the cross for us. The verses we hide in our hearts are not quick tips for self-improvement. They are the words of the God who has already won for us in Christ, and who is now patient enough to write them into who we are.

REFLECT: Where do you tend to face temptation while running on empty, unprepared? What is one verse you would most want already stored in your heart the next time that moment comes?

PRAY: *Lord, store up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you. By your Spirit, shape my thinking until your Word becomes part of who I am. Keep me dependent on you and your Son who came to save us from our sins. Amen.*

FIRST STEP: Pick one verse this week and memorize it.

DAY 4:

LEAD VISIBLY

Using My Words to Build Others Up

James 3:3-5

If we put bits into the mouths of horses so that they obey us, we guide their whole bodies as well. Look at the ships also: though they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are guided by a very small rudder wherever the will of the pilot directs. So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great things. How great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire!

James calls the tongue a small member that makes great boasts. He reaches for three pictures to make the point. A bit turns a whole horse. A rudder steers a whole ship against strong winds. And a small fire sets a great forest ablaze. The tongue is little, but its reach is enormous. That is why our words deserve more care than we usually give them.

Proverbs, the Bible's book of practical wisdom, shows us how that fire spreads. Pointless chatter cheapens our words, so that when we finally have something worth saying it carries less weight (Proverbs 10:19). Small lies keep us hiding from the very truth that would free us (Proverbs 12:19). Boasting steals the credit that belongs to God (Proverbs 27:2) and quietly minimizes the work of Christ on the cross (Romans 3:27). And gossip is perhaps the clearest picture of the spark that sets so big a fire. "For lack of wood the fire goes out," Proverbs says, "and where there is no whisperer, quarreling ceases" (Proverbs 26:20).

Here is the uncomfortable thing. James says a person's heart is revealed in their speech. We are, in a real sense, what we say. Our words are the most visible test of what is actually going on inside us. You can hide a lot from people, but given enough time your mouth tells the truth about your heart. To lead visibly is to let people watch how you talk and find Christ there.

So Paul gives the believers a clear aim. "Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear" (Ephesians 4:29). Notice the standard. Speech that merely avoids harm is not the goal. Speech that builds and hands grace to the listener is. That kind of mouth does not come from gritting our teeth and trying harder. It comes from a heart being remade by the one who spoke us into being and speaks grace

over us still.

REFLECT: Where do your words tend to leak (chatter, small lies, boasting, or gossip)? What would your speech reveal about your heart this past week?

PRAY: *Father, you see what my words reveal about my heart. Forgive the talk that has torn down rather than built up. Have your Spirit guard over my mouth, and transform my heart that your grace and your love comes out of it. Make my speech point others towards Christ. Amen.*

FIRST STEP: Today, find someone who needs to hear an encouraging Word and take the opportunity to build them up by pointing them towards Christ.

DAY 5:

Living Consistently in Private and Public

LEAD VISIBLY

Proverbs 10:9

Whoever walks in integrity walks securely, but he who makes his ways crooked will be found out.

“Whoever walks in integrity walks securely, but he who makes his ways crooked will be found out” (Proverbs 10:9). Integrity here is a life with no hidden seams. The person walking in it has nothing to manage between the version others see and the version that’s actually there. That’s why he walks securely. There’s no double life to keep balanced, no speck in someone else’s eye he’s pointing at while a log sits in his own.

Jesus took that double life seriously. He called the Pharisees “whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead people’s bones” (Matthew 23:27-28). The outside was managed and presentable. The inside was dead. And before we use that line on anyone else, Jesus tells us where to start: “first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly” (Matthew 7:5). The order matters. We don’t get to deal with everyone else’s crooked ways while leaving our own unexamined.

But walking securely was never about arriving at perfection. Peter swore he would never deny Jesus, then denied him three times within hours while people watched, and “went out and wept bitterly” (Luke 22:62). That same man preached the gospel weeks later. Scripture is honest that we remain sinners on the way: “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves” (1 John 1:8). Paul owned what he’d done and said in the same

breath, “by the grace of God I am what I am” (1 Corinthians 15:10). Consistency in private and public is the absence of pretending, not the absence of failure.

That’s where the security in Proverbs 10:9 actually comes from. When a Christian sins and then repents, that’s not the gospel failing. It’s the gospel still working. The same Christ who saved you is the one who convicts you and calls you back. You can stop curating an outside and let him keep working on the inside, “sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ” (Philippians 1:6).

REFLECT: Where are you maintaining a gap between the version of you that others see and the version that’s actually there? What would it look like to stop pretending and walk in the light?

PRAY: *Father, you see all of me, and there’s nothing to hide. Take the log out of my own eye and sanctify me by your Spirit. Where I’ve made my ways crooked, bring me to repentance, and help me to walk in faithfulness until the day of Jesus Christ. Amen.*

FIRST STEP: Name one private inconsistency you’ve been letting slide. Confess it to God today, and tell one trusted person so it stops living in the dark.

Week 2

The Interior Posture of the Saved Heart

Live Joyful and Lead Humbly

DAY 1:

LIVE JOYFUL

Responding to Challenges with Gratitude

1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

Paul wrote these words as he visited the church that he had planted in Corinth. This was one of his stops in his second missionary journey. He had just received a report from his protege, Timothy, with encouraging news about the believers in the church at Thessalonica. You could look at Paul in the moment of writing these words, and think that it is easy to say such things when he was surrounded by believers and encouraged by letters of good news from his church plants, but you mustn't forget that also by this point, Paul had endured great suffering as well. He had been beaten, wrongfully imprisoned, and he had even witnessed friends in the faith be persecuted and killed for their faith. And yet he says: "Rejoice always." This is not naïveté. This is not pretending that suffering isn't real or all that bad. This is something else entirely. It is a gratitude that runs deeper than circumstances.

When we respond to challenges with gratitude, we are not thanking God for the problem. We are thanking him for himself. We are saying, even here, even now, even in this hard thing: God is good. He is present. He is working. That posture, that refusal to let difficulty have the last word about who God is, does something to the human heart. It loosens resentment's grip. It quiets the voice that whispers we've been forgotten or abandoned. It opens our eyes to see small mercies we would otherwise miss.

Gratitude in the hard seasons is not natural. It costs something. It requires us to look past the immediate pain to the One who neither created the pain nor abandoned us in it. It requires faith. But here is what Paul knows: that habit of seeing God's goodness even in dark circumstances is actually the will of God for you. Not the hard thing itself. Not the pain. But the gratitude. The gratitude that God was there with you through it all, that even in the darkest of night, there was still a sliver of light. That

kind of gratitude will change your perspective on every hardship you have ever been through and help you use your whole testimony for the glory of God.

REFLECT: What is a challenge you're facing right now? What is one thing you could actually be grateful for in it—not ignoring the difficulty, but looking deeper?

PRAY: *Lord, when I want to shake my fist at my circumstances, help me see your hand in them. Teach me to give thanks not for the problem, but for you being with me in the problem. Make my gratitude a witness of your faithfulness to others. Amen.*

FIRST STEP: This week, choose one hard thing you're facing. Each time you think about it, pause and name one specific thing you can thank God for—it might be his presence, his promise, a small mercy, or his past faithfulness. Practice this daily, and notice what it does to your heart.

DAY 2:

Forgiving Others Quickly

LIVE JOYFUL

Matthew 18:21-22

Then Peter came up and said to him, "Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?" Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-seven times."

Peter is asking a generous question. Seven times seems like a lot—enough to seem incredibly generous. However, Jesus' answer demolishes the math. Seventy-seven times is not a strict number to live by. Rather it is a way of saying: forgiveness is not currency to be rationed.

The parable Jesus tells shows why. The servant who is forgiven an enormous debt, one he could never have dreamt to repay in a lifetime, turns around and refuses forgiveness of a small one. The king is astounded. How is this possible? You have been forgiven so much. How can you withhold forgiveness for so little?

When we forgive quickly, we are remembering something we dare not forget, that we have been forgiven first. Our debts against God were incalculable and our sins against him relentless. And yet he forgave. Completely. Without requiring us to earn it or wait for it or prove ourselves first. He forgave while we were still sinning against him.

To forgive others quickly is to imitate that mercy. It is to say: I am not the final authority on what you owe me. I am not keeping score. My life has been completely transformed by forgiveness, and I will not be the one to withhold it from you. That doesn't mean that it doesn't cost something. It requires us to release the right to stay angry, to demand repayment, to hold it over someone's head, but we must remember that it costs us far less to forgive others than it cost Jesus Christ to forgive each and every one of us on the cross.

REFLECT: Who is someone you've been slow to forgive? What would it cost you to forgive them quickly?

PRAY: *Jesus, you forgave me before I asked, while I was still failing you. Give me a heart like yours. Help me forgive quickly, without scorekeeping. Help me offer to others the mercy that I have received. Amen.*

FIRST STEP: If there is someone you need to forgive, send them a simple message this week—a text, an email, a conversation. Don't make it complicated. Just say: "I've been holding onto some hurt, and I don't want to anymore. I forgive you."

DAY 3: **Demonstrating the Joy of Christ**

LIVE JOYFUL

John 15:11

These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.

Before Jesus spoke the words in this verse, he taught his followers how to abide in him. He taught them that he is vine and that we are the branches. Without him, we can bear no fruit. One of those fruits is joy. Jesus is not talking about happiness, i.e. the feeling that comes from things going well or circumstances being pleasant. He is talking about joy, which is something deeper and stranger. Joy is the peace and gladness that remains even when circumstances are hard. It is not dependent on what is happening to you. It is dependent on who you belong to. It is dependent on your reliance on the true vine, Jesus Christ.

When Jesus says "my joy may be in you," he means it literally. The joy that sustained him through his earthly ministry as he faced rejection, hostility, the weight of human sin, and finally the cross itself, that same joy is available to you. It is not something you generate. It is something you

receive. Jesus would many times during his earthly ministry go off alone to seek his Father God's presence and guidance. His joy through every hardship came from knowing and relying solely on his Father. We should learn from this.

A person who demonstrates the joy of Christ stands out. In a world that is anxious and exhausted and grim, joy reads as audacious. It reads as a testimony about who God truly is. When you remain genuinely glad, not because life is easy but because Christ is real and present and has conquered death itself, you are telling a true story with your whole life. You are saying: Christ is enough. He is good. Even here, even now, he has me in his hands.

REFLECT: When do you feel the deep gladness that has nothing to do with circumstances going your way? Where do you notice joy in others? What habits have helped that joy remain in your heart or others hearts despite yours or their circumstances?

PRAY: *Jesus, fill me with your joy. Not a shallow happiness, but the deep gladness that comes from seeking your face and knowing you're with me. Let my joy be a testimony to your goodness, even in hard seasons. Amen.*

FIRST STEP: This week, notice one moment where you feel genuine joy—not because everything is easy, but because you're aware of God's presence and goodness and faithfulness. Sit in that moment. Don't rush past it. And then, let someone see it. Let your face show it. Let your words and actions show them who your God truly is.

DAY 4: **Putting the Needs of Others Before My Own**

LEAD HUMBLY

Philippians 2:5-8

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

Paul is not asking you to copy Christ's exterior life. You are not God incarnate; you cannot die for the sins of the world. He is asking you to copy Christ's interior posture. The mindset. The way he thought about

power and position and his own needs.

Christ had the right to anything. He was God. And the one thing he was most concerned to do was lay down his rights. He did not grasp. He did not hoard. He did not say “I deserve this” or “I have earned this” or “my needs matter more than yours.” He made himself nothing. He took a servant’s position. He put your needs, your redemption, your healing, your eternity, before his own comfort and safety and life.

When you put others’ needs before your own, you are not being taken advantage of. You are being shaped and formed into the image of Christ. You are learning to think the way he thinks, not from weakness, but from the kind of strength that does not need to assert itself. You are practicing the economy of the kingdom, where the last become first, where losing your life is how you find it, where serving is what the strong do.

This habit of putting others’ needs before your own very well could cost you something. It could cost you convenience. It could cost you a position at work that you thought you wanted or needed. It could cost you friends or the approval of others. But in the end, you will gain so much joy from serving others and a deeper understanding of your Savior Jesus Christ.

REFLECT: What need in someone else’s life are you aware of right now? How could you put that need before your own comfort, time, or preference?

PRAY: *Jesus, you gave up everything so I could be saved. Teach me to think like you, to see the needs of others like you. Help me lay down my rights so others can know your love. Amen.*

FIRST STEP: Identify one way you can put someone else’s needs before your own this week. It could be a friend, family member, coworker, neighbor. It doesn’t have to be dramatic. It might be as simple as dropping something you wanted to do so you can listen to someone, or serving in a way that costs you something. Notice what it does to your heart.

DAY 5: **Welcoming Feedback and Correction**

LEAD HUMBLY

Proverbs 9:8-9

Do not reprove a scoffer, or he will hate you; reprove a wise man, and he will love you. Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be still wiser; teach a righteous man, and he will increase in learning.

The contrast Proverbs draws is striking: the wise person listens and learns; the fool is sure of themselves. The mocker rejects correction and hates you for offering it; the wise person receives correction and loves you for it. This runs against everything our culture teaches. We are taught to be confident in ourselves, to never doubt, to project certainty. To admit we got something wrong or could improve feels like weakness. But Proverbs knows something different: the deepest confidence is not in yourself. It is in being willing to learn from God and others. It is knowing that you are not the final authority on truth, that others see things you don't see, that correction is a gift.

Welcoming feedback and correction is actually an act of humility, which is not the opposite of strength but the foundation of it. A person who cannot hear criticism cannot grow. A person who cannot hear criticism cannot be trusted. And a person who cannot hear criticism cuts themselves off from the very thing that makes them more fully human, the willingness to be shaped and refined, to stand corrected and become better because of it.

When you welcome feedback, you are saying: I trust God more than I trust my own perception. I believe he speaks through others. I am willing to be wrong. I am willing to change.

REFLECT: Who is someone whose feedback you trust? Is there something they've been trying to tell you that you've been resisting? What would it look like to actually listen?

PRAY: *Lord, protect me from the pride that closes me off from correction. Help me hear what I need to hear, even when it's hard. Make me someone who can be trusted because I am willing to learn and be shaped. Amen.*

FIRST STEP: This week, ask someone you trust: "Is there something you've noticed about my life or my actions that you think I could work on?" Then listen without defending yourself. Thank them. And reflect on how you can implement what you have learned into your life.

DAY 6:

LEAD HUMBLY

Praying Before Decisions or Direction

Luke 6:12-13

In these days he went out to the mountain to pray, and all night he continued in prayer to God. And when day came, he called his disciples and chose from them twelve, whom he named apostles.

Jesus had authority. He had power. He knew what needed to happen. He could have made this decision in his sleep. And yet the night before choosing his twelve disciples, the men who would become the foundation of his church, he spent the whole night in prayer. Not praying for strength or for approval. Praying. Listening. Seeking direction. Staying with his Father until he understood what his Father wanted.

This is the pattern: prayer before direction. Not after you've already decided and you're looking for confirmation. But before. In the silence. In the not-knowing. In the place where you have to admit you don't have all the answers.

Praying before decisions is an act of trust. It is saying: I cannot see what you see. I don't know what will come of this. I need wisdom I don't possess. I need you. When you pray before major decisions, you are positioning yourself as someone who needs God's direction. You are refusing to act from your own understanding alone. You are reminding yourself that you cannot do anything alone. You are creating space for the Spirit to speak.

This does not mean God always gives you a feeling or a clear yes. Sometimes he gives you peace. Sometimes he gives you the freedom to choose between good options. Sometimes he gives you wisdom as you wait. But he always meets you in prayer. Always.

REFLECT: What decision are you facing right now? Have you brought it to prayer, or have you already decided and are looking for God to bless what you want?

PRAY: *Jesus, you prayed before your most important decisions. Help me slow down and pray before mine. Keep me from rushing ahead of your direction. Give me the wisdom I need and the patience to wait for it. Amen.*

FIRST STEP: Choose one decision you're facing whether it is big or small. Spend time praying about it this week before you decide. Bring it to God. Listen. Ask for wisdom. Write down what you sense him saying. Then act from that place.

Week 3

Community Shaped by Mutual Giving

Live Connected and Lead Generously

LIVE CONNECTED

DAY 1:

Participating in a Small Group or Discipleship Setting

Hebrews 10:24-25

And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

The writer of Hebrews is warning against isolation. Some believers were stopping gathering together, probably because it was becoming dangerous in their context to meet. And the writer says: don't do it. Don't give up on gathering. Don't underestimate what happens when you meet together in a regular, intentional way. Don't underestimate how important it is to your spiritual growth to be surrounded by Biblical community.

When you participate in a small group or discipleship setting, whether it's a Bible study, a prayer group, or a small group of people committed to knowing Jesus better, something happens that cannot happen in isolation. You watch how others follow Jesus. You see faith lived out in someone else's marriage, someone else's doubt, someone else's loss. You get to be spurred on. You get to spur others on. You become a people instead of a person.

This is not optional for those who want to grow. The Spirit speaks through the body. Wisdom comes through counsel. Encouragement lands differently when it comes from someone who knows you and loves you. God intended for us to be in community with each other just as he is in community in the Trinity. We need each other because the path to life is narrow. We all need that constant companionship and encouragement in the faith by people who are walking down the same path as us.

Discipleship is not a solitary sport. It is participation in a community. It requires you to show up regularly, to be known, to let others see your struggles and your growth and your questions. It costs you privacy and comfort and time. But it makes you more human. It shapes you more into the image of Christ.

REFLECT: Are you part of a regular small group or discipleship setting? If not, what is keeping you from it? If so, how is it shaping you?

PRAY: *Lord, help me see community not as optional but as essential. Connect me with people I can grow with, people I can learn from, people I can love and be loved by. Make me faithful to show up. Amen.*

FIRST STEP: If you're not in a small group or discipleship setting, identify one this week and commit to trying it. Attend at least once. If you're already in one, make a commitment to be consistently present, encouraging, and vulnerable this month. Let the people there know they matter to you, and let them know ways in which they can pray and help you in your walk with Christ.

LIVE CONNECTED

DAY 2:

Letting Others Speak Truth and Correction Into My Life

Galatians 6:1-2

Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.

The Apostle Paul is talking about correction in these verses. When someone you love who is a believer is caught up in something that is pulling them away from Jesus, God instructs us to help restore them gently, meaning to help show them where their sin has led them and remind them of the Gospel through your words and loving action towards them. This is not gossip. This is not judgment. This is the work of the Spirit through the body of Christ. This is what it looks like to care more about someone's freedom from sin than about your comfort.

But notice who can do this. Paul says "you who are spiritual." Only someone who is aware of their own capacity for the very same sin can do this. Only humility makes it possible. Only someone who has been corrected themselves, who knows what it is like to be stuck in sin and need someone else to speak truth into their life. Only that person can offer correction gently instead of harshly.

On the other side of it, letting others speak truth and correction into your own life is one of the hardest spiritual practices there is. It requires you to let people see you. To admit you're stuck. To not defend yourself

when someone says something that lands uncomfortably and convicts you. It requires you to believe they might be right, even when it stings. It requires humility.

But when you listen, that correction, it frees you. When someone you trust can tell you the truth about what they're seeing in you, when you can actually hear it instead of arguing or minimizing, you are given the gift of being known and still loved. That is the Gospel lived out in the body of Christ, and that is what makes transformation possible.

REFLECT: Is there someone who knows you well enough to speak truth into your life? Have you made space for that? Is there a fellow believer whom you love that you see going down the wrong path? How can you restore them gently to the narrow path?

PRAY: *Lord, give me courage to be known. Help me hear correction from people who love me. And teach me how to speak gently into others' lives when I see them caught in sin. Make me a trusted voice of truth in the lives of the people around me. Amen.*

FIRST STEP: Identify one person whose voice you trust. Invite them to speak truth to you. Tell them specifically: "If you notice me getting off track, I want you to tell me. I trust you and I want you to hold me accountable for my actions." Then actually listen when they do.

DAY 3:

Giving Financially Through the Church

LEAD GENEROUSLY

2 Corinthians 9:6-8

The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work.

Paul is talking about the principle of sowing and reaping: what you invest in, what you tend to, what you care for, that is what grows in your life. Paul is not saying that if you give money, you will get more money back. That is a false prosperity gospel, and it is a misreading of this text. A person who sows sparingly into the kingdom of God sows sparsely into their own spiritual growth. A person who sows generously reaps

generously from their own deepened faith, their own gratitude, and their own joy.

Giving financially through the church is an act of faith. It is saying that God is my source of security, not money. I trust him more than I trust my bank account. I am willing to support the work he is doing in this community. I am a part of something bigger than my own comfort. This will challenge you. Money is vital for living our lives on this earth, but because of that, it can easily and quickly become an idol in our lives. Giving it away is hard. You will have to answer the question: do I actually believe God provides? Or do I believe my security comes from my savings account? That question is not trivial. Your answer shows you who you worship.

But notice what Paul says about the result of giving cheerfully: God is able to bless you abundantly. Not because you gave, as if God owes you something. But because you have positioned yourself in the flow of God's generosity. Through giving to the church and giving to others who need it more than you do, you gain so much joy. You become more rich with God's abundant blessings, not poorer. Your joy and abundance multiplies like the fish and loaves Jesus fed to the five thousand.

REFLECT: What do you actually believe about money? Do you actually believe that God will provide every one of your needs? Does your giving through the church reflect that belief?

PRAY: *Father, you have given me everything I have. Help me hold it loosely. Teach me to give generously, not from guilt, but from gladness. Make me someone who trusts you with my security. Amen.*

FIRST STEP: If you're not giving financially through the church, start this month. Even if it's small. Let it be a regular practice. And ask God to change your heart about money as you do.

DAY 4: **Volunteering My Time to Serve**

LEAD GENEROUSLY

1 Peter 4:10

As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace.

The Apostle Peter is talking about gifts or the particular talents and capacities God has given you. The thing you're good at. The thing that

comes naturally. The thing that, when you're doing it, you feel most yourself. Peter says: that is not for you alone. That gift is a form of God's grace, and grace exists to be given away.

When you volunteer your time to serve, you are saying: what I have is not mine. It is on loan from God, and I am going to spend it on others. You might volunteer at church, at a shelter, at a food bank, in a youth program, in a friend's life. The venue matters less than the surrender. You are saying: I could use this time for myself, but I choose to use it for others.

This will cost you. It will cost you free time and energy. But it will also change you. It will remind you that you are part of a body, that your gifts are not just for your own flourishing, that there is joy that comes from giving yourself away. It will also connect with so many amazing people who are stewarding their gifts right beside you.

Volunteering is not heroic. It is simply what stewards do. They manage what belongs to someone else and give account for how they've used it. God gave you gifts. Now it is your job to steward them well. The question is: did you spend them on yourself, or did you multiply them by giving them away?

REFLECT: What gift has God given you? How are you stewarding it? Where could you volunteer that gift in service of others?

PRAY: *Lord, show me the gifts you've given me. Help me see them as yours to use through me for others. Give me courage to serve, even when I'm tired, even when I get nothing back but the joy of having given of myself. Amen.*

FIRST STEP: Identify one way you can volunteer your time this month. It might be an hour a week. It might be a one-time project. Start small. But start. And notice what happens in your heart when you serve.

Week 4

Carrying the Gospel, Multiplying Disciples

Live Sent and Lead Somebody

DAY 1:

LIVE SENT

Praying for People Who Don't Know Christ

1 Timothy 2:1-4

First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

When Paul tells Timothy how the church ought to live, he starts with prayer. “First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people” (1 Timothy 2:1). Not for some people. For all people. And the reason follows close behind: God “desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Timothy 2:4). Before we ever speak a word to someone who doesn’t know Christ, we can speak to God about them. This is where evangelism begins.

Prayer is both a gift and a command. When we pray, we align our hearts with God’s will, we express our dependence on him, and we grow in intimacy with our Creator. So consider your own prayer life honestly. Is it consistent or sporadic? Focused or distracted? When you bring people before the Lord, do you remember to bring the ones who are far from him? Praying for those who don’t know Christ asks something of us. It asks for boldness to intercede for others and faith to trust in his timing and answers.

Notice what the passage tells us about God himself. He is “God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved.” When we pray for someone who doesn’t know Christ, we are not trying to talk God into caring about them. He already does. We are joining a desire that is already his. That should steady us. The work of their salvation does not rest on the strength of our words or the cleverness of our approach. It rests on the God who gave himself as a ransom for all (1 Timothy 2:6). Our part is to ask, with sincerity and dependence on him, and to keep asking.

So pray for them by name. Pray with persistence, the way Jesus taught his disciples to pray and not lose heart. Then watch how praying for someone changes the way you see them, and how it readies your own heart to one day open your mouth. Evangelism that begins on our knees begins in the right place, because it begins with the God who has the power to save.

REFLECT: Who is one person in your life who does not know Christ? What would it look like to carry their name to God consistently this week, before you ever say a word to them?

PRAY: *Father, you are our Savior, and you provide a way for all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. Teach me to pray with sincerity and dependence on you. Give me boldness to intercede for those who are far from you, and faith to trust your timing. Thank you that Christ gave himself as a ransom for all. In his Name, Amen.*

FIRST STEP: Write down the names of three people who don't know Christ. Pray for each of them, by name, every day this week.

DAY 2:

Sharing the Gospel in Daily Relationships

LIVE SENT

1 Peter 3:15

...But in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect.

Picture a man walking into a nearly empty Chick-fil-A. An employee greets him, and he answers loudly, "God is so good." He quotes Scripture rapidly, with almost no explanation, and he does it at people rather than with them. Then he corners two high school boys who have nowhere to go and launches into a speech. For the whole time, they never get another chance to speak. He talks. They endure. What was missing there was not boldness, Scripture knowledge, or sincerity. What was missing was listening. He had zeal and truth on his lips, but no awareness of the people right in front of him. (This was a real encounter witnessed by a friend of mine.)

Peter gives us a different picture. "In your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect" (1 Peter 3:15). Notice the shape of it. The witness happens when someone

asks. That means our daily relationships have to be the kind where people feel free to ask, and where we have stayed present long enough to be there when they do. Wisdom requires awareness. Grace requires restraint. Gentleness and respect are not the soft edges of evangelism. They provide an opportunity to share the reason for our hope with the person standing in front of us.

So the next step in sharing the gospel is usually smaller than we think. It is staying present instead of changing the subject when a conversation turns heavy. It is asking a question instead of immediately giving an answer. It is offering to pray, or sharing a piece of your own story. Sometimes you are not even saying the name of Jesus yet, but it is still always about him. “That sounds really heavy. Do you want to talk about it?” “Can I pray for you?” These are faithful moments. Not every conversation is the harvest and that takes the pressure off. Our job is to be present, curious, and committed, and to keep honoring Christ as Lord in our hearts. God is already at work before we ever open our mouths.

That is good news for ordinary witness in ordinary conversations. You do not have to manufacture a moment or say everything at once. The same Christ who suffered to bring us to God is the hope that lives in us, and he is the one who gives the growth. We get to be faithful. He gets to save.

REFLECT: Where in your daily relationships have you been talking at people rather than with them? Who is someone you could simply be more present with this week, listening long enough that they might one day ask you about your hope?

PRAY: *Lord, help me honor you as holy in my heart today. Make me present, curious, and committed with the people you have placed in front of me. Give me gentleness and respect, and the readiness to give a reason for the hope I have in you. Guide your Spirit to reveal to me opportunities to share the good news of Jesus Christ. Amen.*

FIRST STEP: Pick one person you see regularly. This week, listen to what they have to say and respond with the truth of the gospel and the hope that is in you.

DAY 3:

LIVE SENT

Supporting and Participating in Missions

Romans 10:13-15

For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!”

Paul walks the chain backwards. “For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” But how will they call on someone they have never believed in? And how will they believe in someone they have never heard of? And how will they hear without someone preaching? And how will anyone preach “unless they are sent?” Every link depends on the one before it, and the chain leads all the way back to God. Salvation reaches a person because a word reached them, and the word reached them because someone went, and someone went because God sent us!

That chain is bigger than Tuscaloosa. God is calling the nations to himself, and he is inviting us to be a part of it. The only question left is how we will respond to his call. The honest answer in Romans 10 is the same one God keeps pressing on his people. We go, or we support those who are going. There is no way to faithfully ignore the mission of God. So the call comes to you in plain terms. Some of us will be the feet that go. Some of us will be the hands that send, through prayer, through giving, through opening and shutting doors in support of the ones who carry the word. God is powerful enough to do both through ordinary people who simply say yes. The mission of God does not stall for lack of his power. It moves through people who decide to play their part.

So put your yes on the table. Decide whether you are going or sending, and then live like someone who genuinely has a part in a story that runs to the ends of the earth. The Lord at the center of this chain is the same Lord of all, “bestowing his riches on all who call on him,” and he does not run short.

REFLECT: In Paul’s chain from sending to hearing to believing to calling, where has God already placed you? Are you being asked to go or to support in this season, and what has kept you from putting your yes on the table?

PRAY: *Lord of all, you are rich toward everyone who calls on your name. Thank you for sending your word to me, and for saving me through your Son Jesus Christ. Make me willing to go and to support your Mission, and use your Spirit to lead me to the role I'm called to play to bring the gospel to all nations. Amen.*

FIRST STEP: Name one missionary, ministry, or unreached people group you can support this week, then take one concrete action toward supporting them (pray by name, give, or write to ask how you can support them well.)

DAY 4:

LEAD SOMEBODY

Meeting Regularly to Help Someone Follow Jesus

2 Timothy 2:1-2

You then, my child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus, and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.

Paul writes to Timothy, “what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also” (2 Timothy 2:2). Notice the chain. Paul invested in Timothy. Timothy was to invest in faithful people. Those people would teach others. Discipleship multiplies, and it happens best through intentional, personal relationships where we speak truth in love and help one another grow.

What does it look like to actually entrust the faith to one person? Jesus showed us with the seventy-two in Luke 10. He did not just tell them to go figure it out. He equipped them with clear purpose, he challenged them by sending them out, and he celebrated their return by connecting their testimony to God’s bigger story. Modeling is a great way to demonstrate what you are trying to train. Don’t just tell people what to do. Show them.

Meeting regularly with someone is where that pattern gets personal. It means praying together, asking how you can pray for them in the moment rather than only promising to later. It means coming with thoughtful questions instead of small talk, because the quality of your questions largely determines the depth of your conversation. It means giving people space to think and be honest rather than filling every silence. And it means naming the gifts and faithfulness you see in them, since many

people struggle to see how God is using them or how they have grown. Two reminders keep this honest. Celebrate faithfulness, not only results. Affirm small acts of obedience, even when the visible outcome is not perfect. And don't say no for someone before they get the chance to answer. Invite them to take a step of faith and let them decide. This is not a program. It is the slow, ordinary work of helping one person follow Jesus, and it rests on grace. Be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus, who first met us, called us, walked with us, and sends us out, and who remains faithful even when we are not.

REFLECT: Who is one person you could begin meeting with regularly to help them follow Jesus? What is one thoughtful question you could ask them this week instead of just empty talk?

PRAY: *Father, strengthen me by the grace that is in Christ Jesus. By Your Spirit, give me eyes to see one person to invest in, wisdom to ask good questions, and patience to listen. Help me name the faithfulness you are already growing in them, and use me in the chain of disciples who teach others also. Amen.*

FIRST STEP: Reach out to one person this week and set up a time to meet. Come with one prayer request to share and one heart-pointed question to ask.

DAY 5:

Encouraging Others Toward Obedience and Faith

LEAD SOMEBODY

Hebrews 3:12-14

Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called today, that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end.

The writer of Hebrews gives us a command and a deadline in the same breath: "But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called today, that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin" (Hebrews 3:13). Notice the frequency. Not occasionally, not when it feels natural, but every day. Encouragement here is not casual or incidental. It requires intention and action. And it has a target. Sin is deceitful, and a heart left alone with that deceit grows hard. The everyday word of a brother or sister is part of how God keeps that from happening.

This is what makes encouragement the everyday work of discipleship. Leading somebody is not only the big conversations and the planned moments. It is also the steady, unremarkable practice of speaking God's words back into someone's life so they keep holding fast. Hebrews frames the warning and the hope together. Verse 12 cautions against an unbelieving heart that drifts from the living God, and verse 14 reminds us that "we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end." Encouragement is one of the ordinary means by which we help each other hold on.

So what does it look like to encourage somebody on purpose? One concrete form is to call out the gifts, passions, and vision you have seen on display in someone. The Lord gave those gifts for a reason, and people need others around them to encourage them to use those gifts with confidence for God's kingdom. Another form is simply to know the person well enough to encourage them truthfully, which means being quick to listen rather than waiting for your turn to speak or jumping to a solution. You cannot exhort someone toward obedience and faith if you have not first taken the time to hear where they actually are.

We encourage because Christ first encourages us. He is the faithful one over God's house, the high priest of our confession, and the reason we can hold our confidence firm to the end. Our daily words to one another are small echoes of his steady word to us. Today, while it is still called today, there is someone within your reach whom God means to keep soft-hearted through your encouragement.

REFLECT: Who in your life is at risk of growing hardened, and when did you last speak a genuine word of encouragement into their walk with Christ? What gift, passion, or vision have you seen in someone that you could name out loud for them this week?

PRAY: *Father, you are faithful, and you have kept me holding fast by your grace. Open my eyes to the people you have placed around me, and give me the love to encourage them today. Instruct your Spirit to keep our hearts soft toward you, that none of us would be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin, and that we would share in Christ together to the end. Amen.*

FIRST STEP: Pick one person today and send them a specific, honest word of encouragement, naming a gift or a way you have seen God at work in them.

DAY 6:

LEAD SOMEBODY

Challenging Someone to Step Into Leadership

Mark 3:13-14

And he went up on the mountain and called to him those whom he desired, and they came to him. And he appointed twelve (whom he also named apostles) so that they might be with him and he might send them out to preach.

When Jesus called the Twelve, Mark records the order plainly. He “appointed twelve (whom he also named apostles) so that they might be with him and he might send them out to preach” (Mark 3:13-14). With him first, then sent out. Relationship before function. He did not hand them a task and walk away. He drew them close, and out of that closeness came their commission.

That order is the pattern for everyone who leads anybody. The goal of leadership is not to accumulate more responsibility on your own shoulders. It is to multiply yourself through others. At the team level, the shift is from doing the work to equipping others to do the work, raising up reliable people who can in turn equip others. This is the natural fruit of maturity. A leader who is genuinely growing starts looking around for someone to grow alongside.

So who, in the people God has put near you, comes to mind? Often the conversation that opens a door is an organic one, started naturally in the ordinary rhythm of being with someone, rather than a formal recruitment pitch. Ask where they sense the Lord at work in them. Notice what is holding them back, and help remove the obstacle rather than waiting for it to clear on its own. And when you sense it is time, issue the challenge. Do not say no for them. Their hesitation is theirs to work through; your job is to invite, then let them decide.

Hear this clearly, though: not everyone needs to climb, and faithfulness at any level is success. Challenging someone into leadership does not mean telling them they are insufficient where they are. It is the same thing Jesus did on that mountain. He saw them, he wanted them with him, and only then did he send them out. We get to extend that same invitation, but trust that the God who calls is the one who provides the growth.

REFLECT: Who is one person you could begin a natural, unhurried conversation with about leading alongside you? What barrier might be holding them back? Is there something you could do to help remove it?

PRAY: *Lord, you called the Twelve to be with you before you sent them out. Help us to raise up faithful people through God-honoring relationships, give us the courage to issue the invitation to lead, and let us trust you to bring maturity and growth. Amen.*

FIRST STEP: This week, consider whether you need to step up to lead or you need to challenge someone to lead alongside you. Take the next right step to serving God in this way.

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