

Make It Real: A 5-Day Bible Reading Plan and Devotional Guide

Rivers Edge Church

How to Use This Guide

This reading plan is built around the three convictions at the heart of the Make It Real vision: presence over production, fathers and mothers over programs, and depth without pressure. Each day moves you through one of the core themes — belonging, welcome, relational formation, honest depth, and mission. Read slowly. Sit with the questions. There is no pressure to arrive at a tidy conclusion by the end of each entry. The goal is not information; it is formation.

Day 1: A Table Before a Stage

****Theme: Belonging and Presence****

****Reading:**** Luke 15:11-24 — The parable of the prodigal son, in which a wayward child returns home expecting servitude and is instead met with a robe, a ring, a feast, and a father who was already running.

****Devotional:****

The father in this parable does not wait behind a podium. He does not require a cleaned-up presentation before the embrace. He sees his son while the son is still a long way off, and he runs.

This is the image underneath everything in this vision. Not a stage where the qualified perform for the watching crowd, but a table where the returning and the weary are given the best seat in the house before they have said a single word of explanation.

The older teenager who has outgrown the youth-group performance, the young single adult eating dinner alone on a Tuesday, the young couple who has quietly concluded that church is simply not for people like them — what they are waiting to find out is whether anyone will run toward them, or whether they will be required to clean up first.

The answer of this parable is the answer of this vision. The feast comes before the speech. The ring comes before the resume. Belonging is not the reward for believing correctly; it is the ground in which belief is made possible.

Notice what the father does not do. He does not hand the son a doctrinal statement to sign. He does not schedule a follow-up meeting to assess the son's sincerity. He calls for music and dancing because what was lost has been found, and that fact alone is enough to start the celebration.

We are not lowering the bar. We are building the table that lets someone reach for it.

****Reflect:****

- Who in your life is still a long way off, and what would it look like for you to be the one who runs?

- Where have you been more like the older brother in this story than the running father?

- What is one practical way you could build a table this week rather than a stage?

Day 2: Tear Out the Carpet

****Theme: Radical Welcome and Costly Hospitality****

****Reading:**** Romans 15:7 — Paul's instruction that believers are to receive one another just as Christ has received them, for the glory of God.

****Devotional:****

When the carpet at Calvary Chapel began taking a beating from the bare feet of a generation of burned-out, long-haired young people, someone proposed a sign at the door. Chuck Smith's response became legend: tear out the carpet before you turn a kid away.

That single sentence carries a theology inside it. It says that the comfort of the institution is never worth more than the soul standing at the door. It says that welcome is not a feeling we generate on Sunday morning but a decision we make in advance, before we know who is coming or what condition they will arrive in.

Romans 15:7 grounds this in something deeper than hospitality strategy. The reason we receive one another is that Christ has already received us — and the manner in which he received us was not contingent on our condition. He did not wait for us to become presentable. He moved toward us while we were still in the far country, still smelling of the pigpen, still rehearsing our speech.

The carpet in this story is anything we protect more than people. It might be a preference, a comfort, a way of doing things that has calcified into a requirement. It might be an unspoken dress code, a cultural assumption, a standard of polish that the people we are losing can sense from across the room.

The question this day asks is not whether we believe in welcome. Almost everyone believes in welcome in the abstract. The question is what we are willing to tear out.

****Reflect:****

- What is the "carpet" in your own life — the thing you protect that may be costing you genuine relationship with someone far from God?
- Think of a time when someone received you before you were ready to be received. What did that cost them, and what did it do for you?
- What would it mean for your community to make the decision to welcome someone in advance, before you know who is coming?

Day 3: Fathers, Mothers, and the Gift of Being Known

****Theme: Spiritual Fatherhood and Relational Formation****

****Reading:**** 1 Thessalonians 2:7-12 — Paul describes his care for the church at Thessalonica using two images: a nursing mother who cherishes her own children, and a father who encourages, comforts, and urges each one individually toward a life worthy of God.

****Devotional:****

Paul does not describe his ministry in Thessalonica in terms of programs delivered or content produced. He describes it in terms of bodies — a mother's body, a father's body, people who were so fond of those they served that they were delighted to share not only the message but their very lives.

Their very lives. Not their platform. Not their curriculum. Their lives.

This is the vision behind the second pillar. The generation we are trying to reach is, in many cases, a family-fractured generation. Many of them have never had a steady, present, affectionate father figure in their lives. Many have never watched a marriage weather something hard and come out the other side. Many have never sat at a table with someone twenty years further down the road and been told, honestly, what the road was actually like.

They called Chuck Smith "Papa Chuck." Not because he ran a mentorship program. Because he was simply present and available, and a rootless generation found in him something they had been missing without knowing quite what to name it.

The job description for the fathers and mothers in this vision is not expertise. It is presence. Honesty about their own failures. A willingness to listen more than they talk. Their stumbles are the curriculum, not their credentials.

This is also a word for those who feel unqualified. You do not need to be cool. You do not need to bridge the culture gap. You do not need answers to every hard question. You need to show up, learn a name, and stay. That is the whole of it.

****Reflect:****

- Who has played the role of a spiritual father or mother in your life? What did their presence, rather than their expertise, give you?
- Is there someone in your community who is younger and further back on the road, for whom you could simply show up and stay?
- What failure or stumble in your own story might actually be the most useful thing you have to offer someone else right now?

Day 4: A Safer Room, Not a Smaller Truth

****Theme: Honest Depth and Faith That Can Hold a Hard Question****

****Reading:**** Psalm 88 — One of the darkest psalms in the entire collection, in which the writer cries out to God from what feels like the edge of death, names his suffering without softening it, and ends not in resolution but in darkness. The psalm closes without a tidy answer.

****Devotional:****

Psalm 88 is one of the most uncomfortable passages in the Bible precisely because it refuses to do what we expect Scripture to do. It does not turn the corner. It does not arrive at "but God." It ends in darkness, and it stays there.

This is depth. Not the depth of a polished answer, but the depth of a faith honest enough to bring the full weight of suffering into the room and leave it there without tying a bow on it.

A great share of the people we have been losing left over glib answers to real pain. They brought their grief, their doubt, their unanswerable questions to the church, and the church handed them a bright resolution before it had earned the right to speak. They could feel the discomfort underneath the cheerfulness. They knew the room was not safe enough for what they were actually carrying.

The third pillar of this vision is not about lowering the theological bar. Chuck Smith handed strung-out young people dense, verse-by-verse Scripture, and they came in waves — the depth was the draw. What this pillar is about is stripping out the things that trip the alarm: the manufactured emotion, the pressure to arrive at certainty before trust has been built, the bait-and-switch of warm welcome followed by a hidden agenda.

A safer room is one where a leader can say "I don't know" and mean it. Where a hard question is treated as a sign that someone is taking faith seriously, not as a problem to be managed. Where the Psalms of complaint are allowed to stay complaints, because that is what they are, and the God who inspired them was not embarrassed by them.

The depth this generation is hungry for includes the willingness to sit in lament without rushing to resolution. We do not make the truth smaller. We make the room safer.

****Reflect:****

- Where in your own faith journey have you been handed a quick resolution when what you needed was someone willing to sit in the darkness with you?
- What hard question are you currently carrying that you have not yet felt safe enough to bring into a room with others?
- How could you create more space this week for honest lament — in your own prayer life, or in a conversation with someone who is struggling?

Day 5: Released to Lead — From Consumer to Participant

****Theme: Mission, Multiplication, and the Freedom to Become****

****Reading:**** John 20:21 — The risen Christ, appearing to his gathered disciples, sends them with the same directness and authority with which the Father sent him.

****Devotional:****

The disciples in this room have not completed a training program. They have not passed an assessment. They have not been handed a certificate of readiness. They are frightened people behind a locked door, and the risen Christ walks through the wall, shows them his hands and his side, and immediately sends them.

As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you.

This is the instinct that ran underneath the Jesus People movement at its best, and it is the instinct that must run underneath this vision. The goal of mentoring someone is not to produce a well-formed recipient of ministry. It is to walk them to the point where they become a mentor. This year's mentee becomes next year's near-peer guide. The table you were welcomed to becomes the table you host.

The serve in this vision — the regular outward move into the community — exists for exactly this reason. Tasting responsibility is what turns a consumer into a participant. You do not become a disciple by receiving discipleship indefinitely. You become a disciple by being sent, even before you feel ready, even before the door is unlocked, even before you fully understand what you are carrying.

The young couples without children and the single adults in this community have something most of the church does not: open evenings, energy, and homes. We should not only minister to them. We should hand them the hospitality. We should hand them the triads to lead. We should hand them the table to host. We should hand them the mission to carry.

The vision ends where the risen Christ always ends: not with a better-resourced institution, but with sent people. Belong, believe, become. The becoming is always outward.

****Reflect:****

- Where in your own journey did someone release you into responsibility before you felt fully ready? What did that do for you?
- What is one thing you are currently receiving that you could begin giving to someone a few steps behind you on the road?
- What would it look like, in a specific and concrete way, to move from participant in this community to someone who sends others?

A Closing Word

These five days trace a single arc: a father running toward a returning child, a carpet torn out at the door, a steady presence showing up in ordinary life, a room honest enough to hold a hard question, and a risen Christ sending frightened people through a locked door.

That arc is the vision. Make it real. Make it relational. Make it deep. Belong, believe, become.

Rivers Edge Church · Make It Real Vision Series · August 2026