

21

DAY FAST

a daily
devotional

2023

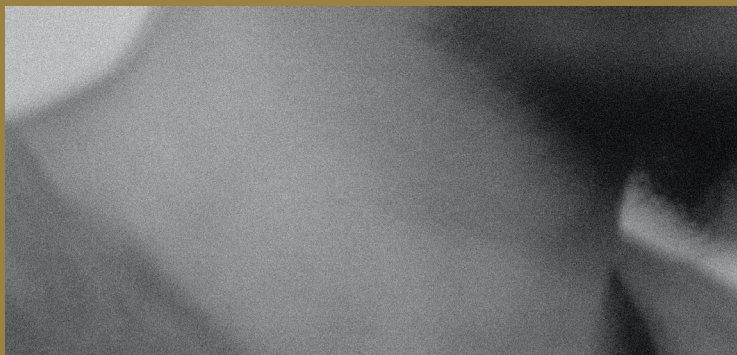
LEARNING FASTING



Welcome to the Learn, Live, Give journey! We invite you to use these 21 devotional thoughts to guide your prayer time and begin a new cycle of growth for your life. In addition, we invite you to make the most of these 21 days by including a spiritual fast.


There is a full cycle of growth in the Kingdom of God that leads to our best and most fruitful life. God didn't send His son to the earth, save us from our sins, and give us freedom for us to live an ordinary life – He intends for us to live a blessed, fruitful, and vibrant life. So how do we keep that vibrancy, and experience new fruit? We learn, we live, and we give. We can grow our way to new fruitfulness in 2023.

Often in the Bible and throughout Church history, God's people would fast during times of great expectancy. That is why we invite you to use these 21 days of devotions while also participating in a fast.



What is fasting? Spiritual fasting is exchanging the needs of the physical body for those of the spirit. It is a humbling of the flesh, saying 'no' to the earthly things we crave in order to say 'yes' to more of God.

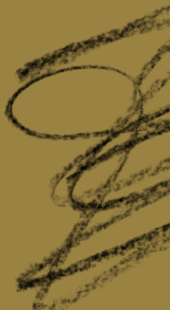
There is no 'formula fast' or one 'right' way. Fasting is about the condition of the heart. Our goal in fasting is to create closer intimacy with the Father. While fasting in the Bible generally involved the abstention of good, some choose to fast from something such as social media, TV, or the internet.



My flesh and my
heart may fail, but
God is the strength
of my heart and my
portion forever.



But the primary aspect of fasting is that it always makes room for an increased life of prayer; without the increase of prayer, a fast is merely a diet. Instead, make the most of these 21-days as we commit 2023 to God, and begin the year in His Word, in prayer, and in fasting.



By wisdom a house
is built, and through
understanding it is
established; through
knowledge its rooms
are filled with rare and
beautiful treasures.

PROVERBS 24:3-4



WEEK 01

LEARN

WEEK 01



DAY 01

SUNDAY

Do Yourself a Favor

READ

Do yourself a favor and learn all you can; then remember what you learn and you will prosper.

Proverbs 19:8

When you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas, and my scrolls, especially the parchments

2 Timothy 4:13

REFLECT

As you begin this focused season of seeking God, “do yourself a favor and learn all you can.” Learn from the right person—Jesus, and learn from the right book—The Word of God.

God wants to thrill us with His wonder and fill us with joy every day. There are joys that aren't expensive, don't require costly travel, and can happen simply by reading God's Word. The greatest joy of learning lies in learning His life-giving truths.

However, when we stop learning, we stop growing. When we stop growing, we shut down one of the main things that can keep life vibrant; when we stop growing, we stop living. As long as you're learning, changing, and growing, life will be interesting, exciting, and filled with just enough difficulty to keep us from getting bored.

But it all depends on your attitude and your perspective. The learner's perspective is powerful, upbeat, and full of faith as it encounters all of the uniquenesses and challenges of life.

This is why David often prayed, 'Teach me your ways, O Lord, and show me your paths.' It is because he had something built into him that said, 'God is good, and He wants me to learn my way through this. I'm going to study Him, praise Him, and thank Him even when things are going wrong.'

This is why 2 Timothy 4:13 is so incredible. This is the last chapter Paul would write. Even as he nears death, Paul is wanting the scrolls and the parchments. Why? To keep learning, to keep studying, and to keep growing. This is what made Paul great, and why God continued to use him time and time again. He was doing himself a favor, just as we all should.

This journey is offered to every child of God. But, we have to accept that He has a process and a pathway. We can simply state it by calling it the Learn, Live, and Give way of life.

As we start to intently look at the Learn, Live, and Give journey, we should always remember that whenever we learn, we are doing ourselves a favor. Lots of people can benefit from our learning, but we benefit the most. By doing ourselves this favor, we are participating in the highest and purest form of self-care. Whether we realize it or not, this is deeply spiritual and emotional because learning takes truth, and truth brings freedom.

RESPOND

1. Determine what steps you can take to make reading the Bible and studying God's Word part of your daily routine.

2. Take a few moments and ask God to show you what you should focus on learning now and ask for the grace to be a lifelong learner.

DAY 02

MONDAY

It's All in the Recipe

READ

By wisdom a house is built, and through understanding it is established; through knowledge its rooms are filled with rare and beautiful treasures.

Proverbs 24:3-4

Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

Matthew 11:29

REFLECT

Have you ever felt like you're just stumbling through life, unsure of what your purpose is or where you're supposed to be going? It can be a frustrating and overwhelming feeling, but there's good news; just like a chef follows a recipe to create a delicious dish, God has a recipe for our lives as well.

The key is to trust in His plan and follow the steps He has laid out for us. It won't always be easy, and there may be challenges along the way, but just like a chef trusts in the recipe to guide them to the perfect result, we can trust in God's plan to lead us to a fulfilling and meaningful life.

Just like a chef must practice to master their specialty, we must study God's blueprint for our lives. This entails studying His word, listening to His instruction, and seeking wise counsel from others who are following His recipe.

Remember that God's recipe for you doesn't fit everyone. He created us with unique talents, gifts, and personalities, and His plan for our lives will match them. This means we must find our calling and follow His steps to fulfill it.

We will experience unforeseen trials and hardships, but we can still discover strength, guidance, and comfort by trusting in His plan and following His ways.

Take time to learn God's recipe. As you obey His steps and follow His plans, your life will flourish with meaning, purpose, and fruitfulness.

RESPOND

1. Do you believe that God has a specific plan and purpose for your life? If so, what steps are you taking to discover and fulfill this plan?

2. Pray for specific guidance for your life. As you do, pray that God would help you be aware of what He has already said, and what He wants to remind you of.

DAY 03

TUESDAY

Use What You Have

READ

Then the LORD said to him, "What is that in your hand?"

"A staff," he replied.

Exodus 4:2

But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me.

2 Corinthians 12:9

REFLECT

We have a tendency to underestimate how useful we are when the grace of God is working through us.

That's what almost stopped Moses. When he told the Lord he wasn't able to lead the nation of Israel, God asked Moses, "What's that in your hand?" "A staff," he replied. To Moses, it was merely a stick used to beat stubborn sheep. But to God, it was the instrument by which miracles would be performed. To Moses, it was just a rod. To God, it was an instrument of freedom for the nation of Israel. By the power of God, that staff was used to part the Red Sea, perform the ten plagues, bring water out of the rock, and lead a nation.

Too many times, we live our lives as if we don't have what we need, forgetting that God's purpose is always supplied with His resources. What is currently in your possession and in your grasp might very well be an instrument of power or freedom in our lives. Instead, fear and insecurity creeps in, and we hesitate to use it. Step out in faith today, believing that God has given you all of the grace necessary, because it really is all you need!

RESPOND

- 1. Do you often feel like you don't have enough or that you're not good enough? If so, what steps can you take to change this mindset?*
- 2. Ask God to show you what you have in your hand. Then pray for grace to use it this week.*

WEDNESDAY

Learn in the Mirror

READ

Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues in it—not forgetting what they have heard, but doing it—they will be blessed in what they do.

James 1:22-25

REFLECT

The book of James gives us a clear illustration of The Word of God being a mirror for our lives. Do you want to grow? Do you want your heart purified? Look in the mirror. Allow the mirror to reflect what it sees.

This metaphor is found within the context of the book of James as a whole. The purpose of James is to “help us to attain a state of completeness in the inner man, to become a ‘teleos’ person.” Teleos is a Greek word used 19 times in the New Testament that describes a complete person. The word “blessed” in verse 25 is “macarios,” which means really happy on the inside. With that in mind, and combining it with James’ goal that we become “‘teleos,’” or complete, it means that everyone has the ability to possess personal wholeness, maturity, and happiness.

The Word encourages us to not be like the person who walks away from the mirror and forgets what we saw in the reflection. It is the double-mindedness or doubting of God's Word—the mirror—that destroys stability in every other area of our lives. Every time we choose to place our feelings over the sovereign authority of the Word of God, we're moving towards instability. The opposite of living by the promises of God is actually allowing the circumstances of our lives – our fears, emotions, upbringing, trauma, hurt, pain, discomforts, fatigue—to cause us to belittle the very thing that leads us to strength, stability, and completeness.

Anyone who looks in the mirror and forgets what they look like, James says, is like someone who listens to The Word but doesn't do what it says. The suggestion is purposeful forgetting. We call this a deflection, instead of reflection. Learning in the mirror requires reflection, not deflection.

RESPOND

1. How can staying focused on the mirror of God's Word help you to overcome instability and move towards health and completeness in your life?

2. Ask God to show you what he wants you to address in your life today. Then pray for grace to see yourself the way God sees you.

DAY 05

THURSDAY

Not as Easy as It Looks

READ

Those who work their land will have abundant food, but those who chase fantasies have no sense.

Proverbs 12:11

After Jesus had gone indoors, his disciples asked him privately, “Why couldn’t we drive it out?”

Mark 9:28

REFLECT

How many times have we said, ‘Oh, I can do that,’ only to realize, when we put our hands to something, that it was much more difficult than we realized.

If we don’t respect what it takes to learn something, we’ll never learn it because it’s not as easy as it looks. And anytime that we think just because we’ve arrived, we should be able to do it, we’re just not looking in the mirror.

In Mark 9, the disciples probably considered themselves pretty advanced in the realm of the supernatural. They not only witnessed miracles, but they actually performed and participated in miracles.

They knew that all of these experiences were directly related to their closeness to Jesus and the grace He offered. Yet, there was still more to learn.

That's the way it is. That's the way grace works. Grace is God doing for us what we could never do for ourselves. But, it's not always the same—grace takes on various forms. We can never forget that every learning experience is covered by God's supreme wisdom and ability to cause all things to work together for our good. The things of God are not automatic, and growing in God is not like putting a Pop-tart in the toaster.

The unique thing about the grace of God is that sometimes grace can make things so easy, and sometimes grace is just enough to get us through, because there are things to learn. There is a mystery to learning, changing, and growing. It is not always easy, but it is part of the way that God shapes us into His image.

So the next time you find learning and growing difficult, don't be quick to count it as a graceless moment or season. The Holy Spirit is faithful, and the Holy Spirit is present. He keeps you digging deeper, sometimes teaching you lessons you didn't expect to learn.

RESPOND

1. Ask God how he has been developing you and maturing you. Then ask God to help you participate with him in your growth.

2. Do you often find learning and growing difficult? If so, what steps can you take to overcome this difficulty and to continue to grow in your faith?

DAY 06

FRIDAY

Learners Eat Pie

READ

Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand,
that he may lift you up in due time.

1 Peter 5:6

He mocks proud mockers but shows favor to the humble
and oppressed.

Proverbs 3:34

REFLECT

Learners eat humble pie, but they also get to taste the sweetest of fruit; it is better to be wrong and blessed than to be right in our eyes but stuck. The secret to a stuck life is to lack humility.

But what does it mean to be humble? Is it accepting that we are imperfect, or is it something more? The word “humble” comes from the Greek word “humus”, which means earth. When we say someone is “humble,” we mean they understand that they are part of the earth—and they are not separate from it. We are merely dust, created and formed by God.

Being humble means that you're willing to change your mind when presented with new information or evidence that contradicts your original thought process.

That is how God teaches us – by challenging and contradicting past thought patterns we have lived under, thereby creating a new path of learning, and a new future.

Sometimes the flesh, our self, stands in the way from a glorious and fruitful future. We have to make peace with the fact that our idea of glorious and fruitful is not always God's idea. When the two clash, we just have to go with God's side on the matter.

No one gets to pass on their serving of humble pie. In life, we are all allotted a certain number of slices that we just have to eat. We hate the taste and the way it goes down, but it's all part of learning, changing, and growing.

RESPOND

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DAY 07

SATURDAY

Everyone Can Grow

READ

As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another.

Proverbs 27:17

Let the wise hear and increase in learning, and the one who understands obtain guidance...Fools despise wisdom and instruction."

Proverbs 1:5,7

REFLECT

Wise people seek growth and development. Fools despise it. This pursuit of growth is meant to be active; in Proverbs, we are encouraged to "call out" for insight and raise our voices for understanding. In fact, we are told to search for instruction as we would search for silver or for hidden treasures (Prov. 2:3-4).

This search is so beautiful to behold that it makes you think we were actually made to be pushed to grow and to push others toward growth. At times, the pushing goes just one way, as in classic mentoring relationships, but it's common for there to be mutual pushing.

We see several examples of purposeful, iron-sharpening-iron relationships throughout the Bible.

At times these relationships are focused on developing character or faithfulness; other times they are focused on developing skills and abilities. We see examples of such relationships throughout the Old Testament, including those between Jethro and Moses, Moses and Joshua, Eli and Samuel, David and Solomon, Elijah and Elisha, Huldah and Josiah, Naomi and Ruth, and Mordecai and Esther.

These relationships, and others, are narrated in such a way that they clearly celebrate the act of people helping each other grow and develop. Again and again, these relationships result in us being sharpened. And as we're sharpened, we begin to bear fruit.

We see the same types of relationships in the New Testament. Jesus, of course, was interested in more than just helping people grow, (but it is striking that) His overall ministry of healing and teaching included a more intimate, unhurried development of his twelve disciples. And it is noteworthy that Luke tells us that Jesus himself "increased in wisdom and in stature" (Luke 2:52).

We also see iron-sharpening-iron relationships between Barnabas and Paul, and between Paul and many others. In the New Testament, we see that developmental relationships are central to the mission of the Church going forward. Is it any wonder, then, that Paul encourages all believers to be like iron to each other? "Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing" (1 Thess. 5:11).

RESPOND

1. Ask God to give you insight into who you need to sharpen.
2. Ask God to help you to receive correction especially when it is difficult to hear.



Let us not become
weary in doing good,
for at the proper time
we will reap a harvest
if we do not give up.

GALATIANS 6:9

WEEK 02

ENVIR

WEEK 02

DAY 01

SUNDAY

Do It Right

READ

Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.

Galatians 6:9

If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must rule over it.

Genesis 4:7

REFLECT

God teaches us many things through His Word and through our experiences in life. But simply knowing what is right is not enough—we must also put it into practice in our daily lives.

When we follow God's teachings and do things the right way, we can avoid many of the headaches and difficulties that come with living in this world. For example, following God's command to love others as ourselves can help us avoid conflicts and build strong relationships with those around us. Adhering to God's principles of honesty, integrity, and hard work can help us be successful in our careers and avoid the pitfalls of laziness and dishonesty.

It's not always easy to put God's teachings into practice. It takes effort and determination to overcome our natural inclinations and, instead, choose to do what is right. We may face temptations, challenges, and obstacles that make it difficult to follow God's plan for our lives. That's why it's so important to continually seek guidance and

strength from God. When we draw near to Him and ask for His help, He will give us the strength and wisdom we need to overcome any obstacle and put His teachings into practice (in our lives).

Let us remember not to learn just God's teachings, but to put them into practice in our daily lives. By following His guidance and doing things the right way, we can avoid many of the headaches and difficulties of life and live fulfilling and meaningful lives.

RESPOND

1. Ask God to show you ways in which the things you have learned have not transferred into living yet.

2. Ask God for the grace to walk in what you have learned.

DAY 02

MONDAY

Live Like You Mean It

READ

If anyone speaks, he should speak as one conveying the words of God. If anyone serves, he should serve with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory and the power forever and ever. Amen.

1 Peter 4:11

So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.

1 Corinthians 10:31

REFLECT

The best form of living is a life fully lived for God. As believers, it is our honor to live our lives for the glory of God. This means striving to do everything we do—from speaking to serving—in a way that brings honor and glory to Him.

While this is the ultimate honor as children of God, we still face many challenges and temptations in this world that can distract us from our ultimate goal of glorifying God. It takes determination and effort to stay focused on living for His glory and to resist the things that would pull us away from it.

We can stay focused on living for the glory of God by seeking strength and guidance from Him. When we draw near to Him and ask for His help, He will provide us with the strength and wisdom we need to overcome any obstacle and to live our lives in a way that brings Him glory.

Another way we can live for the glory of God is by focusing on our daily tasks and responsibilities. Whether we are eating, drinking, or doing anything else, we can do it all for the glory of God. This means doing our best in everything we do and giving our all to every task, no matter how big or small.

Ultimately, living for the glory of God means living with purpose and intention. It means recognizing that we have been put on this earth for a reason—to glorify God—and making the most of every moment we have. So let us live like we mean it—for the glory of God!

RESPOND

1. Think about the things you have to do today. Ask God to receive glory from your work and activities in advance.

2. As you go throughout your day pray and ask for grace to live for his glory in everything.

DAY 03

TUESDAY

Better Together

READ

Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor: If either of them falls down, one can help the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up. Ecclesiastes 4:9-10

For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them. Matthew 18:20.

REFLECT

Part of living like Jesus is living in community. We are better together. Jesus knew this, because Matthew 18:20 suggests that when we come together with others in the name of Jesus, He is present with us.

In a world that can often be lonely and isolating, being a part of the family of God means that He surrounds us with people who are meant to help us live by faith. When we are surrounded by other believers, we are able to learn from one another, grow together, and support each other on our spiritual journeys.

When we share our lives together, open our homes and our hearts to each other, and serve alongside each other, we become an unstoppable force.

We begin to see firsthand the impact that our faith can have on the world around us and our hearts.

Ultimately, the family of God is better when we are together because it allows us to support each other and grow together in our faith. When we are surrounded by other believers, we are able to learn from one another, encourage each other, and serve together in the name of God. This can be a powerful way to deepen our relationship with God and make a difference in the world around us.

RESPOND

- 1. Thank God for the other believers He has placed in your life.*
- 2. Ask God to give you wisdom on how you can be more fruitful together with them.*

DAY 04

WEDNESDAY

Step Into the Ring

READ

Therefore I do not run like someone running aimlessly; I do not fight like a boxer beating the air. No, I strike a blow to my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.

1 Corinthians 9:26-27

Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; 6 in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight. Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord and shun evil.

Proverbs 3:5-7

REFLECT

The apostle Paul lived with a never-ending awareness that he had to keep himself in check. Living requires that we put principles over preferences (and know the difference). It requires just scales on the table, meaning that we give a real ear to opposing views and opinions, especially during conflict. Living requires embracing the fact that we are often our own worst enemy.

Although following God is always what's best for us, temptations and carnal desires often come into play. It is the enemy's plot to derail us from God's plan for our lives.

When we're tempted to compromise what God wants for us, or simply to give up on the mission that God has for us, we are called, like the Apostle Paul said, to fight ourselves so that we don't lose ourselves.

Many times, before the enemy beats us, we lose the fight ourselves. To fight yourself is to fight your preferences, prejudices, and proclivities. If you don't step into the ring with yourself, you will lose an internal fight with yourself, but don't let your lower nature win. Win the battle on the inside before it becomes a battle on the outside. When we step into the ring and fight ourselves, we make so much room for God to get the credit.

RESPOND

1. In what areas of your life do you struggle with self-discipline? What steps can you take to improve your self-control and align your actions with God's will?

2. Thank God that he has given you the victory in your life. Pray for the area of your life that lacks self discipline and ask God for the action steps to grow.

DAY 05

THURSDAY

Step by Step

READ

But I will not drive them out in a single year, because the land would become desolate and the wild animals too numerous for you. Little by little I will drive them out before you, until you have increased enough to take possession of the land.

Exodus 23:29-30

They came to Bethsaida, and some people brought a blind man and begged Jesus to touch him. He took the blind man by the hand and led him outside the village. When he had spit on the man's eyes and put his hands on him, Jesus asked, "Do you see anything?" He looked up and said, "I see people; they look like trees walking around." Once more Jesus put his hands on the man's eyes. Then his eyes were opened, his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly. Jesus sent him home, saying, "Don't even go into the village."

Mark 8:22-26

REFLECT

As we learn to put into practice what we learn from God in our daily lives, we must be aware that not all growth happens overnight. In fact, deep spiritual growth and maturity come little by little, or step by step.

If God had driven out Israel's enemies right away, all at once, in Exodus 23, the nation of Israel would not have learned the valuable lessons they needed. God is not interested in building lives that look good for a moment—His desire is for us to live lives that stand as tall, resilient trees, that bear fruit over the course of a lifetime. The struggle for us, though, is that sometimes we overestimate what God wants to do in the short run and underestimate what God can do in the long run.

The attention we give to implementing what we learn, as well as the environments that we put ourselves in, determine the growth that will take place in our lives.

Jesus' healing of a blind man in Mark 8 shows us that, step-by-step, He wants to show us new things that will build upon the previous stage of growth. Jesus' healing of the blind man was progressive – step-by-step, the man gained his abilities back. For us, step by step we grow. Step by step, our roots go deeper and our capacities enlarge.

RESPOND

1. How can we be patient with ourselves and trust in God's timing for our growth?

2. Take a moment and thank God for the slow process he has grown you through. Ask him for a new perspective so you can be gracious with yourself and others and also enjoy your personal journey.

DAY 06

FRIDAY

Everyone Needs a Coach

READ

Blessed are those who listen to me, watching daily at my doors, waiting at my doorway.

Proverbs 8:34

If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you.

James 1:5

REFLECT

The humble learners throughout history are the ones who have truly moved the needle. When humble learners spot that desire to learn in someone else, they will often give away, in ten minutes, something that took them ten years to learn. Everyone needs a coach, and God will always provide the coaches His children need when they are humble enough to ask for them.

That's the blessing of humility. Our humility draws out the generosity in others. Successful people love to make important deposits in others, but humility is what makes it worth their time. Humility is like a kingdom toll (booth), and when we show up with humility, we get access to so many things, not just in the Kingdom of Heaven but even in the realms of this earth.

When Proverbs describes wisdom, it says, “Blessed are those who listen to me, watching daily at my doors, waiting at my doorway.” Similarly, James 1:5 states, “If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you.” How do we learn, get wise, and grow? We humble ourselves.

Why is humility so important? It's because, as we try our best to live out what God teaches us, humility is what keeps the truth in front of us. Without humility, we can neglect to embrace, digest, or internalize truth at the level that is necessary for it to be powerful in its effect in our lives. Truth will only impact those who receive it with great humility.

Jesus told his followers, “I am the way, the truth, and the life.” Truth is untamable, and we either embrace it or lose out on it. It can be harnessed but never truly tamed because whenever we go against its nature, it immediately throws us off like a wild stallion. To embrace truth is to bow to its irrefutable strength and power, acknowledging its indisputable nature. Truth will always be had on its own terms.

Humility is not just taking in the hard stuff. It's received with the joy and innocence of a child. Learning is at least a stepping stone and, at best, is the launching pad.

RESPOND

- 1. What can you do to seek a coach's voice for your life?*
- 2. Thank God for giving you the guidance you have had up until this point in your life. Ask God to show you the voices that need to be speaking into your life today.*

DAY 07

SATURDAY

Stay Sharp

READ

If the ax is dull and its edge unsharpened, more strength is needed, but skill will bring success.

Ecclesiastes 10:10

Train yourself to be godly. For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come.

1 Timothy 4:7b-8

REFLECT

Ecclesiastes 10:10 begins with the example of a tool, an ax. The sharper an ax is, the less effort is required to cut and make progress. Axes that are sharp are not only more effective and efficient, but they're also safer. The sharpest knife is also the safest knife. If we sharpen ourselves by faith, the Lord will know we're ready to be used.

Our sharpening is holistic. It is physical, but it extends mentally, emotionally, and spiritually (relationally). Ecclesiastes 10:10 begins with a tool, but ends with skill. An ax is physical, but skill is something that we possess. An ax doesn't have skill, people have skills. But when our ax is sharpened, then we can utilize our skills.

Living out God's truth and promises in our lives accepts that we have never arrived. God has given us this life, and it is up to keep our axes sharp! If we fail to stay sharp, we fail to be ready for the new opportunities, seasons, and blessings that God has for us.

Life has different seasons that require different gears and different ways of sharpening. God wants us to use all the gears He has put into us. But as we sharpen ourselves and shift into new gears, we should remember that not all change has to be drastic. Sharpening is often more of a maintenance issue.

We are God's vessel, created for His use. When He tells us to stay sharp, He is also implying that He will help us stay sharp.

RESPOND

1. Think about your life in four ways – mentally, physically, emotionally, spiritually. How can you sharpen yourself on a regular basis in all four areas?

2. Thank God for his sharpening work in your life. Ask God to show you what he wants you to sharpen this week and how.



Freely you have
received, freely give.

MATTHEW 10:8

WEEK 03

GIVE

WEEK 03

DAY 01

SUNDAY

Push and Pull

READ

I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, and his incomparably great power for us who believe.

Ephesians 1:18-19

But the LORD said to Samuel, “Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The LORD does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.”

1 Samuel 16:7

REFLECT

As a leader in the early church, the apostle Paul understood the importance of both pushing forward those who were ahead of him and pulling forward those who were behind. This “push and pull” approach allowed Paul to effectively mentor and develop the next generation of leaders in the church.

Paul was guided and mentored by Barnabas, who spent time with him and let Paul observe him interact with new believers at Antioch (Acts 11), church leaders (Acts 13), and non-believers in their first missionary journey. Paul was pushed forward in his purpose by Barnabas, and in turn, he pulled others forward.

Most notably, Paul pulled Timothy forward, writing two letters to him that live on in the New Testament, instructing Timothy to continue the push-pull effect within the church: “You have heard me teach things that have been confirmed by many reliable witnesses. Now teach these truths to other trustworthy people who will be able to pass them on to others” (2 Timothy 2:2). Eventually, Timothy would pastor the church in Ephesus, one of the examples of health and fruitfulness in the early church.

Paul's prayer to the Ephesians stands out because he was praying that they would get the insight and enlightenment that they could pursue the best life. What was that enlightenment? An ability to see the next generation of people to continue the push-pull effect. His desire was that they would continue the push-pull effect that their pastor Timothy was most likely modeling before them.

Samuel saw David. Elijah saw Elisha. Jesus saw Peter. Barnabas saw Paul. Paul saw Timothy. Timothy saw the individuals that made up the church in Ephesus.

When the people of faith came before us, they weren't 'seeing' finished products. Barnabas saw potential in Paul, but it needed refinement. We have all had spiritual parents and spiritual overseers who have gone before us and seen something in us. It's time for us to see something in someone new. When we see the riches in God's people, we can help them find the riches of Christ and the kingdom.

RESPOND

1. How can seeking out instruction and correction help you to become the person that God has called you to be?

2. Thank God for the community of people He has placed around you. Begin to pray for the people that you lead and the people that are alongside you.

DAY 02

MONDAY

Our Process, Their Shortcut

READ

Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.
Philippians 4:9

The lips of the righteous nourish many.
Proverbs 10:21

REFLECT

Our process is meant to be someone else's shortcut. Our failures and victories can be someone else's classroom. Many of life's greatest challenges, lessons, and successes are given to us so that others can learn from them.

When we are generous with our time, our talents, and our resources, we can help accelerate the spiritual growth of others. This can be particularly helpful for those who are just starting out on their spiritual journey, or who are struggling to find their way.

Ultimately, the generosity of God's kingdom means that our process of spiritual growth can become someone else's shortcut.

By sharing our experiences, lessons, and resources, we can help others to grow and mature in their faith. This can be a powerful way to demonstrate the generosity of God's kingdom, and to make a difference in the lives of others.

RESPOND

1. How can you be generous with your time, talents, and resources to help others in their spiritual growth?
2. Praise God for the generosity that He has shown you in your life thus far. Ask God how he wants you to be generous today. Pray for opportunities to open for your generosity.

TUESDAY

Be a Real Friend

READ

“Don’t be afraid,” he said. “My father Saul will not lay a hand on you. You will be king over Israel, and I will be second to you. Even my father Saul knows this.” The two of them made a covenant before the Lord. Then Jonathan went home, but David remained at Horesh.
1 Samuel 23:17-18

Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.
1 Thessalonians 5:11

REFLECT

Genuine, godly friendships are centered around a giving mindset. This means that the focus of the friendship is on giving to others, rather than on receiving from them. Godly friends are willing to put the needs of others before their own, and are always looking for ways to serve and support those around them.

Proverbs 17:17 tells us that ‘a brother is born for adversity.’ We have all had people who have acted as brothers or sisters to us while in the trenches of life, like David with Jonathan. When we reflect on those relationships, and the great lengths that some people go to for their friendships, we see that this is a very godly quality. To be a giver means that oftentimes we put others before ourselves.

This is not just when it serves us, or when it's convenient, or when it's obvious. Friends read their counterparts' expressions and actively seek ways to serve them.

In Paul's letter to the Thessalonians it shows that one of the important parts of being a real, godly friend is encouraging others. And what was Paul encouraging to the Thessalonians? To keep encouraging others! Just as they already are! He was, as some say, 'giving them their flowers.' As friends, we are extensions of God's encouragement. Sometimes, that means giving others their flowers and spurring them on. At times, it is being the one who can tell them the honest truth that they may not hear from anyone else. Proverbs 24:26 says, 'An honest answer is like a kiss on the lips.'

How do we do this? With the fruit of the Spirit, through the power of the Spirit. "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control" (Galatians 5:22-23).

As you pray about growing as a giver today, identify how you can be a real friend and an extension of God's encouragement to someone else.

RESPOND

1. How can the fruit of the Spirit help us to be better friends and encouragers?

2. Pray for guidance and direction in growing as givers and becoming better friends.

DAY 04

WEDNESDAY

Giving Gives Mercy

READ

The merciful man does good for his own soul, But he who is cruel troubles his own flesh.

Proverbs 11:17

Freely you have received, freely give.

Matthew 10:8

REFLECT

We often think of giving as something that happens materially, but the highest form of giving is often forgiveness. It is an act of mercy. As God's children, we've received the highest act of mercy – forgiveness of our sins. Just as we have received, we can also freely give.

Forgiveness involves letting go of anger, resentment, and bitterness towards the person who has hurt us. It also involves offering them grace and compassion, and choosing to release them from the debt that they owe us. By forgiving others, we are showing them the same mercy that God has shown us.

Forgiveness is not always easy, and it can be difficult to let go of our anger and hurt. However, forgiveness is essential for our own spiritual health and well-being. When we hold on to anger and bitterness, it can eat away at us and cause us to become bitter and resentful. But when we forgive, we are able to let go of that anger and to move forward in our lives with a renewed sense of peace and freedom.

When we have received mercy from God, it should motivate us to extend mercy to others. By forgiving those who have wronged us, we are able to let go of anger and bitterness, and to experience the freedom and peace that comes from forgiveness. Let us strive to forgive others, just as God has forgiven us.

RESPOND

- 1. In what ways can forgiveness help to repair and restore relationships?*
- 2. Thank God for the mercy He has shown you. Ask God to show you who you need to extend mercy to today.*

DAY 05

THURSDAY

Lessons From a Locust

READ

Locusts have no king, yet they advance together in ranks.

Proverbs 30:27

Some men came carrying a paralytic on a mat and tried to take him into the house to lay him before Jesus. When they could not find a way to do this because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and lowered him on his mat through the tiles into the middle of the crowd, right in front of Jesus. When Jesus saw their faith, he said, "Friend, your sins are forgiven."

Luke 5:18-20

REFLECT

Locusts don't wait to be invited. They find their place. Giving means you become like a locust. You find a way to make a difference. If you want to give, you are not waiting to be asked – you are finding your place to make a difference.

The locust illustrates the nature of Christian service. We are called to be selfless servants, who serve out of love for God and others. We are not called to wait for people to ask us to serve. We are not called to wait for permission to do what needs to be done. It is not about us, it is about making a difference in the lives of others in whatever way God has planned.

There is power in the principle of us falling into place and doing our part to bring about a greater victory. Godly synergy is realized by those who have a strong desire to bring about the greater good. Selfless service is the secret to powerful synergy, while selfishness is its enemy.

Similar to the locust, the paralytic's friends in Mark 5 knew what their friend needed. They didn't fill out requests or apply for permits; they stepped up and did their part in the Kingdom of God. When we step out and take our place, God moves, miracles happen, and God's healing can descend upon our land.

Learn from the locust today and take your place in the Kingdom.

RESPOND

- 1. In what ways have you experienced the power of selfless service and synergy in the Kingdom of God?*
- 2. Ask God to show you who he wants you to partner with today for kingdom advancement.*

DAY 06

FRIDAY

Serve Others Into Greatness

READ

Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms."

1 Peter 4:10

Whoever welcomes a prophet as a prophet will receive a prophet's reward, and whoever welcomes a righteous person as a righteous person will receive a righteous person's reward. And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones who is my disciple, truly I tell you, that person will certainly not lose their reward."

Matthew 10:41-42

REFLECT

As Christians, we are called to serve others and to help them grow into the people that God has created them to be. This calling extends to all aspects of our lives, and we can serve others in many different ways. Whether it is through our work, our relationships, or our community involvement, we have the opportunity to make a positive impact on the lives of those around us.

One who is living in the fulfillment of the 'Learn, Live, Give' call does everything he can to serve someone else's purpose into greatness, and we do so by trusting in God's reward system.

We generously use 'whatever' gift we have to be stewards of God's grace to someone else. Sometimes, that is identifying and articulating the call of God on someone's life. Sometimes, it is giving aid to someone who is in need. Other times, it is identifying how you can be an addition to someone else's mission.

Finally, Christians can serve others by being an example of what it means to follow Christ. This involves living our lives in a way that reflects the teachings of Jesus, such as being kind, compassionate, and forgiving. It also involves sharing the love of Christ with those around us, whether through our words or our actions. By living out our faith in this way, we can serve as a beacon of light and hope to those around us and help them to grow into greatness.

RESPOND

- 1. Thank God for the people He has sent to bless and mature you.*
- 2. Ask God to anoint you to serve someone else into greatness today.*

DAY 07

SATURDAY

Give to Those Who Are Closest First

READ

Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. The second is this: Love your neighbor as yourself. No other commandment is greater than these.

Mark 12:30-31

REFLECT

As Christians, we are called to love our neighbors as ourselves and to treat others as we would want to be treated. But what does this look like in practice? One way that we can live out this calling is by giving first to those who are closest to us.

Giving to those who are closest to us is not always easy. It can be tempting to prioritize the needs of strangers ahead of the needs of those who are closest to us. But as Christians, our integrity dictates that those who are closest to us should see the brightest light of Christ in us.

One way to give to those who are closest to us is by being present and attentive to their needs. This could involve setting aside time to spend with our family members, listening to our friends when they need to talk, or offering support and encouragement to our coworkers.

It could also involve being willing to sacrifice our own time and resources to meet the needs of those who are closest to us.

Our integrity dictates that we should give first to those who are closest to us. This involves being present and attentive to their needs, showing them love and compassion, and being willing to sacrifice our own time and resources to meet their needs. Let us strive to be a light to those who are closest to us and to show them the love of Christ in all that we do.

RESPOND

1. What are some practical ways that you can give to those who are closest to you, such as your family members, friends, or coworkers?

2. Thank God for those who God has put closest to you in your life. Then ask God for the grace to be present and loving to the people that we are nearest to.

