

**A DEVOTIONAL
ON THE XA24**

BY THE CHI ALPHA STAFF

Introduction

Welcome to the XA-24 Devotional,

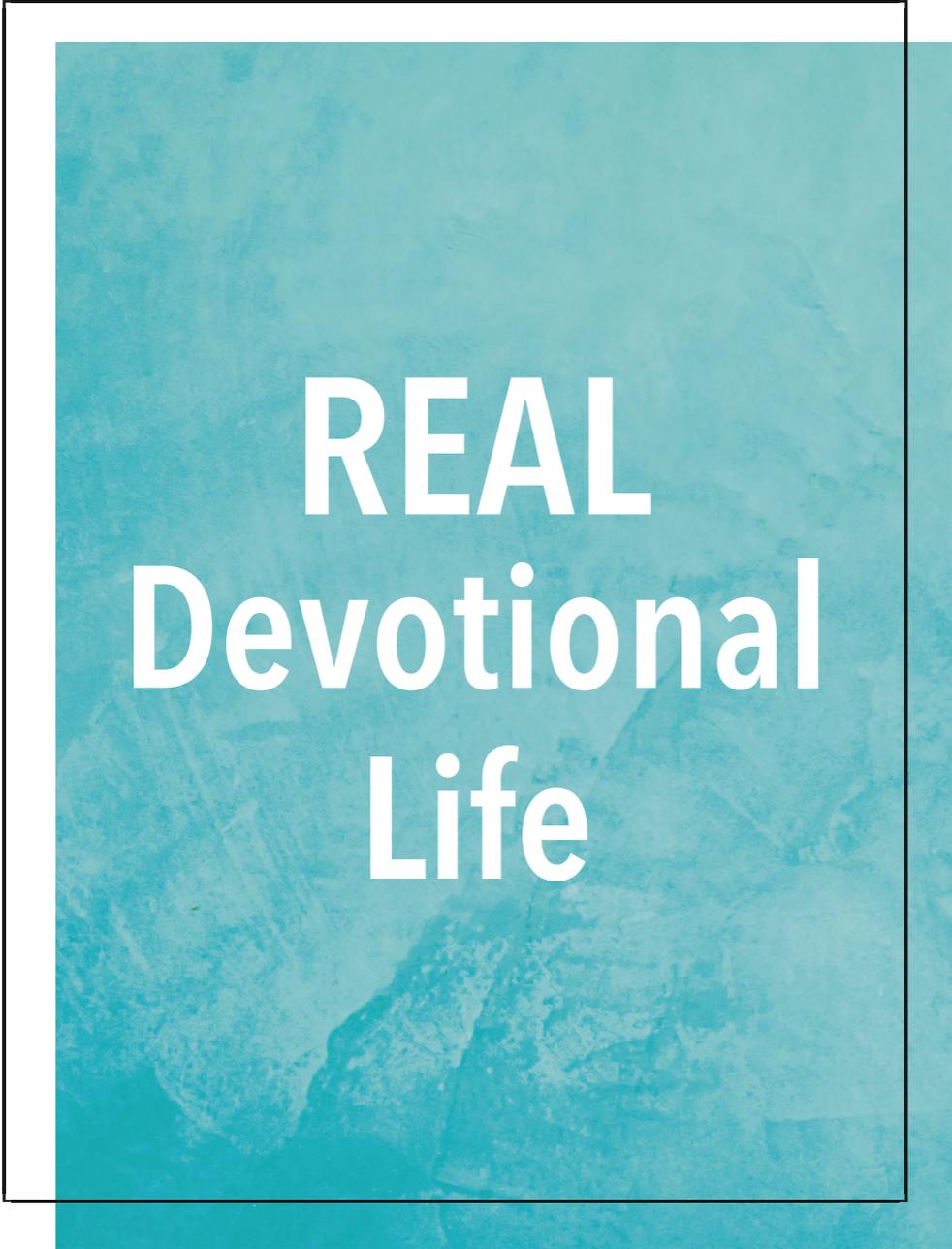
Here at Chi Alpha at UVA, we have long believed that words matter. How we speak to one another, and the words we choose shape us and those around us. That is why we have chosen twenty-four axioms for our community. We hope you take these phrases to heart, and repeat often! Ephesians 4:29 says, “Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.” We chose axioms that we think are wise, timeless, and helpful for building each other up. They remind us what is of value, how to treat others, where to strive for more, and who we really are.

This devotional will take you through a different axiom daily. Each section starts with Scripture to show us God’s truth within the saying, continues to a meditation on it, and closes with reflective questions to help you process integrating the axiom into your life. We believe that if our culture and community come to know and treasure these words of wisdom, we will all daily come to look more like Christ. Not just that, but we as a body will come to look and act more like the Kingdom we pray will come to earth.

With affection and gratitude for you,

Chi Alpha Staff

“May these words of my mouth and this meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer.” Psalm 19:14



REAL Devotional Life

Day 1: Real Devotional Life

Reading scripture doesn't cause God to love you more, it causes you to love God more.

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. Do not be carried away by all kinds of strange teachings. It is good for our hearts to be strengthened by grace.

Hebrews 13:8-9

Do you ever have those days where you question God's love? Where you question if He's actually listening, if He really knows you that well, or if He's truly good? I know I have. I think that we've all had those days; those moments of asking God to remind us the truth of who He says He is. The truth is, God's love for us is unchanging. The writer of Hebrews shares with us that Jesus is the same yesterday and today and forever. What good news! We know that God's love is unchanging, unfailing, and brings us into greater understanding of who He is.

However, in those times of wonder and questioning, it can be easy to forget that God's love for us cannot lessen or fail. We are scared that our failures and shortcomings will begin to erode His love. It is also far easier to be tempted by the thought that maybe, through our actions, we can make God love us more. Maybe we're doing something wrong, maybe we can fix our relationship with God ourselves.

God, in His infinite kindness and desire to be in relationship with us, has given us a better solution. We don't have to earn His love, and we don't have to fear losing it. Instead, when we are doubting His love, we can be strengthened by grace!

But how do we do this?

We spend time with God through prayer and through reading Scripture. Reading Scripture doesn't cause God to love us more. Remember, God's love is unchanging. Instead, it causes us to love God more. The more time we spend with Him, the more we see and know His heart for us. The more time we spend with Him, the more we truly come to believe that He couldn't love us any more or any less. What a joy! What a relief!

What's more, as we read Scripture and understand God's heart, the more our hearts are shaped to look like His. We begin to look more like the sons and daughters that God created us to be. We care for what He cares about! We take up the cause of the Cross to seek and find those who don't know Jesus, but who are in desperate need of a Savior's love, just like us. This has the power to give us a higher view of God, to change us, and to change our communities around us.

God's love for us is so complete, that it couldn't grow any larger. God's love for us is so steadfast, that it could never get smaller. We, however, are people who are growing more and more in our capacity to love. Reading Scripture grows our hearts for the world around us, and most importantly, grows our hearts for our awesome God, who is so worthy

of our love. And every day, we can grow in giving Him more! Today, as you read Scripture, rest in God, asking Him to reveal the depth and height of His great love. Then, ask Him how you can respond to His love!

Reflection and Journaling Questions:

Have you ever questioned if God's love for you changes? What are scriptures you've used to reflect on God's unchanging love for you?

Day 2: Real Devotional Life

Prayer is relational and consequential.

One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples." He said to them, "When you pray, say: 'Father, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us. And lead us not into temptation.

Luke 11:1-4

Have you ever wondered if prayer actually does anything? Or, have you ever been in a place where you believe prayer is worth it and worth doing, but you've had no idea how to pray, what to say? Don't fret, you are not alone! Prayer is one of the great mysteries of the Christian life. It is almost unfathomable that we can pray to the all powerful creator God and that He would hear us, let alone do anything about our prayers. And yet, we know very clearly from scripture that both are true!

In Luke 11, commonly known as the Lord's Prayer, Jesus himself teaches us prayer is both relational and consequential. At this point, the disciples had spent a great deal of time with Jesus and saw him constantly praying. They asked Jesus if he could teach them to pray as he prays.

From the very beginning, he sets the stage for prayer being relational. Luke 11:2 says, "He said to them, "When you pray, say: Father." When we pray we are engaging in relationship with our heavenly Father. Prayer is so personal! Verse 2 continues, "Father, hallowed be your name..." Not only is he Father, but he is deserving of praise. When we pray, we recognize who he is to us, his character. This is continuing the relational aspect of prayer. First and foremost, prayer is relational. In the same sentence, Jesus continues, "your kingdom come." Requesting for God's kingdom to come is about aligning our hearts to His will. We are praying for his rule and reign over our lives. When Jesus tells the disciples to pray for God's kingdom to come, he's teaching them that part of a healthy relationship with God is desiring for God's ways to dictate our life - not our own. Prayer is relational.

The remainder of the Lord's prayer continues to teach us the dual aspect of prayer. Verse 3 says, "Give us each day our daily bread." In praying for daily bread, we're asking Him to meet our daily needs. By having our needs met, we learn prayer is consequential. Verse 4, "Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us." Daily we pray for forgiveness, daily we are reminded to forgive others Scripture tells us that when we repent and ask for forgiveness, it is offered.

against us." Daily we pray for forgiveness, daily we are reminded to forgive others Scripture tells us that when we repent and ask for forgiveness, it is offered. Again, prayer is consequential. Verse 4 continues, "And lead us not into temptation." When we pray daily against our sins and for forgiveness, we are reminded to strive for holiness. It

helps our hearts recognize areas in our lives growing in sin, things we may otherwise ignore if we weren't spending time with God. Jesus is saying through our relationship with the Father, we can pray against encroaching temptation - we ask Him to show us where we are blind to it. And thankfully, He does! Prayer is relational and prayer is consequential.

Jesus takes a seemingly difficult task and makes it approachable. He teaches us a good prayer is both relational and consequential. When we pray, we have the honor of speaking to God on a personal level, as one in relationship with Him. We can trust he hears our prayers, he takes joy in listening, simply because He loves us as His children! We also take comfort in the fact that our prayer is consequential. When we pray, it's not just relational, but it's causal! We can pray with expectation. Jesus and the disciples had their needs met. We know God cares because of numerous Biblical examples. We can pray with the same expectancy. Pray as Jesus prayed. Prayer is relational and consequential.

Reflection and Journaling Questions:

What are different aspects of your relationship with God that you can name, praise him for, and invite more into your daily experience of Him?

What are specific things you can believe and ask for in prayer, today?

Day 3: Real Devotional Life

Remember who you were, who you are, and who He is.

When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the Lord your God for the good land he has given you. Be careful that you do not forget the Lord your God, failing to observe his commands, his laws and his decrees that I am giving you this day. Otherwise, when you eat and are satisfied, when you build fine houses and settle down, and when your herds and flocks grow large and your silver and gold increases and all you have is multiplied, then your heart will become proud and you will forget the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.

Deuteronomy 8:10-14

Do you remember the awkwardness of middle school? The hair, the clothes you wore, the shows and movies you watched, passing notes or texting in class? Many of us cringe, laugh, or do both when we think back on those preteen years. Part of what makes recalling those middle school days so humorous is the difference of who we are now. We have vastly matured since navigating that jungle (we hope!). Though it is fun to remember who we were and be thankful that we've changed, the practice of remembrance is actually vital to the Christian life. To look back and remember who we were before entering into a relationship with Christ and who we are now is a way to honor God for all he's done. A way to acknowledge his goodness in our lives.

In Deuteronomy 8, God commands the Israelites to remember what he had done for them after freeing them from slavery in Egypt. Remembering who we were and who we are now helps us to realize the great work God has done in our lives, just as the Israelites practiced the discipline of remembrance, recognizing their move from slavery to freemen to owners of abundant land. The act of remembrance creates humble and thankful hearts.

This example comes to pass in the life of Paul, once known as Saul. He grew up within a Jewish sect deeply devoted to the law and avoided all contact with Gentiles. He was passionate about his Jewish faith to the point of seeking out Christians to persecute and imprison them for their belief in Jesus. Acts 8:3 tells us, "But Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off both men and women and put them in prison." To Paul, Jesus was a heretic and a liar. The people who followed Jesus were just as shameful for spreading what Paul believed to be false. Christians feared Paul gravely.

... But then, Paul had a miraculous encounter with Jesus and became devoted to the Gospel! Acts 9:20 shares, "At once he began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God." Paul, a man once determined to destroy Christianity, became a great apostle in the faith and wrote a large amount of the New Testament.

In a letter to a younger believer, Paul explained, "Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief. The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that

are in Christ Jesus. Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners - of whom I am the worst," (1 Timothy 1:13-15). In this verse, Paul remembered who he was, who became in Christ, and the gracious God that transformed him.

In our own lives, we are called to practice the same discipline of remembrance so we may cultivate humble, grateful hearts. We have the honor of serving a God who has the power to transform! The longer we serve him, the more we continue to change from who we once were. Remember who you were, who you are, and who He is.

Reflection and Journaling Question:

In what ways have you seen God change you since you started following Jesus?

Day 4: Real Devotional Life

Scripture builds us to be strong, steady, and substantial.

As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.

Isaiah 55:10-11

In a world overflowing with information, opinions, and “How to be a better friend/employee/millennial/meme-master” articles at our fingertips, it’s easy to feel overwhelmed and inundated by the world’s so-called wisdom. It comes from politicians, teachers, our friends, the news, celebrities, and obscure sources on the internet. As we hear all these competing voices, we wonder who do I trust? Whose voice carries weight? Everyone tells me to do something else! What matters the most, knowing that I have limited time and emotional capacity to accomplish things?

Growing up, the more of this “wisdom” I was exposed to, the more insecure, over-analyzing, and cynical I became. If there were a million different truths, that meant there wasn’t actually any truth at all, right? That thought left me feeling empty. My first-year core group leader was the first person to ever explain why I felt this way. She said I needed to stop listening to interpretations, and instead go to the

source of truth. I needed to sit at the feet of my Creator for awhile, and listen to His voice. She told me that the difference between any human’s voice and God’s is their authority. At a singular and authoritative “Let There Be”, God’s voice created light, earth, life! What human can do that?! What human has that wisdom and power?!

Isaiah 55 tells us that God’s words accomplish the purpose for which He sent them, just like rain brings about vegetation. Water is necessary for a seed to grow. Similarly, God’s word is necessary for His image-bearers to grow strong, steady, and substantial. Do you want to be strong when tested? Do you want a steady, unshakeable character in the face of temptation? Do you want to be a person of substance in a world that so often feels vapid and vain? Soak in the Scriptures and let them build up inside of you day by day by day. And because God’s word is powerful, it will be accomplished and achieve the purpose for which God sent it. All you have to do is receive it.

But remember this key point. Matthew 4:4 quotes Jesus as saying: “It is written: ‘Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’” You don’t eat bread once and think you’re set for the week. You fuel yourself regularly! We need to do the same with God’s word. And just as the crops in Isaiah 55 need more than one rainfall, one glass of water won’t hold you for a week. We need to be people who regularly soak in the word. When we do, God’s word will water the field of our hearts and cause seeds of faith to grow. What a miracle!

Reflection Question:

Where have you been consuming words from the world in an effort to strengthen your mind, soul, or heart? What steps can you take to recenter on His word?

Day 5: Real Devotional Life

Never let serving God replace knowing God.

“Martha, Martha,” the Lord answered, “you are worried and upset about many things, but few things are needed—or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her.”

Luke 10: 41-42

Emails, chores, assignments, notifications, relationship demands, and so on-- there is always something demanding our attention these days. No matter which way we look, there are things that need to be done. Have you ever felt the weight of all this stuff? Has it ever left you crippled, exhausted, or exasperated knowing that no matter how much you try, there is still more demanding your attention?

Thankfully, Jesus had something to say to us about all our stuff. In the wake of everything that demands our attention, Jesus sweetly says, “Hey, come near me. Let me lend you a hand with all that stuff you’re trying to carry.”

Busy lifestyles aren’t new to the world. There were plenty of over-achievers in Jesus’s time. One of those was Martha, the sister of Mary, who we observe at the end of Luke 10. Scripture says that “Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made.” Martha gets ticked-off when she sees her sister, Mary, sitting pleasantly next to Je-

sus and complains to him about Mary’s lack of productivity. This is when Jesus sweetly assures Martha that the most productive thing in the Kingdom is prioritizing time with him, our loving Savior.

In *Live Dead Joy*, Dick Brogden writes, “Jesus loves it when we listen to Him. We are so distracted with serving that sometimes we forget to listen to him.” Yes, that’s right! We can miss the point even when all of our stuff has to do with serving our God. What is the point of doing stuff for God if we have ceased to experience transformation in Him?

Scripture says that in God we find our rest, strength, comfort, vision, hope, joy, love, purpose, and much more. As human beings, created in His image, we should aspire to be carried by our creator. When we approach Jesus, he equips us for what we need that day. If we’re tired, he refreshes. If we’re hurting, he comforts. If we’re dissatisfied, he fills our heart with vision. If we have joy, he multiplies it and helps us to share it with others.

What a wonder it is that an all-knowing, all-powerful God would desire to have a relationship with us! When you think about it, who else has more stuff to do than God? He holds the universe together, guides his people, works millions of miracles we never see, and so much more. Yet, He desires to be intimately and personally involved with each and everyone of us, constantly inviting us into His presence. Will you take His invitation?

Reflection and Journaling Question:

What are some ways that you can prioritize spending time at the feet of Jesus this week?

Day 6: Real Devotional Life

Genuine love for Jesus means obedience to Jesus.

“Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me. The one who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love them and show myself to them.”

John 14:21

It seems to me we don't really care for the word obedience. Obedience brings to mind a blind follower, someone without critical thinking skills. Obedience carries with it the idea of compliance without understanding. Some sort of fear-based responsive action. And yet Jesus, our Good Shepherd and loving Savior, tells us that love for God is marked by obedience. What's more, He says that keeping His commands will show us more of who Jesus is! What's going on?

First, God is showing us that He cares much more about our heart posture toward Him than our performance. God desires to win our hearts! Obedience is the natural outflow of a heart that is oriented toward God. Obedience means that we trust God. That He is who He says He is, that He will do what He promises. Love for God means putting God's glory on display through our own lives!

What better example than our Savior. Jesus so loved the Father that, at every turn and temptation, Jesus yielded His spirit to the Father's will. Despite being subject to discomfort and disrepute, rejection and be-

trayal, Jesus knew the purpose that He came to live and die for: the reconciliation of God's people. Though tempted multiple times to save Himself, He did not. Why?

In *Live Dead Joy*, Dick Brogden writes, “He could not save Himself and still save us. He could not yield up His spirit and remain in control at the same time. Surrender of our spirits is an all-or-nothing proposition. There is no negotiation of terms... When we are not yielded, we seek to participate in the salvation of others without losing self. We agree to work in the fields of God as long as we do not lose our identity, the respect of our peers, and fair treatment by our elders and leaders.”

Do you find yourself putting conditions on how you're willing to respond to God's commands?

“I'll learn to live generously... once I earn more money.”

“I'll follow God's commands... as long as I still get married by 27.”

“I'm willing to go wherever God calls me to the mission field... if my parents agree, if it's safe, and I have a job offer for when I come back.”

Let me encourage you that your obedience matters. Your obedience to God's purposes will cause you to be conformed to the image of Christ in powerful ways. If you are seeking to know God and to be known by Him, Jesus says it all: He will show himself to you when you keep His commands. And it will be a worthwhile pursuit!

And hey, it's impossible to keep Jesus' commands if you don't know Him. Plain and simple. When you study the Word of God, when you follow after Him in prayer, you will have a deeper and more full understanding of the heart and passions of our Heavenly Father. When you understand His heart and passions, it will be easier to love and obey Him. Just like Jesus, you will know that the purpose of your obedience is worth the cost. So open up Scripture and learn why God is worth loving, and His will is worth obeying— and be prepared for God to show you!

Reflection and Journaling Question:

What do you think is the purpose that God has for His people?

Day 7: Real Devotional Life

Our devotion goes beyond our emotion.

So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.

1 John 4:16

Emotions are valuable. They can be an early warning system for danger, or reveal things through instinct when our thoughts are still catching up. They are also a way God has blessed us: He made good emotions feel good. When we are in love, we feel all gooey and indestructible. Something exciting happens, we feel energized and joyful. We eat a great meal, we feel satisfied and relaxed. Emotions are not just useful -- they're also enjoyable! But remember, 1 John 4:16 doesn't say "so we have come to feel and believe the love that God has for us." Why is that?

Because emotions are also fickle. Emotions can be a response to what we think is happening rather than the truth of a situation. They can be created by our sinful desires, and not godly ones. Sometimes, we have 'bad' feelings because a situation is difficult, not necessarily detrimental. For example, I don't feel good when I exercise - I don't care what you say about endorphins! But even though I feel lousy, I know it's good for me. What this means is that while emotions are helpful and even enjoyable, they are not truth. Truth is truth. Our emotions just

reveal our understanding of and relationship to truth. But my emotions cannot change what is true.

Scripture, however, is truth. It communicates truths. For example, Scripture shares that God offers me grace, which is unmerited favor. Sometimes I read a verse about God's grace and I feel joy and peace. But other times, I read it and I feel ashamed. Does this mean I should feel shame or that His grace must be a lie? No way! Rather, my shame is tempting me to believe that I can and should have earned God's love. Does this ever happen to you? I feel like I can't be the only one who occasionally struggles here.

Here is my answer to that struggle: as a Christian, I must have a devotion to God that goes beyond my emotional experience of Him. Our emotions will change, but He is the never-changing God.

In John 16:33, Jesus says "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world." Jesus had just been telling them about how they would grieve for a while about His death (though the disciples did not yet know that's what He was referring to). "Now is your time of grief, but I will see you again and you will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy" (John 16:22). Jesus said the world may rejoice while they grieve, that they would have trouble, but a day would come when no one could take away their joy. He was making a promise to them, built on the foundation of what He knew was soon coming -- the Cross. Jesus knew that no matter what we feel in this world, no matter how long we wait for the complete coming of God's

kingdom, the Cross stands unmovable as our proof of God's love, salvation, and offer of relationship with us.

Our devotion has to go beyond our emotion, because emotions ebb and change. But nothing can take away the truth of the Cross! No enemy, no event, and certainly no emotion. God loves you, and He has made a way to be in relationship with you. That is the truth. So, no matter your feelings of the day, no matter how tempted you are to doubt -- know and believe in His love! Have a devotion that goes beyond emotion.

Reflection and Journaling Question:

What is a practice you can instill in your life that will help you to believe in God's love for you, even outside your daily experience?

Day 8: Real Devotional Life

The Christian life is a Spirit-led life.

So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

Galatians 5:16-18

I once heard a pastor ask, “Who thinks the Christian life is hard?” I remember glancing around the room to see if anyone was brave or honest enough to raise his or her hand. Looking at the few raising their hands, the pastor said, “You’re right. But the Christian life isn’t just hard; it’s impossible! That’s why we live by the Spirit.”

Christ died so that we would experience newness of life and live differently on earth. But does living differently ever feel difficult? Why is it that there are some days where we can’t seem to want, let alone do, what the Lord would desire? Sometimes, we can tend to see Christianity as this: Jesus gave me eternal life, but now it’s up to me to live a godly life. Loving my enemies, serving others, being blameless and pure -- after falling short of this again and again, I understand what that pastor meant by the Christian life being impossible on our own. It’s trying to be Christ-like without the power of Christ!

In Galatians 5, Paul sheds light on this tension happening in our souls. He names two simultaneous realities: the Spirit and the flesh. We are completely reconciled to God through Jesus, but we still live in our old body. Our flesh’s inclination is to desire what is contrary to God (Galatians 5:17). So how can we follow Christ if our very flesh is contrary to Him?! As God’s children, we’ve been given the gift of the Holy Spirit to lead us. If you are in Christ, you have the very presence of God within you! This is great news, because it means that conflict in our souls isn’t bad. It means the Holy Spirit is within us and is fighting a battle against our flesh! But we have the ability to choose who we will follow - the Spirit or our flesh?

If we are to follow Jesus and live in His will, being led by the Spirit isn’t just helpful, it’s essential. The Spirit is not passive. He leads, and we follow. Like the locomotive of a train, which leads and brings power to the rest of the train, the Spirit leads us by His power. Just like a train needs to stay hooked up to a locomotive in order to move, we must stay hooked up to the Spirit and go where He leads. Thankfully, He is always leading us closer to the Kingdom of God!

The joy of being reconciled to God means that we get to walk in His glorious presence each day! We’re not on our own; as we walk by the Spirit, we’re able to do the impossible. We can resist sin that before held us trapped, face situations that once crippled us with fear, and even see miracles done by God’s power! As we live with our eyes fixed on the Kingdom, His Spirit is the best partner we have to work in and through us, and to neglect the beautiful reality of God’s Spirit is to ne-

glect the engine of the Christian life. May we always acknowledge and be empowered by the presence of the Spirit within us!

Reflection and Journaling Question:

Ask God what is one thing you can do to walk by His Spirit today.
What is that thing?



REAL Community

Day 9: Real Community

Always ask, "What difference does the Gospel make here?"

Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.

Colossians 3:12

The Gospel is a shocking reality, no matter what angle you look at it. It is the story of the One who created human life willingly sacrificing His own life for ours. It is the only Person who has never done anything wrong, willing to take the punishment of everyone else's mistakes. It is a King looking down at a mass of condemned traitors and terrorists to the Kingdom...and willingly leaving His throne just for the chance of restoring them to the Kingdom. It is a Father and His Son entering separation and pain and grief... so that you could be adopted into the Father's household. The Gospel is a culture-transcending, norm-breaking, expectation-blowing reality!

And, it will have an impact on every area of your life if you let it. Whenever you are stressed, frustrated, confused, if you are experiencing relational difficulties, doubt, a betrayal -- one of the best actions you can take is this: find a quiet place to withdraw, even if it's just a quiet place in your mind, and honestly ask "What difference does the Gospel make here?"

Perhaps the Gospel will remind you of the grandiose nature of your own forgiveness from God and inspire you to similarly offer radical forgiveness. Maybe it will give you the encouragement you need to endure a difficult situation by reminding you of God's incredible love for you. In remembering the Son who was willing to lay down His life for your sake, you may realize that laying down the need for always having a clean kitchen or the frustration of a less-than-tactful teammate is worth bearing for the sake of loving with a Christ-like love that wins their heart for the Lord.

The Gospel will challenge you to reconsider how you handle every interaction and situation. We may once have lived for security, self-promotion, and self-satisfaction, but the Gospel strips us of the right to demand to have it "our way." Rather, the Scriptures teach us that as recipients of the Gospel, we should clothe ourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.

Rather, the Scriptures teach us that as recipients of the Gospel, we should clothe ourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.

When we consider the radical nature of God's love towards us, how can we offer the world anything but that same unmerited love? If the King of every living thing, Creator of the known universe, and Ultimate Judge of the living and the dead -- if that God embraced loving you and saving you even in the face of your sin and treachery to Him -- Can't you offer grace to a brother or sister who is a fallen human just like you? Their debt to you is so much smaller than the debt you once

owed God. This is the difference the Gospel makes. We no longer live according to the previous standards of the world. We live according to the merciful and gracious standards of our Saving God.

I assure you, you will see how the Kingdom breaks through into your life as you step more and more into a Gospel-centered life. What difference does the Gospel make here? An eternity.

Reflection and Journaling Question:

As recipients of the Gospel, we are told to clothe ourselves in “compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.” How can you better offer these same gifts to others in your life?

Day 10: Real Community

Carefronting is caring more about their future than their feelings.

Wounds from a friend can be trusted, but an enemy multiplies kisses.

Proverbs 27:6

I can look back on several times in my life where friends have sat me down and talked with me about the path I had chosen. I was in error and had sin in my life. I wasn't always thankful in the moment for their "care" of me (sometimes we love our sin, don't we?), but in hindsight, I'm very thankful! I wouldn't be the person I am today if it weren't for their timely words of wisdom and caution. Their words of, "you shouldn't be looking at that" are words that changed a trajectory in my life. A path I didn't even know was harmful to me, my God, and my future relationship.

Confrontation and conflict are two words that have very negative connotations in many circles today. Why is this? I believe we have forgotten what it means to be a true friend. In the age of tolerance and political correctness, we have over-zealously applied these attitudes to our own personal friendships. We don't rock the boat. We don't speak up. We have lost the ability and desire to Care-Front, and through this, we are forfeiting each other's futures.

Care-fronting is when we combine caring and confronting. The Proverbs tell us that wounds from a friend can be trusted! As friends, we

have to be able to speak into each other's lives and help each other grow in godliness.

One of the reasons I hate personality tests is because when we fill them out, we are often filling out who we hope we would be. We should have those closest to us fill it out and then I think we would get a truer reading. This is because our friends often see the "real us." We can have blind spots to our own personalities and even to our own sin. This is why we need friends that have the green light to care-front us about things that are going on in our lives. About the things we can't quite notice ourselves, or don't want to notice about ourselves.

The thing about care-fronting is that we have to get both parts right. Not only must we confront the sin in each other's lives but it must be done because we care. Their future is worth more than their current feelings. We may fear to lose the friendship, but love reminds us: them being holy is more important than me having an easy friendship. To truly confront sin is the most caring thing we can do for our friends in the long run. It's a temporary inconvenience in order to save the years of pain and suffering that can come from sin. We may fear to lose the friendship, but what friendship that is truly worth having is one that avoids truth telling? A friendship based on lies or one that looks the other way is no friendship at all.

But we must also do it with care. If you are desiring to confront someone all the time, then there may be something wrong with your own heart (many times we call that legalism). If you feel like you're a little nervous and scared, then you probably have the right heart behind the

care-frontation. It's not easy to talk to our friends about sin in their life, but it's always right. A part of living in real community with each other is to be able to have iron sharpen iron (Proverbs 27:17), so that we can grow into the people of God we were created to be. This happens best when the community gathers around us and charges us to grow.

After all, if we don't talk with our friends about what is going on in their lives, who will?

Reflection and Journaling Questions:

Have you given someone(s) access to your life to call out sin?

How can you embolden yourself to care-front in the future?

Day 11: Real Community

Rejoice with those who rejoice, mourn with those who mourn.

For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.

Romans 12:4-5

Recently, I had coffee with a friend who has known me for over 15 years. She asked me what my dad thought about my role in ministry. I replied, “We haven’t really talked about it, we don’t talk about much.” Recognizing the silence across the table, I looked up. My friend was crying. She was mourning my broken relationship with my dad with me, and for me. This coffee date reminded me of something important. It is insecurity and pride that makes me think that I can handle this particular broken relationship on my own. Instead, the beautiful reality -- if I am willing to let them -- is that I have a family in Christ who will bear this with me. We edify the body of Christ when we mourn with those who mourn.

In his Live Dead Joy devotional, Dick Brogden notes that, “We overcome evil by speaking the truth of God’s character — proclaiming both what He is for and what He is against. We speak truth; truth that is merciful, gracious, kind, firm, strong, corrective, and life-giving. Part and parcel of being for Jesus is publicly standing with Him on what He is against.” My friend told me frankly that that sin had mauled my rela-

tionship with my dad. However, that same day, she told me about growth she had seen in me over the years, an increased faith and devotion to God, and a deeper love for people. She reminded me that I was a child of God, and that that reason alone made me worthy to be known. So, she also rejoiced in the ways that the Lord has transformed me over the years! We edify the body of Christ when we rejoice with those who rejoice!

To rejoice or mourn with one another, we must turn from self-preoccupation towards the honor of Christ. What do I mean by this? Paul tells us that we, as individuals, belong to the body of Christ. He then asked the church to remember that, because of this, each member belongs to all the others. As one body, when one or two people rejoice, we should rejoice with them and celebrate with them. Their joy should not equate to our suffering. Paul reminds the Corinthian church, “if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it” (1 Corinthians 12:26). Celebrating the body of Christ honors Christ.

How can you create unity in your community? How can you celebrate your friends? Will you rejoice in their wins as if they were your own, not resorting to jealousy or comparison? Will you mourn with someone over brokenness? Will you hit the pause button on your schedule to be with someone in their loss? Will you serve someone to show that you see his or her hurt? As we act in humility and love, this will ultimately build more intimacy and trust into the body of Christ!

Reflection and Journaling Questions:

Do insecurity, pride, jealousy, comparison, or selfishness get in your way of rejoicing or mourning with others? If so, reflect on which of these are at the root of your lack of identifying with other members in the body of Christ.

How do humility and love inform the way that you can rejoice with those who rejoice and mourn with those who mourn?

Day 12: Real Community

Vulnerability leads to intimacy.

Because we loved you so much, we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well.

1 Thessalonians 2:8

When was the last time you went on a walk and took time to look at other people? What did you notice? You probably noticed they were all wearing earbuds/airpods (or BEATs if they're real cool). We live in the most connected generation to have ever lived, yet we're all alone. We walk alone. We text alone. We look at Facebook alone. This increase in technology and social media stems, in part, from a desire to be known. The desire to not just exist in our own vacuum, but to have our lives matter in relation to others. To have relationships that are deep and meaningful and lived out in real space and time. But we don't know how to do it in today's world. How can we have intimate relationships with those around us?

We must first understand that we are known fully by God (1 Cor 13:12). This truth allows us the freedom to be known by others in a real and vulnerable way because we are secure in our relationship with God. He loves us and wants us to be in relationship with others.

What does it mean to be in relationship with others? Paul shares a key point in his Thessalonian correspondence: "not only did we share the

gospel with you, but we shared our very lives." Paul loved the church that was started in Thessalonica. He loved the people of Thessalonica. He cared for them, prayed for them, hoped for them, believed for them. And to show how much they meant to him, he shared his very life with them. The more we are able to open up and share our lives with those closest to us, the more intimacy we will have with them.

The story of Lazarus raising from the dead is an interesting one when it comes to a study on community. After Jesus tells Lazarus to, "Come out!", he comes out, and then someone has to take the grave cloths off of him. We can conjecture that the people closest to Lazarus are the ones that volunteered to take those things off him. It wasn't glorious, and it probably stunk (literally!) but it was a truly intimate moment. That's what intimacy is going to look (and smell) like sometimes. It won't always be the prettiest but it will be truly doing life together.

Part of being vulnerable is letting people close enough to see the real us. This can be a scary notion if vulnerability is new to you. The definition of vulnerable includes a sense of being susceptible to attack, or exposed. What are those parts of our lives that we need to share but don't want to expose to those around us? That we are scared they may attack? Can I encourage you to make the choice and allow people to know you? Sometimes this means that you will have to go first. You will have to take the step out onto the ledge of vulnerability, not sure of what will be on the other side. But we must share our lives with those closest to us in order to have the intimacy that we truly desire.

Friends that will do anything for us, friends that are closer than siblings, are the friends that we have been vulnerable with. These are the friendships we enjoy the most. These are the friendships that are the most lasting. Because vulnerability leads to intimacy!

Reflection and Journaling Questions:

Who would you consider to be in your closest friendships?

How can you increase the vulnerability in these relationships so that the intimacy may be increased?

What has been holding you back from sharing with those in your closest circles?

Day 13: Real Community

A healthy heart is a grateful heart.

Jesus asked, “Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? Has no one returned to give praise to God except this foreigner?” Then he said to him, “Rise and go; your faith has made you well.”

Luke 17:17-19

Read Luke 17:11-19.

In this story, Jesus is called over to a group of men who had been cast out of society because of their leprous skin. As they call to Jesus, he pronounces them clean. All they had to do was show themselves to the priests and return to their lives. Yet, amazingly, only one returns to fall at Jesus’ feet and thank him!

All ten are cleansed. However, only one is made well. All ten are healed of their physical malady; but one is granted salvation and wholeness. What’s the difference?

Our wholeness, not just physically but spiritually, is rooted in our gratitude. Because when we stand face-to-face with this Holy and perfect God who has pardoned us from our sin through Jesus Christ, there is no acceptable response but praise and thanks! We see in Scripture that ungratefulness was present at the Fall. In Romans 1:21 Paul writes, “For although they (the unrighteous) knew God, they neither glorified

him as God nor gave thanks to him.” Even demons can acknowledge God’s power (Mark 1:24)— it is the Christian who is thankful for it.

Gordon Fee writes, “[A life of continual thanksgiving] reflects a life that evidence the only proper posture before God -- humility -- a life that is constantly aware of God’s mercies.” (1) Fee says that diminishing gratitude in our lives is connected with increased self-reliance and self-confidence. A grateful heart has a healthy awareness of God’s goodness and grace.

What does this mean for our community? You and I find ourselves in a culture where critique and criticism are normalized, and where finding a fault or weakness in an argument is considered smart. We find ourselves looking for the bad rather than the good. How do I know this? Because I’m the sort of person who fixates on the typo in the email rather than the intended message. We swim against the tide of culture when we choose to trust, to honor, and to be grateful. Have you noticed that Paul starts many of his letters with a grateful heart to God for the people around him? Let us remember to thank God for the people who surround us!

When your life is saturated in gratitude, you recognize that every thing you have, every opportunity you’re given, and everyone around you is a gift from God. Paul asks us, “What have you that you have not received?” (1 Cor 4:7) His answer is implied. Nothing! We can be tempted to think we have earned the good things in our lives, but that raises the question: from where did you receive your intellectual, physical, or other capacities to work towards those things? Is it a healthy

heart that recognizes these gifts are from God, and remembers to give thanks. Let us be a community that celebrates the good, and is ever-increasing in our thankfulness for the gifts of grace in our lives!

Reflection and Journaling Questions:

What do you have to be grateful for? If you journal, consider writing down five things (or people) each day that you are grateful for. Be aware of how God changes your attitude as you bring your attention to the many gifts of grace you have been given.

Who can you give thanks to God for? First, express your thanks to God for the people you have. Then, think about telling them face-to-face or in a letter what they have meant to you. My prayer is that our community would be one defined by a healthy gratitude!

(1) Fee, Gordon. Listening to the Spirit in the Text

Day 14: Real Community

Choose trust over suspicion.

You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

Ephesians 4:22-24

“Mind the Gap” is a phrase popularized by its use in the London Underground to make sure passengers didn’t fall or get stuck in the space between the station platform and the train. That gap is a fact of life, and one that passengers better pay attention to if they want to make it safely in one piece to their destination!

In life we are continually faced with another gap—the gap between our expectations and our experience in relationships. You come home expecting a clean kitchen, but your roommate has left the kitchen an explosion of dirty dishes! You expect your group project teammates to show up on time to the meeting, but you sit for thirty minutes waiting for them to show up. You text a close friend and expect to hear back, but after a week you haven’t gotten a response. In any relationship and in all communities, we will face a gap between our expectations and our experience. How we fill this gap greatly impacts the health of our relationships. We have a choice— in moments of missed expectations,

we will either grant the benefit of the doubt and trust our friends, or we will allow seeds of suspicion to be planted.

Healthy, loving relationships will be defined by trust. Trust travels with her siblings of positivity, graciousness, and thankfulness. This is the attitude of the new life in the Spirit! Trust always protects and restores the relationship.

Unhealthy, broken relationships will be defined by suspicion. Suspicion travels with her siblings of negativity, ungraciousness, and grumbling! This is the attitude of the old, fleshly self we are suppose to put off. Suspicion always unravels the relationship.

What does choosing trust over suspicion look like? It looks like going out of your way to believe the best about a person, and give them the benefit of the doubt. It looks like choosing not to jump to conclusions and fill the gap with suspicion, but instead extending the most generous explanation possible for what may have happened. It looks like coming to a friend’s defense when others assume the worst of them. It looks like going directly to a friend and having an honest conversation if they continually act in a way that begins to erode your trust.

Ultimately, navigating the gaps in our relationships and communities requires us “to be made new in the attitudes of our minds”. The beginning of the end of a relationship often has less to do with an action or a word, and more to do with a thought of doubt and suspicion. How we choose to think and respond in relationships will either be the response of our old self and corrupted desires, or our new self and our

renewed minds. When we choose to embrace an attitude of trust, our relationships will not only be able to weather any storm, but they will thrive as God designed them!

Reflection and Journaling Question:

What do you normally fill the gap with in your relationships? Are there any current relationships where you need to choose trust over suspicion?

Day 15: Real Community

We must love truth and truly love.

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

John 1:14

I have never tried to walk on a tightrope, but I am fairly confident that it is not easy. It takes incredible focus to make sure that you don't fall off in either direction. This image captures what it can feel like when seeking to follow the example of Jesus. The Scriptures tell us that He came full of grace and truth, which is what I believe it means to "love truth and truly love." We see Jesus walk this tightrope with incredible precision.

Jesus was full of grace. As Kevin Deyoung says so well, "He welcomed sinners and tax collectors and ate with them... He welcomed children to come and sit on His lap... He healed lepers, the lame, and the blind. He saved the criminal on the cross, who in his dying breath, confessed that the dying man next to him was truly the Son of God."¹

Jesus was also full of truth. Deyoung continues: "He condemned many of the religious leaders of his day for being liars and hypocrites. He talked more about hell than He talked about heaven. He called all those who would be His disciples to take up their cross

daily and follow Him...He obeyed the law, set standards, and demanded everything from His followers, even their very lives."²

We see Jesus walk the tightrope without falling off of either side. He set the example for us to love truth AND truly love. We are not to choose between truly loving or loving truth, we are to vigorously embrace both. In *Life Together*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer says "The basis of the community of the Spirit is truth; the basis of human community...is desire." He later adds, "In the community of the Spirit there burns the bright love of brotherly service, agape."³ The point is, a Christian community is to be defined by both truth and love. Not one or the other.

I have personally seen students love truth but, in the process, not truly love people. When we do this, we do not rightly represent our Savior. We come off harsh and belligerent. We have convictions but no compassion. I have also seen a lot of students truly love but, in the process, stop loving truth. They have compassion but no convictions. I am reminded of what Mark Batterson said, "I would rather be biblically correct than politically correct. If we were really honest about it, I think some of us are more afraid of offending people than we are offending the Holy Spirit."⁴

Mark also gives us a helpful hint on walking the tightrope in a relationship. He says, "For what it is worth, whenever I have to have a tough conversation with someone where I have to confront an issue, I almost always reference John 1:14 where it says Jesus was 'full of grace and truth'. Grace means I'll love you no matter what. Truth means I'll be honest no matter what."⁵

Loving truth and truly loving is a Christ-like combo that will impact people! Let's not fall off either side of the tightrope. Let's walk full of grace and truth.

Reflection and Journaling Questions:

Where have you seen the grace of God change your life? Where have you see the truth of God change your life?

Which side of the tightrope am I tempted to fall towards with others: truly loving but abandoning truth, or loving truth without truly loving? Why?

(1)<https://blogs.thegospelcoalition.org/kevindeyoung/2014/06/03/full-of-grace-and-truth/> (2) Ibid. (3) Life Together, pg. 31

(4)www.markbatterson.com/uncategorized/politically-correct-vs-biblically-correct/

(5) Ibid.

Day 16: Real Community

When forgiveness is extended, someone must absorb the wound.

Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?" Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy times seven times."

Matthew 18:21-22

The harsh reality of the Fall is that each of us will experience the pain of being hurt by someone else. Small or large, intentional or accidental, personal or systematic, our hurting world perpetuates hurt. We face a universal experience of being negatively affected by other's actions: none of us go through life unscathed.

When we recognize that we have been hurt or wronged, we are met with two options. We can either harbor resentment, expecting apology and repayment of the debt... or we can forgive. But what does forgiveness really entail?

"Forgiveness is costly. It means accepting undeserved suffering. It means absorbing the consequences of another person's evil choices. It means choosing not to take revenge. It is a choice to trust God to deal justly with the offender and to make things right." (1)

'Absorbing the wound' of a wrongdoing is costly. When you forgive someone their debt, you don't suddenly have the money back -- you

have to absorb the loss. Similarly, Jesus couldn't just look at our sin and simply say "I forgive you". He had to personally absorb the consequence of our sin, on the Cross. No matter the size of the wrong, to forgive is to bear the brunt of repaying or absorbing the cost.

As Jesus explains forgiveness to Peter, He tells him a parable. A servant who owes his king an insurmountable debt is brought before his master. The consequence of the servant's debt is his entire family being sold into slavery. The servant cries out asking for patience in repayment. In an act of mercy, the king cancels his debt and lets him go. But that same servant then goes out and hunts down a debtor of his own who owes him one hundred silver coins — a tiny debt in comparison with the one from which he was released! The servant refuses his own debtor's plea and instead throws him in jail. The king is astonished -- if he offered such exorbitant grace, so should the servant.

What does this parable tell us? Jesus shows us that our forgiveness flows downhill from what our righteous and Holy God has done for us. Our debt of disobedience against God was not able to be paid. Scripture tells us that the "wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23). We would bear the consequences had it not been for the saving act of Jesus Christ, our God, on the Cross. Forgiveness is showing a fellow sinner grace because of the grace that was shown to us.

C.S. Lewis puts it this way: "To be Christian means to forgive the inexcusable, because God has forgiven the inexcusable in you. This is hard... how can we do it?"

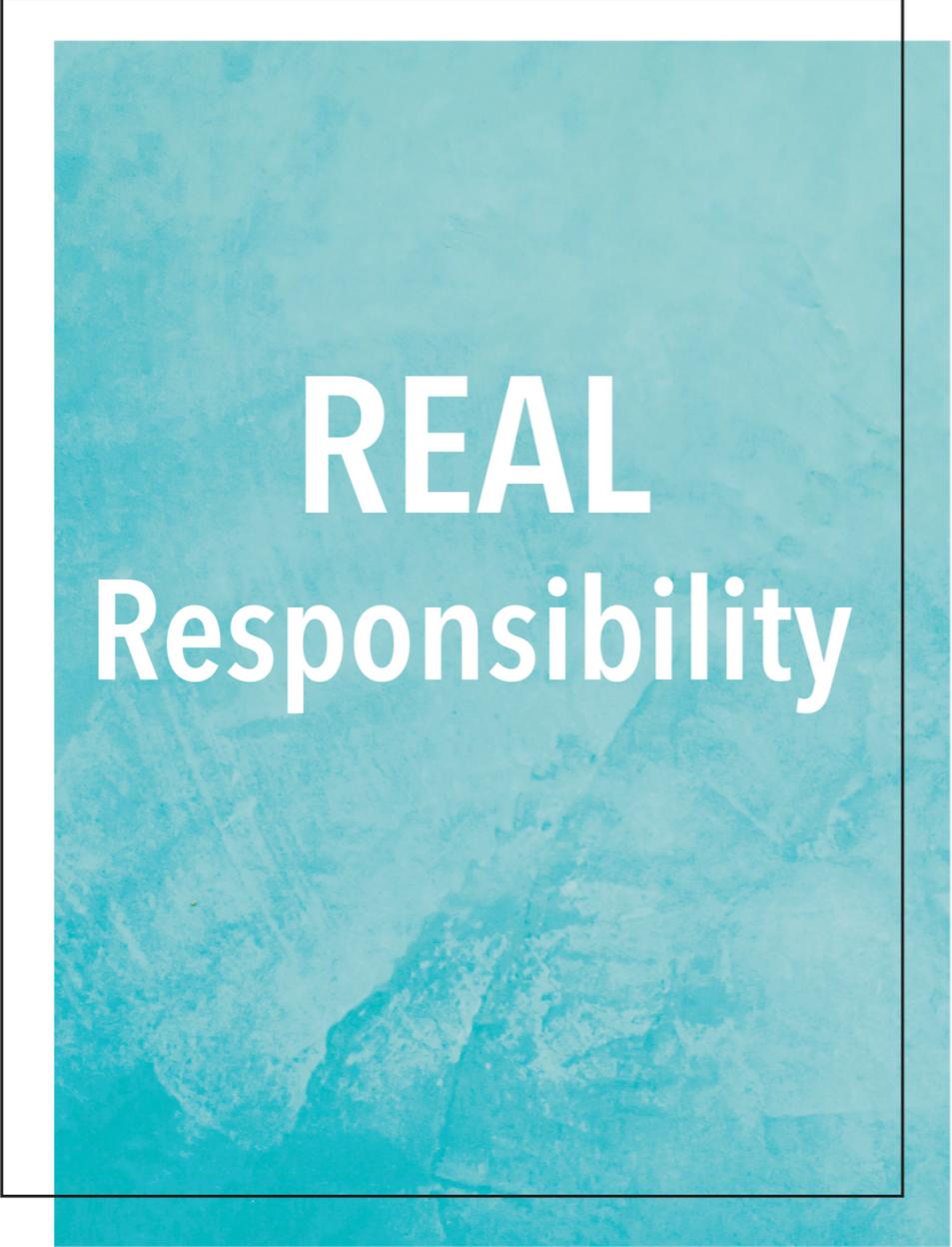
Only, I think, by remembering where we stand, by meaning our words when we say in our prayers each night, 'forgive our trespasses as we forgive those that trespass against us.' We are offered forgiveness on no other terms. To refuse it is to refuse God's mercy for ourselves. There is no hint of exceptions and God means what He says." (2)

Reflection and Journaling:

Write a prayer of thanksgiving for what God has forgiven in you.

Continue by asking God to help you forgive those who have wronged you. Be specific about who and what you need to forgive.

1) Schroeder, Joy. "Tools for Mentoring" (2) Lewis, C.S, The Weight of Glory, "On Forgiveness"



REAL Responsibility

Day 17: Real Responsibility

What God does in you, He wants to do through you.

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors...

2 Corinthians 5:17-20

Think about the most beautiful place you've ever been. What was so great about it? What did you see, feel, experience while you were there? Chances are that you probably love to talk to others about this place as often as you're able. You want them to experience it too! Some things in the world are too beautiful to store away hidden in the depths of our souls.

The beauty of the Christian life is that every situation is redeemable by God's love. No longer bound by the shadows of our past, we're made into new creations in relationship with our Heavenly Father. What can separate us from the love of Christ? 'Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?' (Romans 8:31-35) No! As Christians, we know that our lives have been completely changed by God's love. God has done amazing things: forgiven us,

saved us, given us hope and purpose, called us His very children. We have seen so many amazing blessings through the Cross!

And now, the amazing things God has done in us, He wants to pour out on others through us. We get the privilege of sharing this message of how the Gospel has transformed our lives into something beautiful. Everyone has to know this great joy and hope we have! Can you imagine keeping this good news to yourself?!

Shawn Galyen, a missionary partner in Spain, tells the story of a woman in his ministry who once asked a stinging question about the Gospel: "My whole life, why hadn't anyone told me this before?" She could not fathom anyone keeping the good news of Christ to themselves. Sadly, when we withhold the message of reconciliation from others, we withhold blessing from them.

The name "Chi Alpha" comes from a phrase in 2nd Corinthians: "We are therefore Christ's ambassadors." At the core, it means that we have an amazing message to share about the reconciliation we have experienced. Remember wanting to share the most beautiful place you've been with those around you? The amazing thing is, Christ has already paid the price for your friends to see the beauty of the Christian life. They can experience it for free! All they need is to trust Christ to lead them there.

Look around you. There are many who have yet to be reconciled and we have something to share with them that is too good to keep hidden! Let us live up to this biblical name of Christ's Ambassadors and

boldly proclaim the goodness of God to restore our relationship with Him.

Reflection and Journaling Question:

How would you share the goodness of what the Gospel has meant to you in three (or less) minutes? Who is someone you can share that with?

Day 18: Real Responsibility

A disciple makes disciples who make disciples.

And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others.

2 Timothy 2:2

I grew up in a home where the kitchen was the focal point. It didn't matter what type of family occasion was happening - a wedding, a birthday, a new addition to the family, a holiday, or simply a time to see one another. We always somehow ended up in the kitchen. There was nothing more comforting than seeing that large cast iron dutch oven full of yummy goodness. It was never a question in my family if the children would learn how to cook. It simply was. One learned from watching, from experiencing (too much or not enough salt), and from gentle instruction. Thus, the family recipes were passed down.

The thing about family recipes is that they are worth passing down. My parents make a mean mouth watering jambalaya. It would be a tragedy if the recipe died with my generation. It's too good not to share. Similarly, on a much greater level, we have been trusted with something so sweet and genuine, so authentic and real, that we can't not share it. As Christians we are called to treasure the wonderful gift of Jesus' death on the cross and to entrust that good news to others.

Before Jesus ascended to heaven after his death and resurrection, He addressed the disciples, "Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit," Matthew 28:19. This verse is often referred to as The Great Commission. The moment when Jesus looks his disciples in the face and tells them His will for the rest of their lives. Go. Make disciples.

Jesus has given us the same commandment to make disciples. However, to make an effective disciple isn't just to teach someone about Jesus. An effective disciple is someone makes disciples who make disciples. In 2 Timothy 2:2, Paul urges Timothy, "And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others." In this one verse there are four generations of disciples. Paul (1) address Timothy (2) to teach reliable people (3) who will then be qualified to teach others (4).

Discipleship is transgenerational, it should go beyond the person we are personally discipling. It's about teaching values of the Christian life so they may also teach others how to follow Jesus. Disciples make disciples by teaching them about Jesus so they may then teach someone else about Jesus.

This is what it means to "go and make disciples of all nations." This is what the Lord has asked us to do so that he may be known among his people. Teach people about Jesus. Then, teach them to not only about Jesus, but how to teach others about Jesus. This is our responsibility

as Christians -- this is the Great Commission. A disciple makes disciples who make disciples.

Reflection and Journaling Questions:

Who in our life has discipled you? What things did they teach you that impacted your walk with God?

Who in your life can you disciple that can then disciple others?

Day 19: Real Responsibility

You make a living by what you earn. You make a life by what you give.

Another of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, spoke up, "Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish, but how far will they go among so many?" Jesus then took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed to those who were seated as much as they wanted. He did the same with the fish. When they had all had enough to eat, he said to his disciples, "Gather the pieces that are left over. Let nothing be wasted."

John 6:8-11

Can you imagine this boy's experience! One second he's sitting down in the crowd getting ready to dig into his fish and chips, and the next moment he is pulled from the crowd, put face to face with Jesus, and asked for his lunch! Had the boy refused to offer his meal for any reason, it would have remained an ordinary bag of bread and fish. But the boy was willing, and in an instant, an ordinary, average, forgettable meal was transformed into an extraordinary miracle! Because the boy was generous, he got a front row seat to the wonders of God. Jesus was glorified, the thousands of people around him were satisfied, and the boy even got a doggy bag to take home! What a joy! What a thrill! I bet he never got tired of telling that story!

That's the kind of life that I want. Seeing God do the impossible! Watching Jesus use what little or much that I have to make the King-

dom work. But to be honest, it's not always that easy. In my day to day life, and maybe in yours, I sometimes find myself defining the quality of my life by what I have, instead of what I give. In my own heart I find three roadblocks to generosity:

1. Scarcity — The mentality that I only have enough for myself and I'm not in a position to be generous. The boy in our story certainly faced the dilemma of scarcity! But our God is not a god of scarcity, He is the God of Abundance. Jesus takes five loaves and two fish, feeds five thousand, and then has leftovers! Jesus can take what seems to be barely enough for us and make it enough for all. What I find is that, when we give, "enough" changes. We don't really need as much as we thought we did before.

2. Ownership — Sometimes I get to thinking that what God has given me is mine, and should be rightfully spent on myself and my family. In this story, the meal belonged to the boy but he chose to give it up for a greater purpose. When we give, God shows us how much greater His purposes are than our own priorities. When it comes down to it, generosity isn't a financial issue, it's a heart issue. Will you prioritize your purposes, or God's?

3. Lack of awareness — Often I just don't see needs the way Jesus does, and if I do, I don't see it as my problem. When the boy was brought before Jesus with his lunch, he had his own growling stomach to worry about, but he still heard the growling stomachs around him. If we start paying attention, we will never stop noticing the opportunities God offers us to be generous.

This week may you experience the joy of living generously as you use the loaves and fish God has given you to bless others and advance His Kingdom!

Reflection and Journaling Questions:

Which of these mentalities do you recognize in yourself? What is a step you can take to begin combating it/them?

What is a way you can be generous today? Do it!

Day 20: Real Responsibility

Jesus early, Jesus often.

At once he (Paul) began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus is the Son of God.

Acts 9:20

Have you ever left a conversation and thought, “I wish I had talked about Jesus?” Or have you ever done a random act of kindness and thought, “Do you think they knew I did that because of Jesus?” I’ve found myself asking both of these questions more often than I care to admit. Why do we find it difficult to share about Jesus, who is the most important person in our lives? Why don’t I tell more people about Jesus, who has saved me and given me a purpose and a future?

Maybe it’s fear of rejection, maybe it’s a lack of confidence, maybe it’s a host of other things, but the fact remains that we have been tasked with sharing Jesus to the whole world. “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.” The Great Commission isn’t a suggestion. It’s the game plan.

“Jesus Early, Jesus Often.” It’s a saying I keep in the back of my mind and say when I’m thinking about my friends that don’t know Jesus or just random people I meet throughout the day. I want to bring Jesus up early in the conversation and bring Jesus up often in my daily inter-

actions. He is the pearl of great price and He is worthy to be talked about!

When I think through the biblical text, there’s one person that quickly comes to mind who lived this out well; the Apostle Paul. At once he began to preach and tell people that Jesus is the Son of God. Other passages in Acts tell us that he regularly went into the synagogues to share the good news of Jesus. Everywhere Paul went, he told people about Jesus. He didn’t wait, he didn’t stall, he shared about Jesus early and often in his spheres of influence and in his relational networks.

If Jesus has made all the difference in our lives and we want Him to make all the difference in other people’s lives, then at some point someone is going to have to talk about Him, right?

What would our days look like if we lived this way? What if we found ways to bring up Jesus when we met people? What would our relationships look like if we regularly talked about the Gospel? We would be on the adventure of a lifetime, that’s for sure! When we share Jesus early and Jesus often, we are on the journey with Jesus. We are partnering with Him in the Great Commission and we are sharing in the joy of more people hearing about the most important person in the world!

How can we bring Jesus up often in our conversations with our hall-mates, groups, and school friends? I’ve found that repeating the phrase in my head has been helpful when I enter conversations or when I know I’m going to be in new relationships. I say it on the way to the dentist, on the way to the softball field, on the way to pick my kids up

from wherever they are. I say it to remind myself to talk about Jesus, my supreme affection.

Reflection and Journaling Questions:

What are some relationships that you want to bring Jesus up in today?

How could you find a way to talk about Jesus in everyday conversation?

Day 21: Real Responsibility

In God's global mission, we either descend or hold the rope.

“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit...”

Matthew 28:19

In 1793, a man by the name of Andrew Fuller recognized the great need for missionaries to go into all the world. He compared the unreached areas to a dark mineshaft. Fuller posed the question: “There is a gold-mine in India, but it seems as deep as the center of the Earth. Who will venture to explore it?”

A man and an answer were in waiting. “I will venture to go down,” replied William Carey; “but remember that you must hold the ropes.”

Mr. Fuller later recounted: “This, we solemnly engaged to do, pledging ourselves never to desert him as long as we should live.” Because people were willing to hold the rope, William Carey would go on to spend 41 years of his life in India and translate the Scriptures into 40 different languages.

I was reminded of the importance of “rope holders” when I was on a hike two years ago with a group of college students. We traversed a breathtaking canyon in Arizona, nicknamed “The Jug.” The canyon walls kept us from climbing up the sides and the flow of water pushed us forward towards the canyon exit. Approaching the midway point,

we found ourselves at the top of a waterfall which we had to rappel down in order to proceed but our 20+ person group could not descend all at once. In fact two individuals had to stay back as rope-holding anchors so the rest could descend safely one at a time.

I love seeing moment after moment in the Bible where God provided rope holders for people He called to do His work. We see Nehemiah develop a God-given passion to rebuild the city wall in Jerusalem. and God uses king Artaxerxes to hold the rope by providing Nehemiah timber to make beams and even sending army officers and cavalry for protection. In the New Testament, many hold the rope for Paul while he takes part in his missionary journeys. One of those groups was the church in Philippi who were extremely poor. “And now, brothers, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity” (2 Corinthians 8:1-2). May we be people who are seen as “rich in generosity” as we hold the rope for those who are called to go!

Two hundred years after William Carey, and almost 2,000 years after Paul left for his missionary journey, the truth of Luke's gospel still rings true today when it says, “the harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field” (Luke 10:2).

There is a real need to take the Gospel to unreached lands and we are all called to the real responsibility of reaching the lost. According to JoshuaProject.net, 3.16 billion people (42% of the world population)

are still unreached by the Gospel. Just as I journeyed through the canyon with my friends in Arizona and rope holders had to step up, we now need rope holders more than ever to plant their feet, partner with missionaries and, by God's grace, make an eternal impact around the globe!

Reflection and Journaling Questions:

What are ways that God's people can "hold the rope" for missionaries?

Write a prayer for laborers to reach the lost places of the world. In it, consider asking:

Am I willing to be one of the workers?

What missionary can I hold the rope for in prayer and finances, starting today?

Day 22: Real Responsibility

Never miss an opportunity to pray for someone.

I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people—for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. ... Therefore I want the men everywhere to pray, lifting up holy hands without anger or disputing.

1 Timothy 2:1-8

What would it look like if every time you ate out at a restaurant, you told your waiter: “I’m about to pray for my meal. Is there anything I can pray for you?” What if, when a homeless person is asking for money and you don’t have cash, you stop your bustling and kneel down to say “I don’t have money but I would love to pray for you”? What about when a classmate is stressed about a test, or a friend has an injury, or a relative is going through a hard time? It can be easy to forget how much these moments matter.

A few days ago at a coffee shop, I ran into an alum whom I used to mentor. We caught up for a good 45 minutes but then had to go on our way. I was about to leave when this axiom popped into my mind, so I went for it. “Can I pray for you before we go?” I prayed over what she had shared, and some simple hopes for her future. It felt small, yet, when I looked up she was holding back tears. Confused, I asked if

she was okay. The answer shocked me. “Yes, it’s just, you’re the first person to pray over me since I graduated a year ago.”

Wow. The first person in a year. And she’s a Christian! Something so small for me meant so much to her. How much more would it mean to someone who may have never had someone take the time to pray over them?

The benefits of never missing an opportunity to pray are far more than providing emotional support. Theologian Blaise Pascal says that God “instituted prayer in order to allow His creatures the dignity of causality.” More holistically, God invented both prayer and physical action for that purpose. He made the matter of the universe so that we can do things to it; we can wash our own hands, plant seeds for food, and help or hurt our fellow creatures. Similarly, God made the world so that it allows a certain amount of spiritual agency, and can be modified in response to our prayers. Think about it. The historical tradition of Christian prayer (including the Lord's Prayer itself) has always prayed for daily bread, for the healing of the sick, for protection from enemies, and for the conversion of the lost, among other things. We pray those things as a Church because we believe the prayer does something about it. *

Christians speak regularly of the need to love our fellow man through actions: service, comfort, justice, provision. But our responsibility to the world lies just as heavily on the other end of causality ... our prayers! In Chi Alpha, we want to encourage everyone to never miss an opportunity to pray for someone. Prayer is one of the ways that indi-

viduals can see God moving in their lives -- whether through the care and attention offered by a person, or through God's concrete answer of that prayer. The next person you meet may have a genuine need that no one has ever lifted to the Lord. Will you be the one to finally take the opportunity?

Reflection and Journaling Questions:

What holds you back from praying more for people? What are ways you can combat that?

What is something you can pray for in faith, right now?

Day 23: Real Responsibility

We don't just go for God, we go WITH God.

“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And, surely I am WITH you always, to the very end of the age.”

Matthew 28:19-20

“Whatever you do, do NOT go for God!” I spoke these words to a student getting ready to give a year to missions in North Africa where ISIS had a presence. Probably not the pastoral advice he expected to receive in our last meeting before being sent out! But it’s what followed that mattered. I looked at him and explained, “Do not go to North Africa for God...I want you to go WITH God!”

After the disciples received the great commission from Jesus to go and make disciples of all nations, his next words must have brought great faith, expectancy, and comfort: “And, surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” Jesus wanted to assure them they were not going in their own strength, but that He was going to be WITH them, through the Holy Spirit, as they sought to make disciples. Then he adds, “to the very end of the age” so that those who embrace the great commission after them will know that He is WITH them too!

When you read the Bible, you will see over and over again how God being WITH someone changed everything. Here is just a quick sample:

In Genesis 39:2 it says “The LORD was with Joseph so that he prospered...” In Exodus 3:13, God called Moses to deliver the Israelites from their slavery in Egypt, the superpower of the world. God tells Moses “I will be with you...” Then in Joshua 1:5 God tells Joshua “no one will be able to stand against you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will never leave you or forsake you. Be strong and courageous...” Sound familiar? Joshua could live a strong and courageous life, not a fearful and timid life, knowing that God was WITH him. The same is said for Gideon, David, Solomon and more. Jesus said it to the disciples. And then, he said the same for us!

What does this change? Everything.

When we live out real responsibility FOR Jesus, we act as if Jesus sits at home in his chair while sending us out in our own weakness and poverty, waiting for us to have something to show for our efforts. With this perspective we become overwhelmed, tired from laboring in our own strength, and gripped by the fear of failure. When we realize we don't just go for God, but we go WITH God it feels different. It is like linking our arms with Jesus and heading out into the day in union and communion with Him. We go in His strength and riches. We are at peace and secure. Jesus is with us!

I asked the 4th year how it felt when he thought about going to North Africa not for God, but WITH God—He said, he was more at peace, more hopeful, more expectant, and full of faith! You were not meant to fulfill the great commission for Jesus, you are meant to fulfill the great commission WITH Jesus! What good news! So, let's go live a “strong and courageous” life, shining the light of Jesus, knowing that HE IS WITH us. And, that makes all the difference in the world!

Reflection and Journaling Question:

When you think of the place that God has asked you to bear witness to Him and make disciples, how does it feel to know that God is with you?

*Emphasis add to “with’ in Matthew 28:19-20.

Day 24: Real Responsibility

Invest and Invite.

When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, “Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today.” So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly....Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.”

Ephesians 4:22-24

If you read the full story found in Luke 19 (which I hope you do!), you'll see that the entire story is quite bizarre. Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem and is passing through Jericho, when throngs of people swarm around just to catch a glimpse of Him. Since Jesus is near the end of His life and ministry, He is now quite famous in Israel! In the midst of this chaotic, bustling scene, Jesus spots a tiny, well-dressed man stretched out in a tree by the side of the road. Instantly, as He stands in the midst of the crowd on that street in Jericho, Jesus' attention is fixed on Zacchaeus. Ignoring the muttering of the crowd, Jesus shuts down the parade and invites Zacchaeus to spend the day together at his home. Why was the “wee little man” not simply a momentary distraction from the praise and attention Jesus was receiving from the crowd that day?

Because Jesus knew His mission, which we find stated at the end of the story. Jesus came “to seek and to save the lost.” As the story goes, Zacchaeus (a tax collector who had sold out to the Roman government

and made a living ripping off his fellow Jews) repented of his sin, paid back more than he had stolen, and became a friend and follower of Jesus. All because Jesus was focused on His mission! As followers of Jesus, shouldn't our mission be the same?

Evangelism can often be intimidating or confusing to think about. But as I think about participating in Jesus' mission “to seek and save the lost,” two words come to mind: relational and intentional.

Jesus didn't just rebuke Zacchaeus on the roadside and command he get his life in order! He spent time with Zacchaeus in the intimacy of his own home to foster a relationship of trust. What does it mean for us to invest in others? It means spending quality time together, laughing together, crying together. It means truly desiring God's best in others, because a deep friendship exists. So the first leg of evangelism is relational living.

The second leg of evangelism is intentionality. Jesus rained on everyone else's parade so that He could have time with Zacchaeus. He could have easily been enamored by the crowd and valued the masses more highly than Zacchaeus. But Jesus knew His mission and was intentional in His actions. If we are not inviting our friends into opportunities where they will hear the Gospel preached, experience the presence of God in worship, and understand the power of Christian community, we are missing important moments. If we can be a little more intentional and give a little more forethought into extending invitations into community to our friends who know us and trust us, we will see God do the kinds of things only God can do!

May we go about Jesus' mission relationally and intentionally as we invest and invite, and may we experience the joy of seeing salvation come to our friends, family, classmates, and all those whom Jesus puts in our lives!

Reflection and Journaling Questions:

Are you more of a relationship-builder or an inviter? What would it look like to be both?

Who will you invest in and invite?