

Jesus is the Good Shepherd who provides everything we need. This 31-day devotional is centered on a passage of Scripture that has been a source of strength, peace, and comfort throughout the generations: Psalm 23. On each day of the journey through this beloved psalm, you'll have an opportunity to reflect on the many ways Jesus shows us His love and goodness in our lives. Whether you feel like you're on a mountaintop right now, going through a dark valley, or somewhere in between, the Good Shepherd is ready to guide you, carry your burdens, and refresh you in every way.

Day 1 – The Most Beloved Psalm

“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep. ... I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own.”

John 10:11, 14

Psalm 23 is one of the most famous and quoted Psalms in the Bible. It's also one of the most widely memorized and beloved passages of Scripture. If you haven't memorized it yet, I encourage you to do so over the next 31 days. With just six verses, it's easy to memorize and will bring comfort and peace to you every time you say it. I also want you to read it through each day, verse by verse and phrase by phrase, and allow the Holy Spirit to speak to you through His Word and reveal how wonderful our Good Shepherd really is and how much He wants to know you and give you an abundant life.

As you read this Psalm, you'll notice three important things the Good Shepherd does. The first thing He does is **provide**. Psalm 23:1 says, “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.” The word “want” here means “lack.” In other words, because our Shepherd, Jesus, provides everything we need, we lack nothing! And although we may not get everything we *want*, He does give us everything we *need*.

It's easy to feel like you need to do more, work harder, and sacrifice all you can to make things better for yourself and your family. However, the Lord is showing us that He wants us to look to Him for provision. He can open doors and bring opportunities your way when you trust Him and ask Him to provide.

Psalm 23 demonstrates *how* our Good Shepherd provides for us:

He provides contentment and peace. *He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters* (verse 2).

The green pastures refer to the rich Word of God, and the still waters refer to His peace. In other words, as you feed on His Word and abide in the Lord, He will fill you with contentment and lead you in peace.

He provides restoration. *He restores my soul; ...* (verse 3).

We all experience things in life that are devastating to our mind, will, and emotions. This is why our souls need to be restored. Your Good Shepherd not only wants to restore your soul to the way it was before that devastating thing happened, but He also wants to refresh your soul to an even better place!

He provides guidance. *He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake* (verse 3).

Righteousness means to be in right standing with God. Because of God's grace and Jesus' sacrifice on the cross, God views you through the lens of His Son when you receive Him as your Savior and Lord—you are brought into right standing with God. And you continue to walk in righteousness when you allow Jesus to lead you through life in such a way that even your thoughts, words, and actions are pleasing to Him. By letting your Good Shepherd lead you, you're able to remain in close relationship with Him and you will lack for nothing.

The second thing our Good Shepherd does is **protect**. Psalm 23:4 tells us that even in the valley of the shadow of death, we should not fear because God is there with us. For most of us, death is our greatest fear. A friend once told me he didn't fear death, but he did fear snakes. The truth is he feared getting bitten by a snake and dying. In the same way, when someone says they're afraid of heights, they're afraid of falling and dying. Death is what brings us the most fear. But Jesus annihilated death when He conquered it on the cross! The Lord wants us to rest in the assurance that He's our protector and provider.

The third thing our Good Shepherd does is **promise**. The final verse of Psalm 23 says, "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever." The word "surely" means "certainly." It is certain; it's a fact. You not only get provision and protection, but you also get goodness, mercy, *and* eternal life. If I were to sum up Psalm 23, it would be, "You get all of this *and* eternity in heaven with your Savior!" Isn't that amazing?!

One of my favorite verses in the Old Testament is Ezekiel 34:12: "As a shepherd seeks out his flock on the day he is among his scattered sheep, so will I seek out My sheep and deliver them from all the places where they were scattered on a cloudy and dark day." In this verse, God is saying, "Listen, I'm coming. I'm going to come and deliver all my sheep that have been scattered from everything that has held them in bondage. And you'll know when I do it because it will be a cloudy and dark day."

This is what Jesus did for us because He is our Good Shepherd. He gave His life for His sheep on a dark, cloudy day so we could be delivered from stress, anxiety, worry, fear, and even death. He promises to protect and provide for you. You simply have to learn to recognize His voice and follow Him.

Today, no matter what you're experiencing in your life, you can be blessed knowing the Lord promises to protect and provide for you. That's who our Good Shepherd is, and it's why this is the most beloved Psalm!

Prayer

Jesus, thank You for being my Good Shepherd and giving Your life for me. Thank You for promising to protect and provide for me. I'm grateful You know who I am and love me anyway. Help me hear Your voice and follow You every day of my life.
In Jesus' name, Amen.

Activation

- Read through the verses for further study and take note of the ways the Lord is your Good Shepherd and how He promises to protect and provide for you.
- Reflect on all the wonderful benefits of having the Lord as your Good Shepherd.
- Pray a prayer of gratitude, thanking God for all the ways He has protected and provided for you throughout your life.

Holy Spirit, what are You saying to me today?

Day 2 – The Nature of our Shepherd

“If a man has a hundred sheep and one of them wanders away, what will he do? Won't he leave the ninety-nine others on the hills and go out to search for the one that is lost?”

Matthew 18:12 (NLT)

The illustration of a shepherd and sheep must be very important to God because the Bible is filled with these references. God clearly wants to show His nature as the Shepherd and our position as His sheep. So, what is His nature as our Shepherd?

First, the Shepherd's nature is to pursue! I love to attend the Global Leadership Summit, which Gateway simulcasts every year. One year, Pastor Craig Groeschel from Life Church gave a leadership talk titled "GETMO," which is an acronym for *Good Enough to Move On*.

It's a leadership concept that says when the incremental gain you're trying to achieve doesn't match the level of effort required to get there, you must realize when it's *good enough to move on*. It's good stewardship to recognize when you're spending a disproportionate amount of time and energy on something that won't provide a great return on your investment.

While that's definitely a great approach to take with *projects*, Jesus lets us know in Matthew 18 that a shepherd *will* spend a disproportionate amount of time and energy pursuing just *one*. Why? Because when it comes to *people*, He wants us to know He won't *ever* move on! In our society, we may generally accept "one" as a loss and think, *Well, we still have ninety-nine. That's good enough to move on*. But when it comes to souls, our Good Shepherd sees the individual beyond the flock. Throughout His time on earth, Jesus declared He was in pursuit of the sick, the blind, the captives, and the oppressed. In fact, He clearly states in Luke 19:10 that His mission is "to seek and to save that which was lost." The action of our Good Shepherd was a work to redeem all humankind *one by one*.

Second, the Shepherd's nature is to provide! When Psalm 23 declares, "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want," it's hard to comprehend. How is it possible to not want? I don't personally know any shepherds today, but the psalmist David sure understood the job. God inspired David to write many psalms using his own experience as a shepherd. David knew the great personal investment a shepherd makes to care for his sheep, and he provided for all the needs of his flock. As God was giving David the words for Psalm 23, I imagine him chuckling to himself, "Yeah, that's about right. As the shepherd of my sheep, I take care of *everything*. These sheep shall not want!" And then, with the weight of that revelation settling on him as he wrote, David realized *he* is the sheep being cared for by the Good Shepherd. And so he declared, "I shall not want."

Third, the Shepherd's nature is to defend! Am I the only one who pictures a shepherd as a mild-mannered guy in a robe with a staff walking slowly back and forth in a field? I've come to realize that is not a very biblical image! When David was making the case to King Saul that he could fight Goliath, he described how he saved his sheep from the mouths of lions and bears and single-handedly killed them both to rescue his sheep. Now that's my kind of shepherd! The real image of our Shepherd is that of a mighty defender.

Finally, the Shepherd's nature is to love! Jesus says in John 15:13, "Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends." I once read a vet manual that said sheep are prey species whose only defense is to flee. As such, sheep's lives are always at risk. That's why we,

God's sheep, require a shepherd! Jesus foreshadowed His own sacrificial death when He said, "The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep" (John 10:11). What great love from our Shepherd!

Do you know today how valuable you are? Jesus left His seat in heaven to redeem you, the *one*. You are valuable because you are a sheep in His pasture, and there is nothing your Good Shepherd won't do for you!

Prayer

God, thank You for being my Shepherd and pursuing me. Today, I ask for Your provision in my life. I pray that You would defend me against attacks of the enemy. Help me give You control of my life and find all I need in You. As Your sheep, I want to rest in You, my Shepherd. With You, I know I lack nothing. Thank You for loving me! In Jesus' name, Amen!

Activation

- Take a moment to reflect on how God has pursued you.
- While you study His Word, ask God to reveal more to you about His heart as the Shepherd.
- Pause to see if you are living with the dependence of a sheep.

Holy Spirit, what are You saying to me today?

Day 3 – The Nature and Needs of Sheep

Acknowledge that the Lord is God! He made us, and we are his. We are his people, the sheep of his pasture.

Psalm 100:3 (NLT)

A cultural phenomenon took place in 2004 when a sheep was discovered to have survived several years without a shepherd. You may remember hearing about this sheep whose name was Shrek. The first time I saw a picture of Shrek, I laughed because he looked ridiculously large and puffy. However, I quickly learned this was actually not a funny situation but a tragic one.

You see, a sheep's wool needs to be sheared about once a year. If they aren't sheared, their coat grows too large and becomes matted. Dirt and droppings can become entangled in their wool and nest there causing infection. But most troubling is when left unsheared, sheep have trouble regulating their temperature, and many die from overheating.

It was a miracle Shrek was even alive after six years of avoiding his shepherd by hiding in caves! When he came back, he could hardly walk, eat, and function the way a sheep was created to. Why? Because Shrek was overburdened with a heavy coat he was never created to bear.

The word "sheep" is one of the most common analogies God uses to describe people in the Bible, and He often refers to Himself as our Shepherd. In John 10:11, Jesus says, "I am the good shepherd." And Psalm 23:1 says, "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want."

Now, the word "want" in Psalm 23 is not the greatest translation in modern English because it gives the impression that if God is your Shepherd, He will give you whatever you want. But the word "want" here does *not* mean "desire." It literally means "lack." God is saying we will *lack nothing* as His sheep. Which begs the question, what do we as His sheep need?

We could talk about the things real sheep need like a good pasture, fresh water, minerals, and rest. And while I'm sure we could find biblical applications for all those things, when it comes down to it, a sheep ultimately has only *one* need: a shepherd. Jesus' actions in Matthew 9:36 affirm this truth: "But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd."

When we, like Shrek, walk away from our Shepherd, we can take on a heavy coat we were never created to carry. It may not even involve us actively walking away from Him. The truth is when we don't have consistent intimacy with the Lord—a regular, ongoing, close relationship—we become weighed down with burdens we were never meant to bear. I talk with so many people who feel overwhelmed with worry, apprehension, and fear. I usually ask about their intimacy with Jesus—their quiet time and their overall relationship with Him. They often respond saying that they have been distant from God. Their situations always remind me of Shrek, a sheep whose coat grew out of control because he avoided his shepherd.

But here's the good news. In Matthew 11:28–30, Jesus says, "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light." When we come to the Shepherd, He promises to free us of that weight!

When Shrek returned to his shepherd, they sheared him for the first time, and he emerged from his old burden. If you see the pictures online of this shearing, it looks as if he is being born again out of his old coat. What a beautiful picture of our *need* for our Shepherd!

Prayer

Lord, thank You for being our Good Shepherd. You promise we will never lack anything we need, and You make our burdens light. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Activation

- Do you feel weighed down? Are you carrying burdens too heavy for you?
- How close are you with the Shepherd? Come back to your Shepherd today and allow Him to shear away the cares, worries, and burdens you have taken on yourself over the years.
- Do you need to allow God to strip back unrighteous burdens? Maybe you need to be born again and fully give your life to Jesus! Maybe you, like Shrek, have walked away and need to come back home. Remember, His yoke is easy to bear, and His burden is light.

Holy Spirit, what are You saying to me today?

Day 4 – He is our Provider

Never doubt God's mighty power to work in you and accomplish all this. He will achieve infinitely more than your greatest request, your most unbelievable dream, and exceed your wildest imagination! He will outdo them all, for his miraculous power constantly energizes you.

Ephesians 3:20 (TPT)

I have a cousin whose nickname is “Cookie.” When I was 12 and she was 14, we became very close. Throughout my teenage years, I’d often travel from Columbia, Maryland, to Washington, DC, to spend the weekend with her. We went shopping, attended events, saw plays, toured museums—we explored the city together.

My days with Cookie were always packed with fun and laughter. We shared all our thoughts, our feelings, our dreams, and our plans with each other. Our fun-filled days led to hangout time in

the evenings. No matter how late it was, we would always break out the vanilla ice cream and whatever pie or sweet specialty my aunt had on the counter for us. We'd share stories from our day, laughing about all our escapades. Cookie and I have shared an extremely close bond with each other for many years and still do to this day. She has always been like a sister to me and is one of my best friends.

When I think about God being my best friend, it gives me such comfort knowing that I can be completely open and vulnerable with Him about anything in my life, just like I was with Cookie. God will laugh with me *and* cry with me. I can share the good times and the not-so-good times with Him. I know He loves me and is rooting for me. I can count on Him to always answer my call, no matter how late, and stay up with me while I eat ice cream and reminisce about my day.

Cookie and I became pregnant and gave birth to our daughters in the same year. She had twin girls in January, and I welcomed my second daughter in November. Very soon after thinking of something I needed, I would receive a box from Cookie with the exact item that had been on my mind. As Cookie's girls would outgrow their outfits, she would pack them up and send them to me. During that special season of my second daughter's life, I never wanted or needed anything. And the cool thing is I always had doubles of everything!

God provided for me and my family through my cousin, time and time again. His provision for us has often left me speechless, and I continue to be grateful for it.

Psalm 23:1 says, "The Lord is my shepherd; *I shall not want.*" I especially love this Scripture in *The Passion Translation*, which says: "Yahweh is my best friend and my shepherd. *I always have more than enough.*" This translation speaks so loudly to my heart. How does it speak to you?

God is our provider, and He loves us very much. His plan of provision for us is so much more than we could ever ask, think, or imagine. And it all starts with having an intimate relationship with Him and taking time to read and apply His Word in our lives. Seeing our relationship with God reflected in the pages of the passages sets us up for true connection, true love, true hope, and true peace.

Prayer

God, thank You for being my best friend. Thank You for always being by my side. Thank You for being my provider and knowing what I need before I need it. Would You help me posture my heart toward You so I can receive all the love, care, and provision You have for me today? In Jesus' name, Amen.

Activation

- Open your heart to the Lord and ask Him to show you how He can be your best friend in this season and beyond.
- Take a moment to reflect on the times the Lord has provided for you. Can you think of a time He provided for you when you least expected it? A heart of gratitude can change everything.
- Challenge yourself to meditate on Ephesians 3:20 in the mornings and write down what the Lord is showing and speaking to you about your life.

Holy Spirit, what are You saying to me today?

Day 5 – Where Discontentment Goes to Die

I know how to live on almost nothing or with everything. I have learned the secret of living in every situation, whether it is with a full stomach or empty, with plenty or little.

Philippians 4:12 (NLT)

Life is full of surprises. Some are good and make us smile while others punch us in the gut and take our breath away. In 2020, during the early stages of the COVID-19 invasion, my life changed dramatically when my dad was suddenly taken away. My expectations, desires, and hopes were ransacked—and it wasn't because of anything I or my dad had done. His life was stolen by a thief *no one* was ready for.

Discontentment is defined as “unhappiness caused by the failure of one’s hopes, desires, or expectations.” That is much too weak a word to describe what I was feeling and what changed that day. I remember going to Psalm 23 because it is known as the comfort Scripture, and I had used it countless times while officiating funerals over the years. When I read, “The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want,” I froze. I had some *huge* wants. I wanted my dad back. I wanted my mom to have her husband. I wanted our family to be like it was before all of this happened. I knew the Lord was in control, but unhappiness and pain weren't just winning the day—they had stolen the trophy. I was asking myself all kinds of questions. *Can I fill this unhappy place with*

enough happiness to change it? Can I fix everything for Mom and the rest of our family? I couldn't. I was unable to breathe.

That's when the Lord took me to Philippians 4:11–13 where Paul talks about learning how to find contentment *regardless* of his circumstances. *That's* what I needed. But was it even possible?

Suddenly a verse from that passage jumped out to me. I knew it well, but it had escaped my thoughts during this devastating time: “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (Philippians 4:13). I knew in my head it was true, but in that season of grief and shock, I wasn't experiencing the truth of it in my heart. The questions continued flooding my mind. *Can I live life without those loving conversations with my dad? What about Mom and all she misses after being married to Dad for 63 years—can she learn how to be content? Will our family ever be truly happy again?* The answer was emphatically “no”—if it were just up to us. But Paul identifies another source for our strength and our contentment. He points us to God, our Shepherd—the one who loves us unconditionally and gives us strength when the world takes all of ours away.

Because of COVID-19 restrictions, we weren't able to have a regular funeral and celebrate Dad's life with all his family and friends like we had always imagined. It was just my mom, my brother and sister and their families, and a few personal friends. But having the Marine Corps honor my dad with a military send-off and present my mom with a folded flag unexpectedly turned out to be such a sweet blessing. My heart was being massaged by God's goodness and grace, and Mom could see and feel His love washing over her.

I could say I don't know how we made it through the initial pain, but in reality, I do. I could say grief is impossible to endure, but I know from personal experience that it isn't. We walk through every single day because Jesus Christ gives us strength when ours is gone. And His strength is *perfect*.

Now I know that discontentment of any kind goes to die in the arms of Jesus. He gives us hope and goes above and beyond any expectations we may have (Ephesians 3:20). And when we start to find our joy and delight in the Lord (Psalm 37:4) our hearts' desires begin to reflect His. When we are wrapped in His arms, we find peace and contentment because we have the promise of eternity with Him.

Is there anyone or anything you are missing in your life? Maybe you too are asking the question, “Can I possibly find happiness again?” The answer is yes because the joy of the Lord *is* your strength (Nehemiah 8:10). And the strength of the Lord is your joy. We don't need anything else!

Prayer

Lord, thank You for always guiding me to the thoughts and things that are best for me. Thank You for restoring Your joy to me and showing me that Your strength is perfect.

Help me to lean into You for hope when my hope is failing. Your strength is my joy!
In Jesus' name, Amen.

Activation

- Take a moment today to picture yourself placing your discontentment in the arms of Jesus.
- Allow the Lord to teach you how to delight in His presence, so He can place new desires in your heart.
- Let the Lord's oil of gladness wash over you, so you feel His joy becoming your strength.
- Thank the Lord for showing you how to be content with Him, no matter what life may bring you.

Day 6 – Everything is Going to be OK, Right?!

“Has anyone by fussing before the mirror ever gotten taller by so much as an inch? If fussing can't even do that, why fuss at all? Walk into the fields and look at the wildflowers. They don't fuss with their appearance—but have you ever seen color and design quite like it? The ten best-dressed men and women in the country look shabby alongside them. If God gives such attention to the wildflowers, most of them never even seen, don't you think he'll attend to you, take pride in you, do his best for you? What I'm trying to do here is get you to relax, not be so preoccupied with getting so you can respond to God's giving. People who don't know God and the way he works fuss over these things, but you know both God and how he works. Steep yourself in God-reality, God-initiative, God-provisions. You'll find all your everyday human concerns will be met. Don't be afraid of missing out. You're my dearest friends! The Father wants to give you the very kingdom itself.”

Luke 12:25–32 (MSG)

I remember the day my sweet husband came to me with the most serious look on his face and spoke the words *no one* wants to hear: “Hey babe, I don't know how we're going to pay for groceries for the rest of the month.” You see, we were missionaries overseas at the time, and we lived on the financial support given to us by our friends, family, and ministry partners. The Lord had called my husband and I to sell everything we owned and move across the ocean with our four children to serve as missionaries in Belgium. How hard could that be, right? I mean if God spoke it, then surely *He* will provide for our every need. It's interesting that dependence on God is a skill we as believers feel we automatically have when we get saved but often have a hard

time putting into practice in our lives. When push comes to shove, will we fully trust in the Creator of the universe? I was about to be challenged on this trust and dependence.

We were barely scraping by. After paying all the bills and the kid-related expenses, we were left with about \$10 in the account ... *for the rest of the month!* In that moment I had a choice: live in fear and stress over things I couldn't change or put my trust *fully* in the Lord and His provision. I chose to take God at His word and wait on Him to come through for us in a miraculous way. When things were literally out of our control, my husband and I would say, "Put it on my tab," which meant: *Hey God, put this on my heavenly tab because You have endless resources, and all we are called to do is trust that You're good.*

During that season, we prayed *daily* and sometimes *hourly* for the Lord to help us continue to trust Him and embrace dependence on Him. Well, wouldn't you know, we got a check in the mail for \$5,000 from a very unexpected source. That was enough money to get us through the next several months of living expenses. All I could do was cry. When I fully gave up, God showed up. And while that wasn't the last time my faith and trust were tested, my faith was built *that* day. I now had a testimony of the Lord's provision and knew what it was like to be fully dependent on Him.

In Luke 12:28 (MSG), it says, "If God gives such attention to the wildflowers, most of them never even seen, don't you think he'll attend to you, take pride in you, do his best for you?" The problem comes when we don't trust God is a good Father. Many of us often feel like we have to take matters into our own hands and control the outcome because we can't see God has already worked it out. When my family was facing that difficult season, we couldn't see God was working on our behalf, but He was! Provision was already on the way.

If you're in a difficult place right now, even if you can't see it, God is working on your behalf. All you have to do is trust Him and rest knowing that everything really is going to be okay!

Prayer

God, thank You for being a good, faithful Father. Today, I choose to surrender every concern of my life—every worry, anxiety, stress, and fear. I choose to trust You with the outcome and trust You are working on my behalf. I take You at Your word today and believe You are working everything out for my good. Thank You for loving me and caring about every detail of my life. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Activation

- Pray about the areas of your life where you need to fully release control to the Lord.

- Ask God to help you trust He cares about you and is moving even when you don't see the circumstances around you changing.

Holy Spirit, what are You saying to me today?

Day 7 – Trusting God's Goodness (Taste and see that the Lord is Good)

When I was a child, my dad would come home every Friday night with a rented VCR and a few movies from the “video store” because Friday nights were movie night in the Carter household. I know, I know, you might be thinking, *What's a VCR?!* (You can google it later!)

Because I grew up with four brothers, most of the movies we watched were full of action with heroes and the villains they conquered—good versus evil. Sometimes, a character we grew to love and trust throughout a story turned out to be the villain in the end. So every time we sat down to watch the newest action movie, I started scrutinizing the good guys wondering, *Are they really good? Can they be trusted?*

As I grew older, I found myself asking that same question in relationships—even my relationship with God. Is He *truly* good? Can He be trusted? I struggled with this question for years because I couldn't understand why a good God would allow bad things to happen in my life—dreams and desires not being realized, heartbreak and disappointment in relationships, and the loss of loved ones. I wrestled with making sense of it all.

My questioning led me to two options: allow the hurt and disappointment to build a wall in my heart, separating me from God, or go to Him with all of it. I chose the latter and began to do two important things that helped me discover His goodness:

1. I spent time in His presence in worship. Pastor Robert teaches about God's omnipresence that is everywhere at all times and His manifest presence where He makes Himself known to us. When I made time to worship God and be in His manifest presence, He softened and healed my heart and spoke the truth of who He is and who I am to Him.
2. I opened my Bible and began to read about the truth of His character and nature. I discovered: • ... "The Lord is just! He is my rock! There is no evil in him!" (Psalm 92:15, NLT). • ... he is good! His faithful love endures forever (Psalm 107:1, NLT). • The Lord is good to everyone. He showers compassion on all his creation (Psalm 145:9, NLT).

Every moment I spent in God's presence and every time I read His Word, His goodness was confirmed to me over and over. King David's words in Psalm 34:8 became my life banner: “Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the man who trusts in Him!” The only way we “taste” or experience His goodness and really get to know Him is by spending time with Him

and in His Word. And once we taste His goodness, we realize nothing else will ever satisfy or sustain us like He can!

I've discovered I can't always make sense of things that happen in my life, and I may not get all the answers I want while on earth, but I know this: my God is good, He is faithful, and His love *can* be trusted. Romans 8:28 (NLT) says, "God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them." He *is* good and He *does* good. There may be times the hand of God can seem a mystery, but I know my Father's heart, and I know I can trust His goodness!

Prayer

Father God, help me see and trust Your goodness in every area and season of my life.
As I open my heart fully to You, open my eyes to the truth that You are good, You love me, and You are for me. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Activation

- Take some time to think about the areas of your life where you have already seen God's goodness displayed. Let this build your faith in trusting His goodness in other areas of your life.
- Write down a few verses from the Bible where God promises His goodness, and put them somewhere you will see them often and can pray them over your life.

Holy Spirit, what are You saying to me today?

Day 8 – God Does the Work. An Invitation to Rest

“Come to me. Get away with me and you’ll recover your life. I’ll show you how to take a real rest.”

Matthew 11:28 (MSG)

I was sitting, not too patiently, in the cold, austere doctor’s office comforted only by the Scriptures on the wall. Surely the myriad of tests I had undergone would finally bring some answers to the unexplainable fatigue, weariness, heart palpitations, sleeplessness, and other symptoms I had been dealing with for far too long now. I was surprised but relieved when the doctor told me all the tests were negative. There was nothing physically wrong with me. After asking me some life questions, the doctor pulled out a prescription pad and drew a rectangle with multiple lines stretching from one edge of the paper to the other. He told me the rectangle represented me. His diagnosis: “You are living with no margins.”

The doctor’s words were a reality check, and I was *so* grateful for this it’s-not-too-late prescription. My physical exhaustion was the result of serving God with a passion that got ahead of His purposes and plans. My pattern of unsanctified yeses was just that: *unsanctified*. The constant state of the calendar running my life had to stop. I knew I was dealing with a spiritual problem that could be healed in God’s presence.

I began searching the Scriptures for concrete answers to the mess I had gotten myself into. “He makes me to lie down in green pastures” (Psalm 23:2). Green pastures was not my spiritual address. I was living on Burnout Street.

So my prayer chair became a place of *resting* instead of *wrestling*. My prayers moved from unrighteous worry to righteous burdens. Then Holy Spirit laid out a three-step pattern for my meeting with Him.

• Be Fully Present: Putting aside distractions, disappointments, and distress, I paused until I was *fully* present. • Be Fully in His Presence: I rested and hosted His presence before I read the Scriptures, prayed, or journaled. • Be Fully Satisfied: I didn’t leave until I felt an “amen” in my spirit. There were not always answers, directions, or revelatory moments, but there was a sensing we had met face-to-face.

This three-step pattern could take place in five minutes or three hours. And I learned it could be repeated throughout the day—anytime and anywhere. My time with God became a continual process of lying down in green pastures!

It wasn't long into my search for God's answers to my *no-margin* living when He interrupted my thoughts: *I lay claim to your evening*. This holy interruption immediately created a peaceful, settled feeling in my heart. God desired to talk about something more important to Him—and ultimately to me: my day-to-day or rather day-to-*night* routine. You see, I am what the dictionary and everyone else would describe as nocturnal. I come alive at 10 pm. I like the peace and quiet of my everyone-else-including-the-puppies-are-sleeping house. I treasure and, if truth be told, covet *my* evening time. It's in those late-night hours that my unfinished to-do list fades into a compartmentalized Scarlett O'Hara-ish "I'll think about it tomorrow" place. After all, tomorrow is another day. So when I became more intentional about that time, slowly but surely my zoned-out evenings took on a peace I hadn't known. I began filling those last hours with things that replenish me: calligraphy, baking, reading, and journaling.

As my conversation with God continued, it was no surprise when He wanted to talk about Sabbath. It was also no surprise how much of a course correction I had to make to obey His commandment. The surprise came as I researched the Jewish mindset about Sabbath. I learned this special, set-apart day is celebrated Friday evening through Saturday evening, but the excitement continues throughout the week. From Wednesday to Friday, you plan and anticipate. Then Sunday to Tuesday you soak in the joy and blessings of this special "keep it holy" day (Exodus 20:8).

With God's help I've moved my spiritual address from one with no margin to one with space for Him to set the rhythm. "Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest" (Matthew 11:28, MSG). This invitation is given to you and me. It's an invitation to be equally yoked to *Him* and find the sustainable rest only He can provide. *His* ways are indeed the greener pastures.

Prayer

Abba, what a good Father You are. Jesus, what a good Shepherd You are. Holy Spirit what a good Teacher You are. Your care for me—body, soul, and spirit—is so evident. Please forgive me for not stewarding my body as I should. I am committed to hearing and obeying Your invitation to daily lie down in green pastures. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Activation

- Does your calendar reflect the rhythm God designed for a healthy body, soul, and spirit?
- Ask God to speak to areas in your life and relationships that are out of order.
- Seek God's direction for a Sabbath mindset that is a daily rest in Him.
- Thank God for caring and being attentive to every detail of your life.

Holy Spirit, what are You saying to me today?

Day 9 – The Peace of Still Water

On the same day, when evening had come, He said to them, "Let us cross over to the other side." Now when they had left the multitude, they took Him along in the boat as He was. And other little boats were also with Him. And a great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that it was already filling. But He was in the stern, asleep on a pillow. And they awoke Him and said to Him, "Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing?" Then He arose and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Peace, be still!" And the wind ceased and there was a great calm. But He said to them, "Why are you so fearful? How is it that you have no faith?"

Mark 4:35–40

I remember a day playing in the ocean as a kid, blissfully unaware of its power and lethality. I remember my sister calling repeatedly from the shore that it was time to go home, and I remember half swimming and half stumbling, desperate to get to her, but only drifting farther into the waves. I remember the man with the long, curly gray hair sweeping me up in one tanned arm, with a surfboard in the other, and carrying me to shore. "There's a riptide out there," he told my sister as he set me on solid ground. "You could have lost her."

Water is an immensely powerful thing. If you've ever been in over your head in troubled water, you know the sheer terror of it—every synapse aware of imminent danger and every muscle unified in one desperate pursuit to keep your head above the waves. I'm not sure there is anything in this life more exhausting than trying to survive deep, churning water.

That's the kind of water that overtook the disciples' boat the night they woke Jesus from His pillowed sleep. The Sea of Galilee, carved like a bowl in the Jordan Rift Valley, caught the sudden storm like a wind tunnel, and it gripped the experienced fishermen with fear. In terror, they woke Jesus, and He rebuked the wind and the waves. "Peace, be still!" He said, and both obeyed.

It's certainly a comfort to know our God can calm the sea at will. I have, on many occasions, called out to Him in terror and watched Him speak stillness to the dark water around me. But like those fishermen, I am prone to missing the most important part of this story if I don't pay careful attention.

The next words Jesus addressed to the disciples who woke Him were: "Why are you so fearful? How is it that you have no faith?" This is a perplexing response considering the disciples had brought their fear to Him. They at least had enough faith to know who to ask for help, right? But Jesus didn't say, "Wow, I didn't see that storm coming. It's a good thing you guys woke Me up." Instead, His loving rebuke suggests they never needed to wake Him at all. Jesus *knew* the storm would not overtake them. He *knew* they were equipped enough to handle it, and He implies *they* could have known it too. Jesus didn't calm the storm to keep the disciples from drowning; He calmed the storm to alleviate their fear.

Imagine having such complete faith in God that you not only know He *can* resolve whatever circumstances loom over you but you also trust Him when it feels like He's not doing anything about them.

This story compels me, and more importantly, it reveals another layer of how deeply we are loved by this Savior of ours. How many times has He calmed the waters, not because we faced danger but because we were afraid, and He wanted us to know peace?

My four-year-old daughter is afraid of crocodiles. She'll call to me at night, crying that she sees them in her room. Between you and me, I know there aren't any crocodiles in there before I go in—but I still go. Would I wrestle a crocodile to save my little girl? You bet your life I would. But that's not why I go in there. I go in there because I love her, and I want better for her than fear.

That's the love of the Father—the Shepherd who leads us beside *still* waters. He knows how exhausting fear is. He knows what a thief anxiety and stress can be. So, He leads us by still waters—not because the storm doesn't sometimes rise up and not because we can't handle it when it does. He does it because He loves us, knows what we need, and wants better for us than the fatigue of fear.

If you are weary from treading the violent waters of fear and circumstance, remind your heart of the One who can speak to them, walk on them, and still them. Lie back in His arms and let Him lead you beside quiet waters today.

Prayer

Shepherd of my heart, You are greater than any storm, stronger than any wind, and deeper than any water. Thank You that not only can You calm the waters but You choose to out of love for me. Quiet the storms around me, and even more importantly, help me allow You to lead my heart to peace in the midst of them. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Activation

- If your heart resonates with being overwhelmed by stormy seas, take a few minutes to remember a time in your past when God rescued you.
- Remind your heart of God's love for you as you speak your gratitude to Him aloud.
- Ask God for wisdom on the first step to follow Him toward still waters, and rest in His answer.

Holy Spirit, what are You saying to me today?

Day 10 – The Master Restorer

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.

2 Corinthians 5:17

A friend of mine restores cars—the kind of cars that really catch your eye while driving down the highway. Red leather seats, perfectly polished chrome, white-walled tires—each car is a testament to its owner’s loving care. Before they were road-ready, those cars were jacked up in a garage and stripped down to the chassis to be rewired, reworked, and reassembled to their original design.

Have you ever felt like that—undone and stripped to the chassis with your life in pieces? Perhaps *you’ve* been towed into a spiritual garage to be rewired, reworked, and reassembled by God, the Master Restorer. He made you, He leads you, and He knows exactly how to restore you to your original state—to whom you were created to be. Psalm 23:3 specifically declares God to be the Shepherd who restores our soul: our mind, will, and emotions.

Psalm 23 doesn’t gloss over or avoid the truth that life is hard. We walk through darkness; we experience evil; we are surrounded by enemies. Our souls are misshapen and exhausted by these experiences, making us road weary. Influenced by sin and our finite understanding, we come to incomplete conclusions about God, ourselves, and others. We need restoration.

If you need God to restore your soul today, allow Him to:

- Renew your **mind**, giving you the mind of Christ (1 Corinthians 2:16).
- Rework your **will**, inviting you into His will and kingdom (Matthew 6:10).
- Reassemble your **emotions**, influencing your desires and drawing you into praise and gratitude (Psalm 37:4).

God knows how you were created to function, and He empathizes with the weariness and dysfunction you face. Our Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ, has come to lead you and restore you to your original design. Once He restores your soul in the garage, it’s His pleasure to fire you up, take you out for a drive on the highway, and let people stare. You’re a testament to your owner’s loving care.

Prayer

Lord, we need You to restore us. Restoration rings of hope, but it’s preceded by surrender. Help us relax in Your hands and patiently wait on You even when we’re jacked up in Your garage. Give us the mind of Christ. We surrender to Your will as citizens of Your kingdom. We surrender to Your desires, grateful that You deposit

goodness in our hearts. Lord, thank You for being our Master Restorer. In Jesus' name, Amen.



Activation

- Invite the Holy Spirit to show you the ways in which your soul is weary. Write them down as an act of surrender to both the reality of those hard things and the reality of His tender care. Listen for His response to your confession.
- Ask the Lord to give you His perspective on a challenge you are facing: Lord, where are You in this situation? What do You have to say about it? What would You like to show me about Yourself, myself, or others through this?

Holy Spirit, what are You saying to me today?

Day 11 – Follow the Leader

“My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.”

John 10:27 (ESV)

Have you ever been a thoughtless *follower*—led by what everyone else is doing without thinking about risks or ramifications? I remember how a conversation went with my parents after I had done something foolish. They started with, “*Why would you do that?*” And I replied, “Because *everyone* was doing it.” As you might guess, their comeback was, “If everyone was jumping off a cliff, would you jump too?” The probable answer was yes—I most likely would have followed the group without someone wiser to lead me!

In Psalm 23, David compares us to sheep being led by a shepherd. He writes, “The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters. He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name’s sake.” The calming tone of this message reassures us that our Shepherd, Jesus, takes care of our needs, gives us rest, and *leads* us.

Though sheep are not humans, we *do* have some similarities. Sheep are by nature followers. They follow each other around with no thought of danger or awareness of their surroundings. If a sheep at the front of the flock wanders off a cliff, it’s likely the rest of the flock will follow right behind. That makes their shepherd’s role as leader critical for their survival.

Without a shepherd, it is hard for sheep to find pasture for grazing and the water they need to sustain life. Although their bodies are composed of nearly seventy percent water, and drinking water is essential to their bodies functioning properly, sheep will *not* drink from fast-moving water. Because of their heavy wool coats, running water poses a serious risk for them to get swept away and drown. That’s why they need their shepherd to lead them to a slow-moving stream or fresh pool of water to satisfy their thirst.

Usually humans can survive three to seven days without water, but a lack of it can affect our bodies and thoughts in strange ways. Water is essential to life. When Jesus encountered the woman at the well in John 4:14, He told her that He would give her living water and she would thirst no more. In John 7:38 Jesus said, “Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’” Like sheep, we regularly need quiet time and a still place with few distractions to drink the living water our Shepherd provides for us.

One more thing you need to know about sheep is, like us, they learn to hear and distinguish their shepherd’s voice. The shepherd constantly talks, calls, and sings to them so they will learn his voice and follow him. In Hebrews 5:11–14, we are reminded spiritual growth includes learning God’s voice; we need to train by constant practice to discern between good and evil. And in John 10, Jesus tells us that His sheep follow Him because they know His voice.

Do you hear the Shepherd’s call, His voice, and the song He is singing over you today? Follow Him! He will satisfy your thirst and give you rest.

Prayer

Thank You, Lord, for being my Shepherd. I ask You to lead me today in the way You want me to go. Bring me to the place of Your full provision so that my thirst for life and significance might be quenched. Help me hear You speaking today so I may follow You in all Your ways. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Activation

- Pray for God to lead us in the way He wants us to go.
- Pray for living water to fill your life and satisfy your soul.
- Pray for clarity and sensitivity to hear Jesus our Shepherd's voice today.

Holy Spirit, what are You saying to me today?

Day 12 – The Paths of Righteousness

In the path of righteousness is life, and in its pathway, there is no death.

Proverbs 12:28 (ESV)

We'd planned our perfect family vacation. My wife, Kelly, and I, along with our daughter, Jessica, flew into Los Angeles to spend a few days enjoying the secluded beaches of Malibu before working our way up the West Coast.

After a few relaxing days in Malibu, we rose early on a bright, crisp November morning to drive the 350-mile journey from Malibu to Carmel. Before leaving, we prayed God would lead us in paths of righteousness (Psalm 23:3). And though we'd made plans, we asked Him to direct our steps (Proverbs 16:9).

As we drove up coast-hugging Highway 1, the ocean views were breathtaking. Every few miles the road widened into a scenic vista with a pullout to stop and enjoy the spectacular views. Some

were elaborate with dozens of paved parking spots while others were small dirt turnouts with space for a few cars.

Jessica, the photography enthusiast she is, watched every turn, looking for the perfect vista to shoot photos. She finally shouted, “Stop! This is it!” Trusting Jessica’s instincts, I quickly turned into nothing more than a dirt shoulder with room for only three vehicles—and one spot was already taken.

We pulled right next to the car that was already parked, and as we got out, we noticed a couple standing by. While Jessica was shooting pictures, the man asked me, “Do you go to Gateway Church?” I said, “Yes, we do!” He said, “*We do too!*” I was shocked! “What campus do you attend?” I told him, and he said, “We do too!” We were more than 1,500 miles from home and both pulled into *that* miniscule spot on the same day, at the same time. What are the chances?! The Lord used that divine appointment to confirm He was literally guiding our steps.

Perhaps you feel like your steps are aimless. If you commit your way to the Lord, He will lead you in paths of righteousness. These paths aren’t imperceptible. In fact, the Hebrew word for “path” in that Psalm means a track or entrenchment. In other words, the way is long established; these are ancient paths others have traveled before us. Jeremiah 6:16 (NIV) declares, “This is what the Lord says: ‘Stand at the crossroads and look; ask for the ancient paths, ask where the good way is, and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls.’”

As we yield to the Lord’s guidance as our Good Shepherd, He so lovingly weighs every intricate detail to lead us in the plans and paths He’s established for us. Proverbs 16:9 (NLT) assures us, “We can make our plans, but the Lord determines our steps.” The word “steps” even encompasses the length of our stride and the pace at which we walk.

Even more remarkable is the origin for the word “steps.” The Hebrew root word refers to the pipes or feeding tubes that supply lamps with oil. In Zechariah 4, during an encounter with an angel, Zechariah has a vision of a seven-branched lampstand like the one found in the Tabernacle. However, this one has been altered so it never needs to be refilled by human effort! A bowl of oil was added on top as well as seven pipes to *each* of the seven lamps to feed the oil from the bowl to the lamps. An olive tree sits on each side of the lampstand, each one constantly supplying fresh oil through pipes to the bowl. These modifications emphasize a continuous, overabundant supply of oil. When Zechariah asks what this means, the angel says, “‘Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,’ says the Lord Almighty” (Zechariah 4:6b, NIV).

In other words, what God does through us is not accomplished by human strength but rather by the power of the Holy Spirit! God provides *guidance* for each of our steps and *empowers* each step with a constant flow of the presence of the Holy Spirit!

Be encouraged today that your Good Shepherd is guiding and empowering you. He wants to remind you of His promise to direct your steps—even down to your pace and the length of your stride. He’s intimately involved in every detail of your life and will supply you with the fresh oil you need to burn with passion for Him. He’ll set you on the ancient paths of righteousness for the sake of His great name.

Prayer

Father, I'm so grateful You establish my path, and You guide and empower each step. I receive Your loving guidance as my Good Shepherd. I recognize the choices I make are not between right and wrong, but rather between life and death. I choose life—Your life! Show me the ancient paths so I may walk in them to fulfill the destiny You've established for me. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Activation

- Do you feel unclear about your direction in life? Invite the Good Shepherd to establish your paths and guide your steps. Spend time alone with God every day, knowing His Word is a lamp to your feet and a light to your path (Psalm 119:105). As you read His Word, you'll begin to recognize the sound of His voice more clearly.
- Jesus says, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow Me" (John 10:27). Prayer involves talking and listening, so practice spending time in God's presence by quieting yourself to listen for His voice. Involve Him in every decision you make.

Holy Spirit, what are You saying to me today?

Day 13 – At the Mention of His Name(s)

Jew and Gentile are the same in this respect. They have the same Lord, who gives generously to all who call on him. For “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

Romans 10:12–13 (NLT)

I’ve recently discovered just how wonderful it is to be a grandpa, or should I say, “Papa.” That’s the name my wife, Jodie, decided I should have as a grandpa. Our first and only grandchild (so far) was born in August of 2020. His name is Jude, and I absolutely love everything about this little man! In my opinion, he is perfect! I love calling his name, seeing his amazing smile, and watching him grow right before my eyes. I cannot wait for the day he calls me Papa! I have yet to hear him say that word, but it doesn’t keep me from constantly trying to pull it out of him. Whenever he *does* call me Papa, I’ll be sure to let the world know. It will absolutely be an epic moment!

I can’t help but think God is similarly overjoyed when we call His name. Psalm 139:18 says His thoughts toward us outnumber the grains of sand. He loves us more than we could ever comprehend. I can just imagine Him smiling with delight when His children call out His name and turn their attention toward Him.

God *loves* for us to call upon His name. Maybe that’s why He gave us so many names to call Him. Yes, He is the Great I AM, but He also gives us more specific names to call Him—names that reveal His majesty and let us know He is eternal, everlasting, the beginning and the end, Creator, Almighty, Lord of Heaven’s Armies, and Most High. He also gives us names that are

deeply personal to let us know He is our Father, Shepherd, Provider, Healer, Shield, Refuge, Savior, and Deliverer. And that's not an all-inclusive list! There are so many other names for God in the Bible that reveal God's nature and heart toward us.

We can trust our Good Shepherd will always lead us down the right path, as Psalm 23:3 assures us, but we have to willingly surrender to His lordship over our lives. Just like it's difficult to guide a sheep that keeps wandering off and chasing whatever catches its attention, so it is when we choose to go our own way or seek to make our own name great instead of God's. But when we submit to Him and seek to glorify Him in all we do, He is able to gently show us the way that's best for us. Knowing that God leads us for His name's sake is so comforting because it means He takes full responsibility for the direction of our lives. We just need to trust and obey Him.

Today, wherever you are and whatever is going on in your life, God is waiting for you to call out His name. He is waiting for you to make a sound in His direction. We have His full attention, affection, and acceptance. Although He is all-sufficient in His nature, God is simply unwilling to live without us. What do you need Him to be for you in this moment as you call upon Him?

Prayer

Almighty God, I call on Your name right now. I know You hear my voice as I cry out, and You see me right where I am. With all my heart, I believe You are the Great I AM—everything I need. Thank You for giving me more than I could ever deserve. Thank You for loving me and never withholding any of Your goodness from me. May I live each day in a way that brings glory to You. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Activation

- Call on the name(s) of God. What do you need in your life in this moment? If you need peace, pray to Jehovah Shalom (God Our Peace). If you need resources, pray to Jehovah Jireh (God Our Provider). Whatever you need, just call out to God. He is waiting for you to call on His name.
- Linger in God's presence. Once you have called on His name, stay in that place. Remember that He longs to be with you. Enjoy the fullness of His glory and presence.
- Listen closely as God speaks. Zephaniah 3:17 says He rejoices over us with singing. Isaiah 43:1 says God has called us by name. Get quiet before the Lord and listen as He sings over you and calls you by name.

Holy Spirit, what are You saying to me today?

Day 14 – The Only Way Out

“Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, whose trust is the Lord. He is like a tree planted by water, that sends out its roots by the stream, and does not fear when heat comes, for its leaves remain green, and is not anxious in the year of drought, for it does not cease to bear fruit.”

Jeremiah 17:7–8 (ESV)

I’ve always been fascinated by the seasons changing. Growing up in Louisiana, our “seasons” were sometimes hard to distinguish, but I’ve always loved the first sight of an orange or red leaf peeking through the sea of green pine and cypress trees. There’s something so special about the change of the seasons being revealed in God’s creation; we’re invited to take a closer look at the nature we’ve hurried by hundreds of times.

Wouldn’t it be nice to know when the seasons of your life were about to change? Imagine receiving a “red-leaf notification” that soon you’d be departing a bright mountaintop season and heading into the darkness of “the valley.”

On our journey through Psalm 23, we’ve arrived at that uneasy point—the edge of the valley. It’s a level playing field representing the issues and difficulties no one is exempt from walking through.

My first experience with the valley occurred when I was nine years old, and my mom told our family about her cancer diagnosis. We believed in God—praying for her healing for over a year while she battled the disease through treatment. Ultimately, after a hard fight, my mom passed away two weeks before Christmas.

Almost 20 years later, as a married man with four children, I found myself facing the edge of the valley again. While going to check on our two-month-old son Oxford, my wife found him unresponsive and not breathing—it was apparent SIDS (Sudden Infant Death Syndrome). Driving behind the ambulance, I cried out to God to save our son’s life and bring him back to us.

Three days later, we experienced a miracle, and we were able to leave the hospital with our completely healthy baby boy.

I've come through the valley with heartbreak and unanswered prayers, and I've come through the valley with the outcome I wanted. But each time I've come through, I've seen God prove Himself to be good. He was near to me when I was brokenhearted, willing to walk me through a process of healing and answering my questions and doubts along the way. God has done miracles in my life and my family's lives—literally bringing my son back from the dead as we prayed.

Have you ever thought, *Why does the Good Shepherd lead us through the valley at all? Surely there's a way around every difficult place.* But while it would feel so much easier if God led us only from mountaintop to mountaintop, the truth is we'd be missing a piece of His nature along the way. So He guides us through the valley, ministering to us through His presence and moving us through His power.

There is a certain nearness of God—a light of His Spirit—that can only be seen in the valley of shadows. He wants us to experience His fullness, especially in that place. God is not intimidated by difficulty, and He does not inch away from darkness. Instead, our omnipresent God leads us onward in full confidence because at the same time He's with us in the valley, He's also on the other side of it shaping a future full of our good and His glory.

Psalm 23:4 (NIV) contains an incredible promise hidden in plain sight. It says, “Even though I walk *through* the darkest valley” This Scripture declares there *is* another side, and we're going to make it there. We're not called to *stay* in the valley. We're there so we can go *through* it. Maybe you've turned your back on the valley because you still remember the hard times and days you were caught in its' ominous reach. Today, with the power of God filling you, I urge you to turn around and face it. Take the hand of your heavenly Father, a very present help in time of need. Look toward Him. You'll see He's not shaken or surprised by what's ahead. And as the Good Shepherd guides you through the valley, you can trust that He genuinely knows and cares about what you're feeling deep down inside.

The only way out is *through*. May you see God's goodness as you take the next step through the valley with Him.

Prayer

Lord, today we pray all our trust would be in You. May we be filled with faith that just as You've brought us through the valley before, You'll do it again. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Activation

- Remember the times in your life when God has brought you through difficulty. Ask Him to give you faith to trust Him to bring you through your current situation.
- Ask the Lord to fill you with courage to face what's ahead of you. Imagine yourself grabbing His hand and taking the next step through the valley.

Holy Spirit, what are You saying to me today?

Day 15 – No Fear

“Keep this Book of the Law always on your lips; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful. Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.”

Joshua 1:8–9 (NIV)

If I told you in this moment, “Don’t think about a purple elephant,” what happens? Do you instantly get a picture of a purple elephant in your mind? And if I describe it as a *big* purple elephant, does it take on even more shape and life in your thoughts?

Joshua 1:8 tells us we should meditate on the Word of God day and night. I think we can easily over-spiritualize the word “meditate” because we hear it in church, but did you know you are already meditating daily? Meditating is nothing more than thinking, contemplating, or reflecting on something. So when you worry about the unknown—guess what— you’re meditating. When you worry about your kids, your finances, or your job, you’re meditating. You are *choosing* to think about something constantly.

When we focus our attention on the wrong things or circumstances out of our control, we experience stress, anxiety, and fear. I heard this quote from pastor and author Timothy Keller: “Anxiety is the result of a collapsing false god.” Wow! Think about that for a moment. Worry is fear of the unknown, and fear is ultimately faith in the wrong things.

Several years ago, my old boss sent me a meeting request. My mind began to race: *Why would he want to meet with me? Am I not reaching my goals? Did I say something I shouldn’t have on a customer service call? Are they letting me go?* There I was: losing sleep, stress-eating my entire pantry, and putting my faith in fear. When our meeting finally arrived, my boss said he wanted to

promote me to another role I honestly didn't think I was qualified for. It was the complete *opposite* outcome of what I had been meditating on all week!

If I had fully trusted in God's good plans for me, I wouldn't have had a second thought on that email—regardless of the outcome. You see, Galatians 5:6 tells us that faith works through *love*. When we know God loves us, it is so much easier to believe He will do what's best for us. In addition, Psalm 23:4 lets us know that we *never* have to fear. Why? Because our Good Shepherd is *always* with us and by our side.

My personal example may seem small, but every time we are faced with the unknown—financial strain, a bad doctor's report, a broken marriage, infertility, family dysfunction—we are given an opportunity to either put our faith in fear or put our faith in God's perfect love. I love what Jesus says in Matthew 7:11 (NIV): "If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!" Today, let's choose to release the things we can't control and cast our worries, anxieties, and fears into His strong, capable hands.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, You love me. Help me believe that every day. I cast all my worries, anxieties, and fears on You. Forgive me for trying to take things into my own hands and not trusting You are in control and want what's best for me. As I read and reflect on Your Word, increase my faith in Your perfect love! In Jesus' name, Amen.

Activation

- Ask the Holy Spirit to help you identify what you are giving your attention to that is stealing your peace. Write those things down and then write what the Lord says about them.
- Replace negative thoughts with the truth of God's Word. Memorize and meditate daily on the verses for further study or other Scripture that speaks to the topic causing you to fear. Consider writing the verses on index cards and putting them around your house and in your car.

Holy Spirit, what are You saying to me today?

Day 16 – Today in View of Eternity

Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.

Psalm 90:12 (NIV)

"I know that my redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand on the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; I myself will see him with my own eyes—I, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!" Job 19:25–27 (NIV)

I was recently in Colorado and had the opportunity to climb a fourteener named Uncompahgre Peak. At 14,321 feet above sea level, it is the highest summit of the San Juan Mountains. The view from the top is spectacular with a 700-foot cliff that exposes a large outcrop of bedrock. As I stood close to the edge, I wondered how sturdy the rocks were beneath me. Every once in a while, a story surfaces of a rock ledge that finally gives way, and I prayed I wasn't standing on the next one.

But isn't that how all of life is—lived in view of eternity? Every day, every drive, and every dull and forgotten moment is lived on the brink of a precipice, lingering between our time here on earth and eternity.

Near the end of World War II, C. S. Lewis wrote: "The war creates no absolutely new situation; it simply aggravates the permanent human situation so that we can no longer ignore it. Human life has always been lived on the edge of a precipice." Indeed, my morning spent peering from the top of Uncompahgre Peak is what we all do every day without even realizing it: live on the edge of a cliff between here and eternity. And more times than we care to admit, the rocky crag gives way under our feet. We were all confronted with this reality when COVID-19 gripped the world. Friends and family lost their battles, and our collective awareness grew of just how close to the edge we dance.

No matter how well we prepare, moths and rust will eat away at the treasure we thought secure. Even nations and economies aren't exempt—all feel the effects of time as it rushes forward. It's not morbid to number our days; it's wise. Life is so brief, even if it lasts 100 years. What then? Wisdom considers and starts preparing.

Each day begins and ends without fanfare; it can get monotonous. Yet numbering our days begins with today—this repetitive yet unrepeatable day. Every day is filled with 1,440 minutes—each minute either mundane or pregnant with hope. When the seed of eternity has filled you with hope, it changes your view of the future.

Many preachers say we are in the last days. Whether they are right or wrong, only God knows. But these are *our* last days, whether Jesus returns to us or we go to Him. This revelation is reason for hope and joy, not fear and dread. So, lift up your head—your redemption draws near!

Prayer

Father, I can honestly say I'm a little hesitant to number my days. The thought of my own death is strange to consider, and as much as I love You, there is so much mystery about what happens next. So I need grace and revelation. Please guide me through a healthy and happy way to gain a heart of wisdom. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Activation

- Thank God that He has not given you fear, even in the valley of the shadows.
- Thank God that Jesus has gone before you to prepare a place for you.
- Thank God that eternity will be filled with nearness to Him, beauty, loved ones, and unfolding revelation of how great His love is.
- Thank God for a growing confidence that He will guide you all the way home.

Holy Spirit, what are You saying to me today?

Day 17 – God, Our Defender

He only is my rock and my salvation; He is my defense; I shall not be moved. In God is my salvation and my glory; the rock of my strength, and my refuge, is in God. Trust in Him at all times, you people; pour out your heart before Him; God is a refuge for us. Selah

Psalm 62:6–8

Imagine this: Two little kids are sitting on the floor happily playing together when suddenly one kid takes the toy the other is playing with, sticks out their tongue, and says, “Nah nah.” The kid who has been stolen from starts crying and then quickly punches the other kid in the face. Now both kids are screaming, neither one happy anymore.

Do you have a memory like this from your childhood, or was this just a six-year-old Bridgette thing? In more recent years, maybe you’ve experienced similar scenes with your own children and found yourself responding the same way my parents did: “Next time, come tell me instead of taking things into your own hands. I could have handled this, but now you’re both in trouble.” Surely this is a typical human response, right? You hurt me; I hurt you. You mistreat me; I mistreat you—an eye for an eye.

Have you ever felt cheated, mistreated, wrongfully disqualified, misrepresented, or unheard? In those moments, the lives we’ve built (and our futures) can seem in jeopardy. A fear of lack can cause us to do whatever it takes to defend our feelings, reputations, or investments—even at the expense of others.

We naturally have the desire to regain what was taken from us, but Psalm 23 lets us know that all we need can be found in Jesus; we lack nothing. Just like a shepherd uses a rod and staff to protect and guide his sheep, the Lord defends, comforts, and guides us with His rod and staff. And because He is always with us, we don’t need to fear our enemies or the future. We can trust every situation we face is in God’s hands because no matter what our enemies do to attack us, God overrides those actions with His goodness and mercy, and we have the ultimate eternal victory.

The hurts and offenses I experienced as a kid, no matter how minor, felt so drastic that I needed to right the wrongs immediately. But in the grand scheme of things, I don’t even remember what my siblings and I were fighting about.

Maybe today you’re experiencing a relationship that failed and is now tainting your reputation. Or perhaps you’re dealing with a business transaction that’s gone wrong and is causing you financial loss. Whatever you’re facing today, it’s probably much more significant than someone taking your favorite toy.

We’ve all had moments when the world has told us to defend ourselves or right the wrong. But when we first take it to our heavenly Father, we can rest in knowing He *will* take care of it, but in His timing and in His way. And who knows, maybe He will show you a creative way to make things right while sharing His love with the person who offended you. Or perhaps He will ask you to trust Him to resolve things with His hands and not yours—to forgive the person who hurt you and move on.

Remembering that God is our Defender and that this life is just a moment in time can help change our perspective on what we deem punch-in-the-face worthy. And when we feel the need to defend ourselves rising up, David’s words give us strength: “He is my defense; I shall not be moved. In God is my salvation and my glory; the rock of my strength, and my refuge, is in God.”

Prayer

Lord, thank You for being my Shepherd and Defender. Holy Spirit, reveal to me any areas where I need to forgive someone, and heal me of any resentment I may be carrying for that person. I trust You and believe You are working all things out for my good. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Activation

- Ask the Lord to reveal any areas where you are holding a grudge, plotting revenge, or believing a lie that you are suffering from lack by the hand of another.
- Decide to put your trust in the Lord as your Defender and Shepherd. Trust that He will heal the wounded areas in your life and lead you to a place of freedom and abundance.

Holy Spirit, what are You saying to me today?

Day 18 – God Our Protector

“Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the Lord your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you.”

Deuteronomy 31:6 (NIV)

When I was about ten years old, my family moved to a new neighborhood where my younger brother began to be harassed by a neighborhood bully. When my brother rode his bike around the neighborhood, the instigator would chase him, trying to make him fall. Since we were new to the area, this neighborhood menace was unaware of one important piece of information: our older brother knew karate. Okay, not really, but we did watch a lot of kung fu theater on Saturday afternoons, so that counts. When my older brother found out what was going on, he went into protective-big-brother mode and put a swift end to the bully's harassment using said martial arts skills.

I'll never forget the moment my older brother sprang into action without hesitation and fear. He deeply cared about protecting our younger brother and carrying out justice. The bully suffered some minor embarrassment and a swollen left eye, and from then on, my younger brother rode his bike with new confidence and security. As time passed, the bully reformed his ways, and my brothers and I became good friends with him.

For adults, life is often *much* more complicated. We face different kinds of bullies, and we fight different kinds of battles. We stand toe to toe with an enemy who wants nothing more than to inflict as much pain and suffering as possible. But as followers of Christ, we can go through life with confidence and security, knowing our Protector is faithful and strong.

Psalms 121:5–8 (NLT) provides us with this encouragement: “The Lord himself watches over you! The Lord stands beside you as your protective shade. The sun will not harm you by day, nor the moon at night. The Lord keeps you from all harm and watches over your life. The Lord keeps watch over you as you come and go, both now and forever.”

You are valuable to God, and He protects what is valuable to Him. That doesn't mean we won't face challenges or suffer loss, but when we do, we can trust God is with us, and with His comfort, strength, and peace, we can keep pedaling forward.

Psalms 91:1–7 (NIV) is a great reminder of this: “Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, ‘He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust.’ Surely he will save you from the fowler's snare and from the deadly pestilence. He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart. You will not fear the terror of night, nor the arrow that flies by day, nor the pestilence that stalks in the darkness, nor the plague that destroys at midday. A thousand may fall at your side, ten thousand at your right hand, but it will not come near you.”

Later in the Psalm, the Lord says, “I will rescue those who love me. I will protect those who trust in my name. When they call on me, I will answer; I will be with them in trouble. I will rescue and honor them” (Psalm 91:14–15, NLT). When we put God first and walk in the path He sets before us, we walk under His provision, power, and protection.

God, our Protector, does not promise us a pain-free life, but He *does* promise to never leave us or forsake us. Today, I want to encourage you to believe the truth that God is with you, deeply cares about you, and desires good for you.

Prayer

Lord, thank You for Your love and protection over my life. As I walk hand in hand with You, let me walk with confidence and security knowing You love me and watch over me. As I acknowledge Your name in all things, I trust You will be with me in

times of trouble and deliver me from every snare set before me. In Jesus' name,
Amen.

Activation

- Read the verses for further study and pray for a deeper understanding of God's love for you. When we have a better understanding of how He values us as His children, our confidence in His protection grows.
- Ask the Lord to show you how to live according to Psalm 91:14–15. When we love the Lord and acknowledge His name, the Word says He will rescue us, protect us, and answer when we call.
- Take time to thank God for His continued protection over you. There is no way to know how many times during our lives God has rescued us from dangerous situations we were unaware of.
- Remind yourself of the truth that God loves, values, and watches over you.

Holy Spirit, what are You saying to me today?

Day 19 – God Our Comforter

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God.

2 Corinthians 1:3–4 (NIV)

My journey to parenthood has been a long lesson in learning about God as the Comforter. My husband and I have two babies in heaven, and I spent a lot of time doing what I could to avoid the pain of those heartbreaks, which really meant I avoided allowing God to heal my heart. Thankfully, through the Lord's gentle nudges, I finally realized His perfect comfort was what I really needed. It makes me a little sad to think about the time I spent trying to hide when the Lord was right there, waiting for me to allow Him in. How sweet is His patience with His children!

By God's grace, my husband and I now have two kids on earth. And while I'm so sad to ever see them in pain, my heart warms the moment they turn to me for comfort. I love that they crawl into my lap to be hugged and rocked when they cry. When either of them experiences even the

smallest scrape or slightest hurt feeling, I want my children to know they can immediately come to me. For them, I am the fixer, the healer, and the comforter. And when we lock eyes across the room, I want their first relieved thought to be, *Oh good, there's my mom.*

Of course, in my human nature, I can still easily feel inconvenienced by how often my children need me. Right now, as infants, they are totally and completely dependent on me. As they learn to walk and talk, they need me to fix meals, teach, and have fun with them. As they grow, the name “Mom” might come close to being worn out. And when they’re adults, they might not actually *need* me. But I *want* them to come to me for comfort—just because. I want my kids to know without a doubt I am always there for them with open arms and love. What an honor it is to be a parent!

Because I have experienced God’s perfect love and comfort, my goal as a parent *and* a believer is to comfort others and ultimately point them to God—our Father and *the* Comforter—who says and does and is *exactly* what we need. It is simply who He is. When the Bible talks about having childlike faith, I believe part of that means knowing instinctively, without any doubt, that God our Father is always there for us with open arms and love. He *wants* to comfort us, and He *never* feels inconvenienced. In fact, it is a joy to Him when His children seek His comfort. Psalm 46:1 tells us, “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.”

I believe it warms God’s heart the moment we invite Him into our hurts because we know with full confidence that He is all we need. I like to imagine God wrapping His big, warm arms around me and smiling when in relief and comfort I say, “Oh good, there’s my Father.”

Prayer

Lord, I praise You because You are the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort. Thank You for wanting to comfort and be close to me. May I always lean into Your presence. Help me see those around me that need Your comfort. Thank You for the healing You’ve done in my heart through Your perfect comfort. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Activation

- Ask God, “What does Your perfect comfort mean for me?”
- Pray for God to reveal any areas in your life where you may be running from pain and blocking His perfect comfort and healing.
- Ask God to show you how to be better at inviting Him to heal the hurts in your heart.

- Pray for God to give you wisdom about people in your life you can encourage to turn to Him for comfort.

Holy Spirit, what are You saying to me today?

Day 20 – The Abundance of Abundance

“The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.”

John 10:10–11 (ESV)

As a young child, I had an illustrated Bible. I can still picture it: bright colors and detailed drawings, which made the Bible stories and sacred passages, along with their characters and settings, come to life in my young heart and mind. I will never forget it. Some of my fondest memories involve my mother reading to me from that Bible at bedtime. Among all the illustrations, the one that left the greatest impression on me was an image of Jesus holding a sheep. That is the first time I can remember having the thought that Jesus is both my Savior *and* my Shepherd.

As I grew older, the image of Jesus as my Shepherd brought me to an important but curious conclusion: if He is my Shepherd, then that must make me a sheep. *A sheep? Really?*

Here’s what I’ve learned about sheep. Sheep are cute, and sheep are wooly—both pretty clear observations, right? However, I’ve also learned that sheep are vulnerable and cannot care for themselves. Sheep need help getting back on their feet when they fall. They have no sense of direction and no way of defending themselves. Sheep are fragile and not made for heavy burdens. They are emotional creatures who respond to the sound of a familiar voice. Putting it simply: sheep greatly need a shepherd. Sound familiar?

It's no wonder the Bible paints a picture of us as sheep. In so many ways, we're just like those tender, defenseless, and sometimes stubborn creatures—greatly in need of our Shepherd.

Using the same imagery of sheep and the shepherd from Psalm 23, Jesus shares in John 10 that He is the Good Shepherd who has come to bring abundant life. In this passage, the sheep, representing us as God's people, are faced with the imminent threat of a fatal attack by the thief, our enemy. Our only hope is that we would have a Shepherd who could rescue us from the attack. Yet amid the danger, we see that Jesus goes above and beyond what would typically be expected of a shepherd. *Our* Shepherd did not come just to watch over us so we can *survive*; He is truly the Good Shepherd who gave His very life so we can *thrive*.

Jesus knows our weaknesses, and He knows we often lose our way—just like sheep. Yet in His compassion and kindness, Jesus still chooses to pour out His love on us and bring us into the richness of His presence as we walk with Him daily. What's incredible is that our Shepherd doesn't just preserve our lives, He gives us abundant, prosperous lives. With Him, we have more than just *enough* to get by. Because He fully laid down His life for us, we can fully live in abundance with Him.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank You for sending Your Son, Jesus, to be the Shepherd of my life. I am so grateful You meet all my needs according to Your great love and glorious riches. No wealth or treasure in this world compares to the safety, peace, provision, and abundant life I have because of You. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Activation

- Read John 10:1–30 and notice how the passage reveals the significance of Jesus being our Good Shepherd. Ask the Holy Spirit to lead you in relying on the strength and security of our Shepherd.
- Spend some time reflecting on ways you have experienced abundance because of your relationship with Jesus.

Holy Spirit, what are You saying to me today?

Day 21 – A Table Prepared for You

“Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life”

Matthew 6:25 (ESV)

Growing up in a missionary family, I had the privilege of sitting at dinner tables all over the world. Each table was uniquely set, and the food prepared ranged from mouthwatering pastries to homemade pasta and bread. Occasionally, we were served something we couldn't quite identify, but in the end, we decided it was chicken ... at least the foot in the dish *looked* like a chicken foot!

From country to country, each of these tables had one thing in common: each one was prepared with intentional thought and care. In every case, the family preparing the meal considered who was coming to dinner and how they could make my family feel welcome and loved.

Just as each of those tables were lovingly prepared for my family, the Lord prepares a table for each of us. I have often imagined the Lord's table to be an extravagantly set banquet table, with food and drink as far as the eye can see. And while I love imagining this banquet in all its glory, I know that the table the Lord has prepared for me is actually His presence.

It wasn't until I began traveling on my own—first as a teenager and then as a young woman—that I started to understand Psalm 23:5: “You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies” I had seen and experienced the Lord's provision in so many miraculous ways, but I had yet to sit at His table (in His presence) while in the presence of my enemies. Although I traveled alone a lot, my physical safety and escalating political situations (including a revolution!) weren't my biggest concerns. No, my biggest concerns—my enemies—were fear and anxiety: Fear that I wouldn't have enough money to buy supplies for basic needs. Fear that I had made a mistake and somehow misheard the Lord, and maybe I *wasn't* supposed to be on the mission field. Anxiety that my visa application wouldn't be approved. Worry I wasn't doing enough or working hard enough. And sometimes I was afraid something terrible would happen

to me, and I would never make it home. Many of these concerns were irrational, but in the moment, they felt very real and scary.

Although I was often with a group or an organization during my travels, there were times I was really and truly alone—just me, myself, and I fighting all my fears and worries. Bleak, I know. But in those moments when I felt the most alone, I now know the Lord was drawing me closer to Him.

It often took me longer than I'd like to admit to bring my fears and worries to the Lord. But the minute I did, the way I viewed my circumstances changed. I'd immediately feel His presence surrounding me, and I knew it didn't matter what fear was trying to tell me or how anxiety was trying to cripple me. Those things were not invited to sit at the Lord's table with me.

All it ever took to access the Lord's table (His presence) was a simple prayer—one I prayed a lot: "Jesus, I can't do this without You. I am worried and scared. Help me today because I am struggling." The Lord was faithful to answer me every time, and I know He will do the same for you—even if you have to pray that prayer every day.

At His table you will find peace that surpasses your understanding, hope that strengthens your faith, rest for your weariness, and a place to lay down your burdens. Your confidence in the Lord will be restored, and you will know—no matter what—you are *never* alone.

Prayer

Jesus, thank You for Your faithfulness in my life. Even when I am struggling, I know You have everything under control, and I can trust You will take care of me. Thank You that I can always enter Your presence and sit at the table You have prepared just for me. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Activation

- Ask the Lord if there is an area in your life you need to bring to His table.
- Practice sitting in His presence and giving Him your worries and fears.

Holy Spirit, what are You saying to me today?

Day 22 – Overwhelming Blessing

One thing I have desired of the Lord, that will I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in His temple.

Psalm 27:4

“Please, Dad, can I have this? Can I have this?” my son asked me over and over. “If you get it for me, I won’t ever ask for anything again!” I made sure I captured him saying that on my phone for solid evidence in the future. I knew he’d ask for something again, but I wanted to teach him how to be content with what he *has*.

What makes us—even as adults—want something so badly? Is it because we feel that something we’re desiring is somehow better than what we already have? In Psalm 23, David provides us with a different perspective. He begins the Psalm with: “The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.” And he ends with: “I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.”

There is *nothing* better than having a Good Shepherd who invites us to dwell in His house forever. All we have to do is put our trust in Him. We may face difficult days here on earth, but our souls are eternal. When we shift our perspectives from the earthly to the eternal, we can rejoice in the opportunity to dwell in the house of the Lord forever, and ever, and ever! Now *that* is a blessing beyond compare!

For years my family raised sheep, and I was their shepherd. Their lives were practically stress-free. I made sure they always had plenty of food and water, and all they had to do was avoid eating the flowers my wife, Bridgette, had grown. I took care of all their needs.

In the same way, if we live a life of obedience to the Lord, He takes care of all our needs. But we so often find ourselves believing there is something better than what has been set before us. However, the ultimate blessing in life is having a relationship with Jesus, our loving Shepherd who takes care of us. The profound truth is we serve the only true God, and there will *never* be anyone or anything better!

When I was growing up, my dad would always say, “James, I love you with all my heart, forever and always, no matter what.” And today I want to remind you that God is saying the same thing to you—every day! He loves you unconditionally and for all time. *Nothing* can separate you from God’s love for you (Romans 8:38–39). It is truly an overwhelming blessing to rest in the unchangeable truth that our heavenly Father feels this way toward us. There is no blessing more significant than knowing the Lord is our Shepherd, and we will dwell in His house forever. And because of this truth, we will not want. Nothing compares to being with Him; it is the ultimate blessing!

Prayer

Lord, thank You for being my Good Shepherd. I pray You will lead me and guide me into all You have for me. Help me hear Your voice and be obedient to Your will. Thank You for giving me the gift of eternity with You. Help me see all the ways You have provided and cared for me. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Activation

- List some ways God has blessed you, and then start thanking God for each of the blessings.
- Ask God how you can spread the blessings He has given you to others around you.

Holy Spirit, what are You saying to me today?

Day 23 – Slip and Slide Grace

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.

Ephesians 2:8–9 (NIV)

When I was a child, I *loved* slip ‘n’ slides. You know, those things you set up in the grass on a hot summer day and soak with a garden hose? Yes, those things! Slip ‘n’ slides were one of the greatest highlights of summer for me. One time, just as I was about to jump onto one, the Holy Spirit spoke to me something that was so profound. (What an unusual time to share something profound!) I will never forget what He said: *Phillip, you see this slip ‘n’ slide? This is what living in My grace is like.* And as quickly as He said it, the word “grace” came alive to me.

So what do a slip ‘n’ slide and God’s grace have in common? Well, a slip ‘n’ slide has the amazing ability to transport you from one place to another with very little effort. It reduces resistance and friction, allowing you to move in a fashion and direction in which you could not move on your own. God’s grace is the same; just like the old hymn says, amazing grace is what delivers “a wretch like me” from the past reality of being a wretch to the present reality of being saved. It moves me from a state of being lost to being found. And just like a slip ‘n’ slide, here’s what’s so amazing: I have nothing to do with it. I *know* I have never arrived anywhere good by my own effort. Rather, just like I would effortlessly cruise down a slip ‘n’ slide, we don’t receive God’s grace through our own efforts; it has already been freely given to us because of the efforts of His Son.

There are three basic principles we can learn from slip ‘n’ slides that remind us how to live in God’s overflowing grace. First, our hearts have to be in a prostrate posture. No one gets on a slip ‘n’ slide unless they first bow down. Next time you’re near a slip ‘n’ slide, try traveling down it while standing tall. It’s just not going to work out. To receive God’s grace, we must first have a humble stance in our hearts. (Sidenote: just like children on a slip ‘n’ slide, we can be humble *and* full of joy at the same time.) The second slip ‘n’ slide principle is to stay on the path set before us. When we sometimes step outside God’s grace and depart from the path He called us to walk, like an unsuccessful ride on a slip ‘n’ slide, we can end up with awful grass burns. Ouch! Jesus doesn’t want us to have “grass burns”; we can and *should* always remain with Him. Third, just like a slip ‘n’ slide, living in God’s overflowing grace is amazing, exhilarating, and *so* much fun! As God’s children, what a privilege it is to live in and enjoy His overflowing grace!

Prayer

God, thank You for Your overflowing grace. Give me a humble heart to receive it, help me remain in it, and help me enjoy it. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Activation

- Ask the Holy Spirit to help you assume the posture required for living in God's overflowing grace—a humble heart.
- Ask God to show you any decisions you've made or directions you've gone where you might have stepped ahead or attempted to push forward into something that does not have God's overflowing grace.
- Ask God to highlight areas where His grace is abounding in your life and the specific plans He has for you.

Holy Spirit, what are You saying to me today?

Day 24 – Fatten Me Up, Father

Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

James 1:2–4 (NIV)

There I sat—two feet across the table from a steely-eyed warlock. Just a month before, I would have been shaking in my Doc Martens, but not today. In some undefinable way, I had grown. I was bigger now, and I was fearless. What on earth had happened?

Anointing had happened.

A couple of months before, I had been approached by some teens from a local coven of witches and warlocks who warned me to back off. I was just a youth pastor in a tiny church in the hills of Pennsylvania, but a lot of kids were getting saved. The devil had apparently noticed, so the coven was now actively working curses against me.

I initially thought they were kidding, but this was no joke, and they were wielding real power. I had always thought curses had no effect on a blood-bought child of God, but I failed to consider how many people I regularly interacted with that were completely unsubmitted to God. Even a Christian who is unsubmitted to God is susceptible to demonic influence, and the coven could easily leverage those people to make my life difficult.

In very short order, all hell broke loose against me. And let me tell you—it was scary. The tumult that was released through these witches still ranks as one of the most terrifying seasons I’ve faced. It is no exaggeration to say I feared for my life.

But that is where the devil overplayed his hand. Why? Because in my fear and desperation, I pressed into the only Defender I had: Jesus. When His sheep are in the valley of the shadow of death, the Shepherd proves His power with the anointing of His presence.

In Psalm 23:5, when it talks about the Good Shepherd anointing our heads with oil, the word “anoint” is the Hebrew word *dashen*, which means “to fatten.” To a shepherd in ancient times, a big, fat sheep was a healthy, strong sheep, so fattening a sheep meant making it bigger and stronger. In English we might say that when God anoints a person, He beefs them up, making them much stronger than they previously were.

The psalmist David knew exactly what he was talking about. When young David marched into the valley to face Goliath, the giant mocked him. What business did a ruddy kid in a shepherd’s smock have on a battlefield? But Goliath didn’t know the prophet Samuel had recently anointed David.

That anointing had enlarged the shepherd boy—fattened him up with the presence of God. Now David, a mere kid, was spiritually bigger and stronger than Goliath, the battle-hardened giant. Imagine the Philistines’ surprise when a kid waltzed up to their champion, lobbed a rock at him, knocked him wall-eyed, and lopped off Goliath’s head with his own sword. How could that happen? God’s anointing made David bigger than his enemy.

And *that* is the very reason I was no longer afraid of warlocks. After months of praying through hell’s valley at my Father’s side, I was dripping with the anointing of His presence. That anointing had fattened me up. I was bigger now, and I was no longer afraid of my enemy.

I did a little sleuthing, found the big kahuna warlock’s phone number, and asked him to breakfast. Imagine his surprise when this ruddy kid swung wide open the diner doors like a Dodge City saloon, swaggered up to the table like John Wayne, offered Mr. Warlock a firm handshake, and took a seat. Over biscuits and gravy, I asked the warlock what he believed. I listened closely, asking clarifying questions until I felt like I understood his heart. When he was done sharing, he did something I am sure he has since regretted. He looked up from his eggs, met my eyes, and asked, “So what do you believe?”

That’s when I knew this entire mess was something God set up. There I was in the valley of the shadow, sitting at a table prepared for me in the presence of my enemy, and I was full to the brim—my cup running over with God’s presence. He had anointed me for that very moment, and like David I had grown bigger than my enemy. That day, for the first time in my life, I witnessed to a warlock and watched him deflate as the withering realization finally sank in: my God was more powerful than his witchcraft.

After that morning, I never saw the warlock again. I guess that town just wasn’t big enough for the both of us.

You may be going through your own valley right now. If so, let me encourage you with this: people who walk through valleys with God receive His enlarging anointing. My friend, you have no need to fear shadows or cower before giants; God’s anointing makes you bigger than your enemy.

Prayer

Father, I need You today. Whether Your path for me leads through pleasant meadows or through the valley of the shadow, I want to walk closely with You. I want to be so close that the anointing of Your presence transforms me and enlarges my spirit, banishes every fear, and breaks every yoke. With You I can face the day. With You I am more powerful than my enemy. Thank You for the gift of Your presence today. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

Activation

- Take a moment to be still before the Lord. Read and reflect on Isaiah 10:27 (in NKJV and NIV), and ask the Lord to help you identify any burdens weighing you down.
- Ask the Lord to fatten you up with the anointing of His presence and break the burdens off you.
- Thank the Lord for the protection of His shepherding presence throughout your day.
- Ask the Lord to fill you to overflowing so that His presence will flow through you to encourage and strengthen everyone you come across today.

Holy Spirit, what are You saying to me today?

Day 25 – Enjoy the Feast

As Jesus passed on from there, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him, “Follow me.” And he rose and followed him. And as Jesus reclined at table in the house, behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and were reclining with Jesus and his disciples. And when the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, “Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and

sinners?” But when he heard it, he said, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.’ For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.”

Matthew 9:9–13 (ESV)

Several years ago, a friend helped me build an eight-foot table for my dining room. It stayed in my garage unfinished for a couple of weeks until one tragic day when I tried to move it, and the planks that made up the top of the table all fell out. I already know what you’re thinking, and you’re probably right. Thankfully my wife’s grandfather came to the rescue and fixed the table, and it’s the very one I sit at today to write this devotional.

This table is the heart of our home. It holds a stringently strict no-phones-allowed policy—the conversations we have here with our family and closest friends are sacred and intentional. These moments mean so much to us that we have a rule in our family—whenever anyone comes over for dinner, we ask them to sign and date the bottom of our table. And when my family is upstairs, I often head to the dining room to lay under the table and read all the notes and signatures. As I look at each of the names and dates, I reflect on the times we spent around the table—the stories shared over a great meal, the laughs, and the tears. You see, something special happens when we slow down and gather around the table. We recapture the lost art of eye contact. We share stories of victory and defeat. In these moments, I feel God’s presence and see His goodness the most. I believe what happens around the table is not just sacred; it is also holy.

All throughout Scripture, we see God has a way of showing up at tables; the tables of Passover and communion are central in the lives of people in both the Old Testament and the New Testament. And when we deliberately choose to make that time of gathering around the table central to our lives, it becomes an opportunity for us to remember and feel the blessings of God.

Several years ago, I went on a trip to Ireland and spent time walking through a park in Glendalough. I eventually happened upon a clearing that the locals said was called “The Thin Place”—where the supernatural meets the natural. In Christianity, these places have historically been sacred sites where worshippers could meet with the Holy Spirit and receive His guidance. For me, my dining table is a “Thin Place.” It’s a place where I meet with God and feel near to His heart.

During His years walking upon this earth, Jesus invited many people to draw close to Him at the table, and those people took Him up on His invitation. Matthew 9 tells us of a time where we not only see Jesus reclining at a table but also see the tax collectors and sinners who were with Him and His disciples reclining at the table. Listen, friends, you don’t relax and recline unless you’re comfortable. Jesus was perfectly at ease, and He made those with Him feel at ease too. No matter what they brought to the table from their past or present experiences, Jesus wasn’t afraid to enter their stories—and He’s not afraid to enter yours either. With all our brokenness and failures, Jesus meets us right where we are and reclines at the table with us.

I’ve found hope and healing at the table. It’s marked me for the better, and the good news is we are *all* invited to be part of it. Psalm 23:5 says God prepares a table for us in the presence of our

enemies. Despite our imperfections, brokenness, and the enemies that may surround us, God invites us to His table to experience His goodness. So pull up a chair, recline in His goodness, and enjoy the feast, my friends; it's a good one.

Prayer

Lord, today I give thanks for the table—the fellowship I share with my friends and family with You in the midst. Every time I come to the table, remind me of the invitation You give, welcoming all to Your table. When I sit down to nourish my body at the table, may it also be an opportunity to nourish my soul and experience Your presence and Your goodness. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Activation

- Ask the Holy Spirit how you can approach the table differently and more intentionally the next time you sit down to enjoy a meal.
- Pray about people in your life who you can invite to sit down at the table with you.

Holy Spirit, what are You saying to me today?

Day 26 – The Certainty of God's Promises

I will be careful to live a blameless life—when will you come to help me? I will lead a life of integrity in my own home.

Psalm 101:2 (NLT)

It was 30 degrees Fahrenheit outside with an icy wind that warned of extreme weather ahead, but we were determined to begin this adventure with prayer. Our realtor pressed the for-sale sign into our front yard and joined my wife and me as we encircled the sign to pray. We thanked God for the blessing the house had been to us and asked Him to make it a blessing for the next family who would purchase it.

When I went back inside and picked up my phone, a surprising Instagram message was waiting for me: “My wife and I were driving around looking for houses and wondered if that was you we

saw praying at the curb.” I hadn’t seen this guy in years, and for all he knew, I was the real estate agent selling the house and not the person putting it up for sale. His family was the first to attend a showing at our home, and soon they made an offer that we accepted.

But the adventure didn’t wrap up that easily. The morning after we signed the contract, the temperature plummeted to historic lows. Over the next several days, the chance of snow our kids were excited about became a devastating winter storm. I never imagined asking the Lord to protect pipes from bursting—they weren’t even going to be mine much longer. Thankfully, the storm’s effects on our house were limited to the outside and easily repairable.

With grateful hearts, we walked out of that home for the last time a few months later on our tenth wedding anniversary. But there was one minor problem: there was no next house.

Within days of moving everything we owned into storage, stories of unprecedented housing shortages began to make national headlines. It was suddenly the most challenging season to buy a house. What’s usually a time of excitement and anticipation was filled with doubt and feeling homesick. The family who bought our home posted a picture online of their first barbecue in *my* backyard. I just wanted to go home.

My wife and I remained hopeful though that house hunting would be as easy as selling our house had been, so we began the search. We drove around neighborhoods for hours on the lookout for couples posting for-sale signs. We jumped at every phone notification, eager for a new listing on a real estate app, but there was little to be found.

Within the first month of looking for houses every day while living with extended family, two amazing homes became available in our area. In such a competitive market, we learned the hard way to not get emotionally attached too soon. We were outbid both times by insane amounts of money.

I cried out to the Lord in prayer: “Lord! We were confident we heard You say ‘go’ when we started down this road. Do You even see us?!” I felt I needed to tell the Lord to pay attention, but He was so kind and gentle in His response. He whispered, *Go read Psalm 101*. It was verse two that changed everything: “I will be careful to live a blameless life—when will you come to help me? I will lead a life of integrity *in my own home*.” *In my own home*—this reassuring response and promise from the Lord, even after my venting and complaining, was His goodness and unfailing love on display.

The psalmist David was quite confident in the Lord’s goodness and love when he wrote, “Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me *all* the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.” He didn’t say maybe if we perform well enough or if we check every box. He said, “*Surely*.” Without a doubt. Definitely. No matter the storm. The Lord’s goodness is steadfast and sure. He also said, “*All* the days of my life”—not just my good ones.

Are you facing uncertainty? When we take a moment to pause—a moment to stop running toward our attempt at a solution—God’s overwhelming goodness and mercy overtake us and

carry us to what He has next. During seasons of uncertainty, God's goodness and mercy have become my peace, and I know I can trust Him regardless of the outcome.

For my family, the journey that started in the freeze of winter ended in the warmth of summer. As I write this, my kids are playing in their new backyard. The house the Lord brought to us is everything we desired—and more. Not because we're special but because God's goodness and mercy pursue us all the days of our lives.

Prayer

Lord, thank You for Your ever-present goodness and mercy. Guide me by Your peace and promises despite the expectations I have and the uncertainty I may face. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Activation

- Thank God for having a plan, even when we don't.
- Soften your heart to hear His voice over all your circumstances.
- Pursue His peace and trust His promises.

Holy Spirit, what are You saying to me today?

Day 27 – The Two Sheepdogs – Goodness and Mercy

My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth! He will not let you stumble; the one who watches over you will not slumber. Indeed, he who watches over Israel never slumbers or sleeps.

Psalm 121:2–4 (NLT)

Full disclosure: I've been known to trip. In my youth it was the uneven sidewalk or the sunken hole hidden in thick grass. If it existed, I'd find it. In my college years, it seemed to only happen when I was walking near someone I was trying to impress. The sidewalk would tragically change shape while I was in the middle of my stride, my foot would catch it, my ankle would turn, and I'd find myself trying to recover as fast as my tall frame could manage. I rarely succeeded. I like to call it awkward grace.

Thankfully, sidewalks don't trip me up these days as much as they used to, but five other things do: my three young children and two tiny Havanese pups. It seems there is always something or someone underfoot. And one thing is for sure: every trip—past *and* present—has left me feeling either embarrassed or frustrated and sometimes injured.

My personal clumsiness aside, can you relate? As humans we tend to trip up—whether it be losing our cool when we are pushed to our limit, speaking out of turn, or trying to overcome sin issues. We say or do things we are embarrassed or frustrated by—often leaving ourselves or others injured in one way or another.

In Psalm 23:6 we read, “Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me.” In this Psalm about the Good Shepherd, goodness and mercy have often been likened to the sheepdogs that follow at the rear of a herd. Similar to sheepdogs guarding a herd, goodness and mercy walk shoulder to shoulder watching out for us and protecting us from the pitfalls and antagonists in our own lives.

The Hebrew word for “mercy” in Psalm 23, *chesed*, means “the unfailing, steadfast covenant love of God.” It's hard to read that definition and not soak in a greater meaning: the innate goodness of God coupled with His covenant love displayed in the death and resurrection of Jesus. God's goodness and mercy along with our response to His Son wipes all our sins away. Aren't you grateful for that?!

So today if your mind brings you back to places where you have stumbled in the past, remember goodness and mercy are following you. With a head bowed in repentance, bring your prayer to the Lord, and allow His mercy and forgiveness to cover you. And if tomorrow you feel yourself slipping, turn your heart toward your Father who is rich in mercy, and trust He'll carry you to the other side of the challenge you face.

Surely, His goodness and mercy *are* following you.

Prayer

Lord, thank You for the assurance of Your goodness and mercy. I repent of the wrong thoughts, actions, and things in my life and ask that Your forgiveness would wash over me. Help me to live a life that displays the richness of the gift of forgiveness You've given me. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Activation

- Ask the Holy Spirit to show you one area where His goodness and mercy have shown up for you recently. Take a minute to talk to Him about that experience.

- Pray about any areas where you've been tripping up, lean into God's goodness, and ask for His mercy.
- Psalm 100:5 declares the Lord is good, His steadfast love endures forever, and so does His faithfulness to all generations. Ask the Lord to put someone on your heart, then take a few minutes to pray that Scripture over him or her and the generations to come.

Holy Spirit, what are You saying to me today?

Day 28 – Mille Jo

For the Son of Man came to seek and save those who are lost.

Luke 19:10 (NLT)

Her name was Millie Jo McSwain, but I knew her best as Grandma. She stood barely five feet tall and weighed less than 100 pounds, but she was a force to be reckoned with. Everyone in our family knew you didn't cross Grandma Millie Jo, or she would set you straight in a loving, spontaneous combustion kind of way.

It was also common knowledge that Grandma Millie was a prayer warrior. She had no formal theological training—she dropped out of school after eighth grade—but boy did she know how to touch heaven! She was the tenacious type who literally prayed until something changed. In fact, when she would visit, we had to be prepared. Every morning at the crack of dawn, she would break the silence in her room with thanksgiving, intercession, and petitions. The loudness was so absurd, I'm sure she had a pocket megaphone tucked in a fanny pack somewhere.

Yet the most impactful thing about her prayers wasn't the volume; it was the consistency. I found out my grandma prayed every single day for over 20 years for the salvation of one of my uncles and for over 61 years for another uncle! That's right—61 years—up until the day she

went to be with Jesus. And guess what? Just before she passed, Grandma Millie asked my mother to take up the baton and continue praying for my uncle's salvation.

What motivates a person to pray like that? I'm sure Grandma Millie was determined to stand in the gap for her sons, but more than that, I believe she understood the mission of Christ. In Luke 19:10 (NLT), Jesus says, "For the Son of Man came to seek and save those who are lost." The Greek word translated "seek," *zeteo*, carries the idea of searching for, desiring, or investigating and getting to the bottom of a matter. This requires meticulous, intentional, and constant pursuit.

Jesus proclaims those words in Luke 19 after encountering a chief tax collector named Zacchaeus. In Hebrew, *Zacchaeus* means "pure," but Zacchaeus was seen as anything but that. He had probably acquired wealth from cheating people on their taxes and was considered a traitor by the Jewish people because he was employed by their Roman oppressors. Yet when Jesus sees Zacchaeus, He literally calls him by name as if to say, "Zacchaeus, I know who you are."

On top of that, Jesus invites Himself over to Zacchaeus's home, thus implying, "And not only do I know you, but I'm also coming for you. I want to be near you." The psalmist David similarly describes the Lord's intentional and relentless pursuit as the Shepherd: "Surely your goodness and unfailing love will pursue me all the days of my life" (Psalm 23:6, NLT).

I believe Grandma Millie prayed so fervently because she understood her prayers were partnering with Christ's purpose to seek and save the lost, which included her sons.

She was cognizant of God's constant pursuit of His beloved because she had also experienced it firsthand. Grandma Millie knew God wouldn't give up, so she didn't either. And guess what? The son she prayed for over 20 years had an encounter with God like Zacchaeus that transformed his life, and he is now faithfully serving the Lord as a pastor in Oregon. And the son she prayed for over 61 years is still being prayed for. My family continues to believe he will meet the God who has been seeking him all his life.

Today I encourage you—no matter how far away you think you've gone—to know that God is pursuing you with His love. If you've been praying for a lost loved one, continue partnering with God as He passionately pursues them. And for all of us, may we know that the same God who pursued us with His love before we received salvation still pursues our hearts—even today.

Prayer

Father, I pause for a moment today and reflect on how You have pursued me with Your love. As I do, I just want to say thank You for seeking and saving me. You are good. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Activation

- Reflect on how wide, long, high, and deep God's love is for you and pray that those around you would know His love.
- Pray for lost family and friends to have a Zacchaeus encounter that would leave them transformed.

Holy Spirit, what are You saying to me today?

Day 29 – What a Difference a Day Makes

A single day in your courts is better than a thousand anywhere else.

Psalms 84:10 (NLT)

The moment I read Psalm 84, I was impressed with two words: “single day.” I began to recall single days I had experienced that left a lasting impression on my life—the most notable being the day my wife, Syble, and I met. I was knocked off my feet the moment I saw her, and today we have two children, six grandchildren, and eighteen great-grandchildren. When we have our monthly Shabbat meal at our daughter's home, it is a *packed* house! What a difference a single day made!

King David also knew the difference a single day could make because he had personally experienced it. Almost immediately after he became the second king of Israel, David saw the necessity for the Ark of the Covenant—God's manifest presence—to be restored to Jerusalem. King David had personally encountered God's presence and did not want to govern the people of Israel without God, so he pursued the Ark of the Covenant.

Gathering all his people, David carried out a plan to retrieve the Ark from where it was at that time, Kiriath Jearim. Imagine that—King David along with all of Israel retrieved the Ark and placed God's presence on a cart destined for Jerusalem. The people joyously celebrated with singing, shouting, dancing, and playing instruments. It would have been easy to hear David's

voice rising above the crowd as he celebrated what he had been longing for: just one more day in the presence of God!

This is where the story of Obed-Edom, one of my personal favorites, begins. On the way back to Jerusalem, King David's mighty procession experienced trouble and had to leave the Ark of God with Obed-Edom. As 1 Chronicles 13:13–14 describes, that day of trouble for King David became the single day that changed the trajectory of Obed-Edom and his entire household. The Scripture shares this:

“So David would not move the ark with him into the City of David, but took it aside into the house of Obed-Edom the Gittite. The ark of God remained with the family of Obed-Edom in his house three months. And the Lord blessed the house of Obed-Edom and all that he had.”

Three things stand out to me in this passage. First, we never know when God will show up. Obed-Edom was going about his day when God was brought to his door! Talk about a surprise visitor! Likewise, God knocks on the doors of our hearts. He provided a way for our salvation to bring us into an ongoing, deep, personal relationship with Him.

Second, when God shows up, our response matters. I can see it now: Obed-Edom quickly rearranging his belongings—all to make room for the Ark of God. Once we receive Christ as our Savior, God wants us to make room for His presence to dwell with us daily.

Third, we experience the blessings of God in His presence. God blessed *all* Obed-Edom had—can you imagine! His marriage, his kids, his friends, his livestock, his garden—everything! No more sibling rivalry. Tomatoes as big as cantaloupes. Wool so thick his sheep could hardly stand! When we abide in God's presence, we no longer need to worry. We can trust that the promises of God found in Scripture apply to us today.

So what happened to Obed-Edom after the Ark of God left his home and was finally returned to Jerusalem? In 1 Chronicles 15, we learn Obed-Edom became a doorkeeper for the Ark of God. He just wanted to be in God's presence! Once we encounter the presence of God, we too just want to be with Him. Psalm 84:10 illustrates the same kind of longing of a worshipper to spend a single day in God's courts, enjoying His manifest presence. Just *one* day with Him is better than a thousand elsewhere!

You are an “Obed-Edom.” I am an “Obed-Edom.” God has chosen to live in us—not just one day but all the days of our lives. He wants us to have an ongoing, deep, personal relationship with Him. May God guide our hearts so we can know and walk in the calling He has on our lives.

Prayer

Father, we ask that You enlighten our hearts to understand how wide, how high, and how deep Your love is for us. Give us spiritual wisdom and insight to help us grow in

our knowledge of You so we can know You better. Flood our hearts with light so we can understand the hope found only in You. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Activation

- Do you feel something may be lacking in your life? Ask the Holy Spirit to speak to you personally, then spend time listening to Him today.
- Ask God to remove any distractions that may prevent you from dwelling in His presence every day.

Holy Spirit, what are You saying to me today?

Day 30 – Our Home Away from Home

“I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.”

Matthew 16:19 (NIV)

“Congratulations on your new home,” the email read. My wife and I had recently signed the documents for our family's third house in just four years, but this house was different; it wasn't ours—it was a lease. For the past 17 years, we have purchased the homes we lived in, but with a whirlwind move and new school year quickly approaching, we didn't have that luxury. In fact, we agreed to the lease before we even saw the house in person!

Our kids had big plans when they saw their new rooms, but we quickly dismissed those plans by explaining we won't be here very long. No need to hang things on the wall or do any renovations to make the house better suit our needs. We reside in this house with a feeling that it is not our own, but while we are here, our family culture, rhythms, and traditions will remain the same. Still, we know we are only here temporarily.

In a similar way, our time here on earth is relatively short when compared to the age and history of the planet. And it's even shorter when compared to the eternity that awaits us on the other side of death. Once we are saved by the grace of Jesus Christ and accept Him as Lord, we become citizens of heaven. It's tempting to think about the brevity of our earthly stay the way I think about my rental house: No need to make renovations of any kind. No need to settle in or feel ownership of this place since it doesn't belong to us. This, however, is not the way Christ has called us to live out this life here on earth.

When God created Adam and Eve, He gave them dominion over the land and the animals. They weren't leasing the land; they owned it. But they chose to give that ownership to the serpent—Satan—when they ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Thousands of years later, Satan tempted Jesus with the offer of giving back authority over the earth. (How audacious of Satan to offer Jesus authority that wasn't his to give!) The good news is Jesus didn't need Satan's permission to reclaim that authority. When Christ died on the cross, He reversed the consequences of the Fall and took back the keys to earth that Adam and Eve gave away. He restored what was lost and redeemed what was broken.

Jesus has given you and me those keys to the kingdom, and we are called to bring His kingdom to earth! What we bind here on earth is bound in heaven, and what we loose here on earth is loosed in heaven as well (Matthew 16:19). Jesus partners with us and authorizes us to exercise kingdom actions here on earth; we have all of heaven on our side.

So let's not view earth as our temporary rental house anymore. The world needs major renovation, and we can't look at God like the landlord who needs to come repair all the problems. God has given us ownership in His grand plans, and He wants us to use the power we have justly and be good stewards of this house. We can choose to improve it—to make it better. Although we are citizens of heaven and this is not our forever home, it is our home *right now*.

When we fail to take ownership of the world God has given us, it's like we're giving His great gift right back to the enemy. Instead of adopting the ways of the world, our citizenship in heaven begs us to bring our heavenly culture and traditions to this place.

So while you wait for the day you will see your heavenly home, trust that Christ has equipped you to be a good and charitable owner of your earthly home. Settle in and make it your own while it lasts. Congratulations on your new home!

Prayer

Lord, I accept and receive my God-given responsibility to steward this land and the people You have placed in my life. I confess I have not always taken ownership of my actions and responsibilities, and I have often let circumstances go into disrepair. I commit to stewarding all You have given me and making this world better for all the days I am here. What You have created is stunningly beautiful, and I have often taken it for granted. So today, I reflect on the marvelous works of Your hands and Your imagination, and I commit to partnering with You to bring the kingdom of heaven to this place—my home. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Activation

- Ask the Holy Spirit to show you ways you have not fully embraced your calling to bring heavenly practices into the world.
- Ask the Holy Spirit to show you ways you can assist in the kingdom work of bringing a heavenly culture to the world around you.

Holy Spirit, what are You saying to me today?

Day 31 – Welcome Home

“In My Father’s house are many rooms;”

John 14:2 (NASB)

It’s easy to look at the world around us and be consumed by worry, fear, and anxiety. Since I was a child, I’ve heard songs, sermons, and soliloquies about escaping this terrible planet. Like me, you may long for the day you will be face-to-face with the Lord in heaven. But the wonderful thing is that when you give your life to Jesus, you immediately receive a new residency—it’s not something that happens down the road or in the distant future; you are home *now*.

Jesus said, “Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father’s house are many rooms; if that were not so, I would have told you, because I am going there to prepare a place for you” (John 14:1–2, NASB). And that’s exactly what Jesus did! He died on the cross, rose again, and went to the Father to prepare your eternal heavenly home. And if Jesus is Lord of your life, you are living in that eternal home *right now* because God dwells with you.

Before Jesus went to prepare a place for you and me, He said, “If anyone loves Me, he will follow My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our dwelling with him” (John 14:23, NASB). When you put your faith in Jesus, you are in Him, and He is in you. He sent His Holy Spirit to live in you and guide you through every storm in life. And the Lord has invited you to dwell in His house—right here and right now. Just like the father who welcomed home his prodigal son, He welcomes us home with open arms and unconditional love.

One of the most beautiful things about the Church is that we all have the same home; all of us reside with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We are at home with God, and He is at home with us. We are brothers and sisters in Christ living in the same house. The Bible says together we are a “spiritual house” for God (1 Peter 2:5). There is peace in the midst of the storm around us. There is joy that prevails in pain. There is hope, there is love, and there is rest. And it’s all found in the Father’s house. When the world is crumbling around us, we can encourage each other with the truth that we are standing on solid ground in the Father’s house.

So if you have chosen Jesus, remember you are *already* home. He can do amazing things in and through you because you are at home in Him, and He is at home in you. You can experience profound miracles because the same power that dwells in Jesus dwells in *you*! You can freely extend God's mercy and offer His love and forgiveness to those who have hurt you because you are in God and God is in you.

As you live your life in God, you can personally experience all His benefits daily. Your life can be filled with supernatural peace, joy, hope, and love because God is with you. And because God lives in you, others can receive those benefits through you. All of this is a (super)natural part of living your life with God.

Every day can be spent in an intimate—*closer than close*—loving relationship with Him because you live your life in the Father's house. And just as David wrote in Psalm 23, "I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."

Welcome home!

Prayer

Jesus, thank You for giving me a wonderful eternal home with You, the Father, and the Holy Spirit. Thank You for preparing a place for me. I'm grateful that I live in You, and You live in me here on earth. I am home. Thank You, Father, for welcoming me home. And thank You, Holy Spirit, for living in me. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Activation

- Read through the verses for further study and take note of the many ways in which God dwells with you, strengthens you, and provides for all your needs.
- Reflect on all the wonderful benefits of Jesus, the Father, and the Holy Spirit living with you, and create points of praise based on His promises to be with you.
- Thank God for the ways He has been with you in difficult times and filled you with His joy and peace.

Holy Spirit, what are You saying to me today?

