

Devotional - Another 7 Days for the Coronavirus

“Moving from Waiting to Worshiping”

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	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Text	Luke 2 Simeon	Matt. 11 Cities	Matt. 6 Followers	John 17 Jesus	Lam. 3 Humanity	Joshua 1 Joshua	Zephaniah3 The King
Theme	Waiting	Resting	Seeking	Praying	Grieving	Trusting	Worshiping
Prayer	Educators	Healthcare	Military	Finances	Infected	Business	Caretakers

Contents

Day Eight - Waiting	2
Day Nine - Resting	4
Day Ten - Seeking	5
Day Eleven - Praying	6
Day Twelve - Grieving	8
Day Thirteen - Trusting	11
Day Fourteen - Worshiping	12

Day Eight - Waiting

Luke 2

²² And when the time came for their purification according to the Law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord ²³ (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "Every male who first opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord") ²⁴ and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the Law of the Lord, "a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons." ²⁵ Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. ²⁶ And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. ²⁷ And he came in the Spirit into the temple, and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the Law, ²⁸ he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said,

*²⁹ "Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace,
according to your word;
³⁰ for my eyes have seen your salvation
³¹ that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,
³² a light for revelation to the Gentiles,
and for glory to your people Israel." ¹*

We open this second 7-day devotional with the topic of waiting. Surely by now, we've all learned that this is a waiting game, and it's going to be very difficult. Thankfully, for Christians, waiting is a central theme of the Bible. We see it throughout Scripture. From the Old Testament to the New Testament, we are a people that are waiting on the Lord.

We also see in the culture that waiting is not something we are accustomed to. We generally hate lines, so we have created dinner reservations, call-ahead seating, self-checkout, and Disney FastPass (sorry for the salt-in-the-wound illustration about Disney). John Mayer wrote a hymn for the millennials about waiting with his song "Waiting on the World to Change." He states, "*Now if we had the power to bring our neighbors home from war, they would have never missed a Christmas, no more ribbons on their door. And when you trust your television, what you get is what you got 'cause when they own the information, they can bend it all they want. That's why we're waiting, waiting on the world to change.*"

This song is an interesting cultural analysis about where we are today. We all want the world to change. We grieve that our neighbors are at war and that things are not the way they're supposed to be. But we're not really sure what to do about it except to wait.

I'm thankful to know that in the Scripture, waiting is active, not passive! It's not sitting around hoping things will change, but believing in a Biblical hope. Biblical hope is not wishing. It's not throwing a penny in the fountain or closing your eyes before you blow out the candles with the false prospect that a moment of unspoken desire will change your life's trajectory. Instead, Biblical hope is confidence in God, who has always done what he said he would do. People have trusted him in the past, and the Bible

¹ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Lk 2:22–32). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

charts how he answers prayers. If this is true, and it is, then we can trust him in the present as we wait on the future.

In this passage, we see a man named Simeon, who is active in his waiting. In verse 25, we read that he was a righteous man and devout, but he was *waiting* for the *consolation* of Israel. Consolation means comfort. Simeon, like us, was waiting for his people to be comforted.

It's important to note that he was righteous and devout. He wasn't in a difficult situation because he was evil. Rain falls on the righteous and the unrighteous alike. Sometimes we think that God will make our lives easy if we are good and moral. But the virus doesn't know the moral or spiritual standing of any man or woman. We are all in this together.

Simeon's waiting for comfort also comes with revelation. He saw Jesus, who is the comfort of the world—the revelation—and God incarnate. He saw the Morning Star, the Root of David, the Lion of the Tribe of Judah, who has come into our world to take on our sin and suffering; to let us know that God's not going to leave us alone. Simeon took this child into his arms and blessed him as “a light of revelation for the Gentiles.” Perhaps what we need during this time is to actively wait, with the expectation that we would see Jesus, the suffering servant. And perhaps the blessing is that Christ would become more real and present to all of us.

In these next seven days, we journey from waiting to worship. I like what NT Wright says in connection with these themes: “*True worship doesn't put on a show or make a fuss; true worship isn't forced, isn't half-hearted, doesn't keep looking at its watch, doesn't worry what the person in the next pew is doing. True worship is open to God, adoring God, waiting for God, trusting God even in the dark.*”

This week, we wait in our homes, apartments, condos, nursing homes, and hospitals. Waiting becomes worship because we're saying Christ is worthy. He is worthy of our waiting for him to show us healing mercy.

The reason we actively wait is because of his worthiness. If he's worth waiting for, then you don't mind the wait. No young man who asks out his dream date will fail to wait in the foyer of her house, awkwardly with her father and his shotgun, if she is 5 minutes late. You would wait 20 minutes, even an hour! Time is not the issue because she's worthy of the wait.

How much more is God worthy of our waiting. Let's bear the uncertainty of this week with confidence in our God. Elizabeth Elliot rightly says, “*Waiting on God requires the willingness to bear uncertainty, to carry within oneself the unanswered question, lifting the heart to God about it whenever it intrudes upon one's thoughts.*”

So lift up your thoughts to God. Your struggles, stress, fears, and anxieties. And know that as Simeon lifted up Christ, we too shall see God answer our deepest longings and prayers.

Other verses to consider:

- *Psalm 40: I waited patiently for the Lord*
- *Psalm 62: For God alone my soul waits in silence*
- *Psalm 130: my soul waits more than the watchman waits for the morning*
- *Psalm 27:14, 31:21, 33:20, 62:1-5, 130:5,*
- *2 Peter 3:12-14*

A Prayer for Educators

Dear Father,

More than anybody else, our teacher's routines and our educator's plans are loosened from their moorings. The scope and sequence that they've worked on all year long no longer work. Their desires to see students matriculate are tentative. Now they're trying to figure out new systems and entirely new ways of operating outside the relational face-to-face educational model.

So give them grace. And help them to give grace to themselves! They're used to teaching for a grade—getting people to understand the knowledge—but now the whole grading system seems to have shifted. May they grade themselves graciously and generously, knowing that they too are learning new lessons in life.

At the end of the day, would you be their teacher and our teacher. This world, which you have made, is meant to lead us to you. So whether they're teaching math, algebra, science, biology, history, literature, philosophy or any other field, may their efforts this semester lead them to you—the truth of the world. Grade them on the curve of your kindness.

Jesus, you are a great teacher. In your name we pray.

Amen

Day Nine - Resting

Matthew 11

*²⁵ At that time Jesus declared, "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children; ²⁶ yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. ²⁷ All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. ²⁸ Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ 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. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."*²

On the date of March 29, 1849, a storekeeper in Richmond VA made a hard decision. He was sympathetic to the cause of slavery, and I'm sure under much duress when he took a man and put him in a box. The box was only three feet one inch long and two and a half feet deep. He stuffed the man into the box and nailed the wooden cover shut. I imagine his tears and prayers quickly followed the pounding of the nails. The box was then shipped, with a 200 lb slave inside, over 350 miles. It went from freight car to steamboat to wagon. An awful 27 hours later, an abolitionist in Philadelphia opened the box, and Henry "Box" Brown emerged as a free man. Throughout the South, his story brought hope.

It would have been an awful situation to be stuck in that box, tossed and turned. Henry had no options but to rest in the hope that soon the cover would be opened. He would leave his personal ark to find a place of refuge and safety. Let's be honest; we are not in any way in the same predicament. But we share one similarity—we have no options but to stay still and to rest.

We have to rest. Slow down and rest.

It's a good thing to rest because, as a culture, we generally stink at it. Almost none of us are good at resting. We fill our lives with the busyness that masks our insecurity. Our to-do lists and emails give us a false sense of importance. Our kids wake up exhausted almost every morning with a constant load of special curriculum activities, recreation, travel sports, church activities, and schoolwork. As a nation, we idolize production and, as a result, are exhausted.

Something strange happened yesterday when I went out for an essential run to the grocery store. I came back to my neighborhood, and people were outside like it was the 4th of July weekend. Everybody was keeping their distance while walking, running, or riding bikes, but on a sunny day, it was like a parade of humanity. People seemed a little more peaceful. In my home, the Sunday night coordination of schedules on a dry erase board, with different colors for each person, has come to a screeching halt. The board is gloriously blank.

² [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Mt 11:25–30). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

It's almost as if we've all needed this excuse for a break. And I know it doesn't come without pain, but there might be some good in forcing us to slow down.

Resting is a theme throughout the Bible. In this passage in Matthew, Jesus has power and authority, and he acknowledges that not everyone gets to see everything the way he does. He says in verse 25, "You've hidden things from the wise and understanding and reveal them to the children." In the context of Matthew, he was speaking earlier about the cities Tyre, Sidon and Sodom that were unrepentant (see Matthew 11:20-24). Sodom and other cities had their problems, but the chief of them was caring more about their productivity than about other individuals. Ezekiel clearly states their sin: "*As I live, declares the Lord GOD, your sister Sodom and her daughters have not done as you and your daughters have done. Behold, this was the guilt of your sister Sodom: she and her daughters had pride, excess of food, and prosperous ease, but did not aid the poor and needy.*"³

And with this context of Jesus having authority (v. 27) to reveal, he gives us an invitation.

*Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden,
and I will give you rest.*

It's a beautiful invitation. We should be thrilled by it, like when you get a sealed envelope requesting your attendance at the wedding, party, or event of the year! As a golf fan, I watch all the pros on social media excitedly open their invitations to the Masters Tournament. It's the lifetime event that they have been practicing for all their lives. As I've been told, getting this invitation never gets old!

But the invitation Jesus gives isn't something that we have earned. It's not an invitation of a lifetime,—it's an invitation for life! And Life Eternal. It doesn't just invite us to a temporary event but an eternal feast—the wedding supper of the Lamb.

Unlike what most people think, Jesus doesn't come to give us more burdens but to take on our burdens. He doesn't come to take away our fun but to provide us with refuge for our souls. For the first time in a long time, we don't have to perform or earn the invitation through charm or being in the right social circles. Christ has already performed for us. He's already taken on the weight of the law by living life perfectly. He has taken on our sin and assuaged the wrath of God by his perfect death. Now we can follow him out of joy, living our lives in obedience to him, the way our lives should be lived.

We need rest because we are tired. We are exhausted with propping up our reputation, putting on the social charm, jockeying for popularity, climbing the corporate ladder, or putting forward an image on social media that is not reflective of our total depravity. We need rest because we

³ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#). (2016). (Eze 16:48–49). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

have been faking it for a long time. We need rest because it is good, restorative, and God himself rested.

May we learn from our Creator who, in Genesis 1, rested after creation. Since we are part of creation, it's our job to rest as well. This doesn't mean relaxing; it means recreating. It means remembering we are made for God; that in Christ, we are loved because of the Father's love for us. But there is more to this invitation.

*“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.”

God is not tyrannical but is gentle and lowly and heart; his yoke is easy. The yoke is something that would be put on oxen to plow a field. We still have work to do. But the yolk that Christ puts on us fits us perfectly. The burden that we carry with him is light compared to what we naturally saddle ourselves with. He's taking on the sin of the world so that we can simply trust him.

In other words, Christ is the one who wasn't put in a box but was placed in a grave. His nails didn't go into the top of a box, but into his feet and arms. And instead of 350 miles, he journeyed into hell. In three days, after enduring death, hell, and the grave, he would rise triumphant from the empty tomb. Not only is he free, but now we are free. Free from our slavery to sin, death, hell, and the grave. Now men, women, and children can trust in a God who knows us and loves us.

Let's rest in the truth today that God wants a relationship with us and wants to be kind and gentle. Let us rest, really rest, in him.

A Prayer for Healthcare (reprised)

Father,

It's time for another prayer for health care professionals. We've prayed for them often, but this crisis is still taking a toll on them. Now we pray this prayer from Ugo Bassi:

*Measure thy life by loss instead of gain;
Not by the wine drunk, but the wine poured forth
For love's strength standeth in love's sacrifice;
And whoso suffers most hath most to give.
-Ugo Bassi, Sermon in the Hospital*

As these nurses, pharmacists, doctors, administrators, and researchers pour out their souls like a drink offering, I pray that you would give them the grace that they need. Some of them have caught the very

virus that they're trying to protect us from! They've taken on the burden of loving humanity, and they have sacrificed because of it.

As their bodies start to break down from exhaustion and coffee loses its effect, give them the energy that they need. Some of the ER docs and critical care doctors are having to isolate from their families to help their families. Show them patience to know that it's worth it. They carry a yoke that very few of us will carry.

As they strip off their scrubs, may they also strip away their pride and do their work humbly and graciously. We pray for protection. We pray for wisdom. We pray for kind eyes as the patients they serve can't see anything else about them. May their eyes give a sense of peace and kindness to those whom they serve. Protect them all we pray.

In your name, the name of the great physician,

Amen

Day Ten - Seeking

Matthew 6

²⁵ “Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? ²⁶ Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? ²⁷ And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? ²⁸ And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, ²⁹ yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. ³⁰ But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? ³¹ Therefore do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ ³² For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. ³³ But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

³⁴ “Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble. ⁴

We are all seeking something. David Foster Wallace, a writer who died before his time, said this in the commencement address at Kenyon College:

“Because here's something else that's weird but true: in the day-to-day trenches of adult life, there is actually no such thing as atheism....If you worship money and things, if they are where you tap real meaning in life, then you will never have enough, never feel you have enough. It's the truth. Worship your body and beauty and sexual allure and you will always feel ugly. And when time and age start showing, you will die a million deaths before they finally grieve you. On one level, we all know this stuff already. It's been codified as myths, proverbs, clichés, epigrams, parables; the skeleton of every great story. The whole trick is keeping the truth up front in daily consciousness. Worship power, you will end up feeling weak and afraid, and you will need ever more power over others to numb you to your own fear. Worship your intellect, being seen as smart, you will end up feeling stupid, a fraud, always on the verge of being found out. But the insidious thing about these forms of worship is not that they're evil or sinful, it's that they're unconscious. They are default settings. They're the kind of worship you just gradually slip into, day after day, getting more and more selective about what you see and how you measure value without ever being fully aware that that's what you're doing. And the so-called real world will not discourage you from operating on your default settings, because the so-called real world of men and money and power hums merrily along in a pool of fear and anger and frustration and craving and worship of self. Our own present culture has harnessed these forces in ways that have yielded extraordinary wealth and comfort and personal freedom. The freedom all to be lords of our tiny skull-sized kingdoms, alone at the center of all creation⁵.”

⁴ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Mt 6:25–34). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

⁵ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PhhC_N6Bm_s

We're all seeking something. The problem is that when we find what we seek, it isn't fulfilling us. Instead, it's creating more anxiety. As David Foster Wallace points out, we become the opposite of the idol that we worship. "Worship intellect... you will end up feeling stupid..." etc. Of course, there is nothing new under the sun. Psalm 115 also teaches about the idols in life:

- ³ *Our God is in the heavens;
he does all that he pleases.*
- ⁴ *Their idols are silver and gold,
the work of human hands.*
- ⁵ *They have mouths, but do not speak;
eyes, but do not see.*
- ⁶ *They have ears, but do not hear;
noses, but do not smell.*
- ⁷ *They have hands, but do not feel;
feet, but do not walk;
and they do not make a sound in their throat.*
- ⁸ *Those who make them become like them;
so do all who trust in them.*⁶

But what if we could live a different way? What if we could seek what gives life rather than what takes it away? Is it possible to change our default settings? To reboot our lives so that we work off of a different operating system?

In Matthew chapter 6, we see one of the greatest sermons ever preached. In this sermon, Jesus tries to put life in perspective. He says in verse 25, "*Therefore I tell you, be not anxious about what you do with your life—what you eat, what you drink—nor about your body, what you put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?*" If you never thought scripture was relevant, then you perhaps have never read it. These words are as true for us as they were for the disciples.

We're confronted, in this text, with a God who knows the condition of the human heart. He understands how we are anxious and seeking gods that don't bring us joy. So he uses an analogy to help us see our foolishness. In creation, the lilies of the field don't toil or spin wishing they are something they aren't. No orchid says, "Oh, I wish I were a lily." And the carnation doesn't long to be a rose. Each part of creation is content to be what it's made to be except for humans. Humanity is always in stress, fixated on questions that we may or may not be able to solve, rather than being content with how God made us and the fact that he will keep us.

The call of this passage is to "seek first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all of these things should be added to you." Get your priorities straight!

⁶ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#). (2016). (Ps 115:3–8). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

Like Jesus in this sermon, perhaps God today is trying to give us perspective. We've been worried and anxious about a lot of things that don't matter much. But what we need to think about is what God would ask of us today. How would he want us to seek the Kingdom instead of our self-interests? How could we think about our spiritual standing rather than our financial positions?

This doesn't mean that we're not concerned about the affairs of our day. But it means our perspective has changed. As CS Lewis says, *"Aim at heaven and you will get earth thrown in. Aim at earth and you get neither."*⁷ In seeking God during this time, the rest is added to us.

Jesus goes on to describe the reality of life. It does no good for us to be anxious about tomorrow because tomorrow has enough trouble of its own. We cannot take on both the burden today and the burden tomorrow. We're only made to take on today's burden.

So the question is pretty clear for us: are you seeking God? And are you seeking what he would want today rather than what you would want? What does he desire to do in your life during this time? Is there something he's trying to teach you or show you?

Because one thing we know is this—throughout all of human history, seeking the things of this world won't give us the pleasure we desire.

But there is hope. Saint Augustine says: *"But the actual possession of happiness in this life without the joy of what is beyond is but a false happiness and profound mystery, for the true blessings of the soul are not now enjoyed; for that is no true wisdom which does not direct all its prudent observations, manly actions, virtuous self restraint, and just arrangements to that end in which God shall be all and all in a secure eternity and perfect peace...There we shall rest and see, see and love, love and praise. This is what shall be in the end without end"*⁸.

Let's seek the end of creation—that we shall be with God and secure eternally in perfect peace—rather than pursuing the means that we believe will get us the ends. Then all things fall into place.

A Prayer for Military and First Responders

Father,

Today we pray for a group of people we should be praying for every day—our military and first responders—because every day, they work to protect us. Unlike us, they are used to being away from their homes and families, quarantined on a submarine, base, or a boat. They're used to being the ones that run into harm's way when there is a car wreck or a house fire.

⁷ C.S. Lewis, *The Joyful Christian*.

⁸ St. Augustine, *City of God*, Book XIX.

In many ways, our relationship with them is like our relationship with you.

We take them for granted, assuming that they'll be there at a moment's notice. We often take you for granted, assuming that you'll come when we call. And both they do, and you do.

But may we not take either you or them for granted anymore. They are called to dangerous and demanding situations for the greater good. They put on the uniforms and go through the drills, all in preparation for something that nobody hopes will happen.

Christ, you have come for what has happened. Your uniform doesn't have pins or medals. Instead, you were clothed with humanity. You came to the earth being stripped and beaten so that we might know that we are protected from our doubts, sin, and shame.

So may our military and responders find a new camaraderie with you. Help them to enjoy the positions that you've called them to. And while they're there serving us, may they also serve you.

Our great protector, and friend, in Jesus name we pray, Amen.

Day Eleven - Praying

John 17

17 When Jesus had spoken these words, he lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, “Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you, ² since you have given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. ³ And this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. ⁴ I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do. ⁵ And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed.

⁶ “I have manifested your name to the people whom you gave me out of the world. Yours they were, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. ⁷ Now they know that everything that you have given me is from you. ⁸ For I have given them the words that you gave me, and they have received them and have come to know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me. ⁹ I am praying for them. I am not praying for the world but for those whom you have given me, for they are yours. ¹⁰ All mine are yours, and yours are mine, and I am glorified in them. ¹¹ And I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one. ¹² While I was with them, I kept them in your name, which you have given me. I have guarded them, and not one of them has been lost except the son of destruction, that the Scripture might be fulfilled. ¹³ But now I am coming to you, and these things I speak in the world, that they may have my joy fulfilled in themselves. ¹⁴ I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. ¹⁵ I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. ¹⁶ They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. ¹⁷ Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. ¹⁸ As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. ¹⁹ And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth.

²⁰ “I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, ²¹ that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. ²² The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, ²³ I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me. ²⁴ Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world. ²⁵ O righteous Father, even though the world does not know you, I know you, and these know that you have sent me. ²⁶ I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them.” ⁹

In this amazing text, we see this high priestly prayer where Jesus intimately prays for us before the Father. Father, Son and Holy Spirit work together to achieve the salvation of our souls. And

⁹ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Jn 17:1–26). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

now, in this prayer, we see Christ's heart for his people—not just for his disciples, but for us now. He states clearly in verse 3 that eternal life is knowing him. In knowing him, we'll get to know the Father because he and the Father are One.

Theologically, this is called Union with Christ. Christ is not just a part of spirituality that we add on to our lives like one line in a resume. No, it's much more than this. God loves us, and we live in him. We suffer with him, but we're also glorified with him.

I love the opportunity that we have now to manifest who we are as believers. In other words, to make known where true hope is found. At least at my church, we have been praying that there would be a bunch of COVID Christian births. That is, that many people would say, "I became a Christian during COVID-19." I'm told by doctors on the front lines that revival is starting to happen.

We should know throughout this trial that Jesus is praying for us. As it says in verse 9, *"I am praying for them. I'm not praying for the world but for those who you have given me, for they are yours."* Right now, we have the King of Kings hearing our prayers and interceding for us before the throne room of heaven.

This said, it doesn't mean that life will be easy. As it says in verse 15, we're still in this fallen world. I am reminded of a passage in one of my favorite books, Jonathan Kozol's *Amazing Grace*. Kozol is an educator. In this book, he studies kids in Mott's Haven, a congressional district in NYC that doesn't get the funds and the attention it deserves, mainly because it's in a minority neighborhood. He tearfully navigates what happens when living in a society that breaks down.

"Of course, the family structure breaks down in a place like the South Bronx!" says a white minister who works in one of NY City's poorest neighborhoods. "Everything breaks down in a place like this. The pipes break down. The phone breaks down. The electricity and heat break down. The spirit breaks down. The body breaks down. The immune agents of the heart break down. Why wouldn't the family break down also?"

"Nobody lives here," she replies. "Those buildings are all empty." The city had these murals painted on the walls, she says, not for the people in the neighborhood –because they're all facing the wrong way—but for tourists and commuters. "The idea is that they mustn't be upset by knowing too much about the population here. It isn't enough that these people are sequestered. It's also important that their presence be disguised or 'sweetened.' The city did not repair the buildings so that kids who live around here could, in fact, have pretty rooms like those. Instead, they painted pretty rooms on the facades. It's an illusion."

This passage highlights how quickly society can break down, and how prone we are to dress up our problems with facades. Some of us have built our lives on an illusion that God isn't real or doesn't care. Everything looks good on the outside, but on the inside, we are dying.

But in John chapter 17, we see a God who knows us and is concerned for us.

In verse 17, he says, *“Sanctify them in truth, for your word is truth.”* The word sanctified means to be “set apart.” God’s desire is for his believers to be protected even when we live in darkness. This is his prayer for us. We use the truth of God’s word to make us prayerful and hopeful. But as we live in this world, even our suffering can be a form of prayer.

Margaret Clarkson says, *“Our suffering itself may become a form of prayer, if we can learn to let submission and love, even praise, ascend to God through it. It is a wonderful and awesome thing when in the grip of severe pain or sorrow to look up into the face of God and say! “I bring You this—now; accept it for the sake of Lord Jesus.”* Suffering is sanctifying because it centers us more in prayer. It reminds us that we are connected with God.

I want you to live this day encouraged. This is possible because of the last paragraph in John 17. Here we see how it ends: *“Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world.”*

It's amazing to think that we can be truly known and truly loved—seen and heard by a God who has the sensitivity to care and the power to save. He is praying for us, so let's pray to him. And if you've never prayed, don't worry; you can't do it wrong. Just simply speak out what you feel, whether it's anger, fear, excitement, joy, or need for help. Your Father just wants to hear you bumble, like a parent wants to hear their newborn babble, and he can discern our cries and our joys.

Hebrews 4:14-16 says, “Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”

A Prayer for Finances

Father,

We pray for those today that we don't normally think about—those in the financial industry. Their world is rocked by these recent week's events. In their job, they're filled with second-guessing choices and seeking opportunities without being opportunistic. They have people's finances in their hands, which is not people's lives but does affect lives. They are charged with helping people find perspective, knowing that you can't serve the two masters of God and money at the same time.

I'm sure over these last couple weeks, they've had phone conversations with people that now can't retire or have to shut down their business or take out massive loans. And while they deal in financing, a lot of their job is pastoring people through difficult life situations. They shepherd hearts towards generosity while helping others hold loosely to earthly possessions. They need

clarity, empathy, great communication skills, and resolve. Would you give them all those things and more? Knowing that as they guide others, they set the tone for whether we will be fearful people or people that trust in you, not just the bull on Wall Street.

Father, would we recognize today that you own the cattle on a thousand hills, and you will provide for what we need. At the same time, you tell us to be great stewards of everything that you've given us, financially or otherwise. So may those in the financial industry—the bankers, managers, brokers, and traders—who don't know you come to see that life is more than an ROI.

And thank you that you don't dole out your grace based on how well we perform or how well our moral stock rises or falls, but you have forgiven our sins and have given us a new start morning by morning. Do the same for those in the industry we pray.

May we all remember that we're rich in many things, not the least of which is your love.

In the name of a King, who owns the world and all that's in it (Psalm 24), we pray,

Amen

Day Twelve - Grieving

Lamentations 3

- 16 He has made my teeth grind on gravel,
and made me cower in ashes;*
- 17 my soul is bereft of peace;
I have forgotten what happiness is;*
- 18 so I say, "My endurance has perished;
so has my hope from the LORD."*
- 19 Remember my affliction and my wanderings,
the wormwood and the gall!*
- 20 My soul continually remembers it
and is bowed down within me.*
- 21 But this I call to mind,
and therefore I have hope:*
- 22 The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases;
his mercies never come to an end;*
- 23 they are new every morning;
great is your faithfulness.*
- 24 "The LORD is my portion," says my soul,
"therefore I will hope in him."*
- 25 The LORD is good to those who wait for him,
to the soul who seeks him.*
- 26 It is good that one should wait quietly
for the salvation of the LORD.*
- 27 It is good for a man that he bear
the yoke in his youth.*
- 28 Let him sit alone in silence
when it is laid on him;*
- 29 let him put his mouth in the dust—
there may yet be hope;*
- 30 let him give his cheek to the one who strikes,
and let him be filled with insults.*
- 31 For the Lord will not
cast off forever,*
- 32 but, though he cause grief, he will have compassion
according to the abundance of his steadfast love;*
- 33 for he does not afflict from his heart*

*or grieve the children of men.*¹⁰

I love the fact that Christianity doesn't pretend like everything's okay. Instead, it teaches us how to grieve. You're going through the grieving process just like I am. Some are in the shock phase; others are experiencing anger or denial. All of us have to learn how to grieve. The Bible gives room for lament. In other words, it's okay to be sad. You don't have to fake it 'til you make it. Jesus himself weeps. Throughout the Scripture, we see that grief is a part of life.

Lamentations 3 is grief wrapped in poetry. With honesty, the writer says, *"My endurance has perished and so has my hope from the Lord"* (verse 18). God allows us to have these thoughts and emotions without telling us just to buck up. What a gracious and loving God we have.

Gerald Sittser teaches philosophy and theology at Whitworth University. Having lost three of his family members (mom, wife, and daughter) in one car wreck, he knows what it takes to walk through sorrow. Listen to the words he wrote in his book, *A Grace Disguised: How the Soul Changes through Loss*:

"Catastrophic loss by definition precludes recovery. It will transform us or destroy us, but it will never leave us the same. Loss can also make us more. I did not get over my loved ones; rather I absorbed the loss into my life until it became part of who I am. Sorrow took up permanent residence in my soul. The soul is elastic like a balloon. It can grow larger through suffering. Loss can enlarge its capacity for anger, depression, despair, and anguish, all natural and legitimate emotions whenever we experience loss. Once enlarged, the soul is capable of experiencing greater joy, strength, peace, and love. What we consider opposites—east and west, night and light, sorrow and joy, weakness and strength, anger and love, despair and hope, death and life—are no more mutually exclusive than winter and sunlight."

Grief will change us. No matter what your feelings are about COVID-19 or where you are in life right now, grief doesn't leave us the same. The thing about following Christ is that he wants to use sorrow to expand us. The pain we feel now can result in more joy later. I wrote on a social media post recently, "Perhaps this hard reset from being able to touch each other will help us to redeem physical touch. For far too long, we've used touch in a sexualized or manipulative way."

When we come out of quarantine and get the all-clear, our souls will be enlarged. Lord willing, we will hug people in more pure and redemptive ways. The handshakes will become an exchange of trust and affirmation, rather than a trite cultural greeting.

And our souls will be enlarged in other ways as well. Beyond touch, think about enjoying a meal in your favorite restaurant. Chances are it will taste better. Or how about that Sunday lunch at

¹⁰ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (La 3:16–33). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

Grandma's, swimming in the community pool, cheering at a sporting event. The things that seem burdensome now will feel like a privilege because our soul is enlarged through grief.

Where does your soul need to be enlarged?

Where you are experiencing sorrow, can you experience a greater joy? Where you are sensing weakness, is there a newfound strength? Where in death will we see resurrection?

Christ doesn't desire to make us robots, but in reality, to make us who we should be. He wants us in color, not just black and white. He wants us to emerge a larger version of ourselves (and not just because we have eaten our way through our pantry—give yourselves grace people!) because in grief we have been expanded.

It's important to lament but it's essential to have hope.

Verse 21 of Lamentations three is the turning point, *"But this we call to mind and therefore we have **hope**. The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end. They are new every morning. Great is your faithfulness."*

We should be thankful and grateful for the doctors, researchers, and first responders and others, but our confidence needs to be in the character of God. His steadfast love will never cease! His mercy will continue when all the masks run out. He never runs out of his kindness.

Because of this, we can trust where he has us. That's why verse 24 says, *"The LORD is my portion," says my soul, "therefore I will hope in him."* The Lord is the person I will hope in. Not in the circumstances to change, because we don't know when they will. But the character of God is constant. He will give us all we need.

Joni Eareckson Tada also knows a good bit about grief. At 15, she became a quadriplegic after diving into a lake and striking a tree under the surface. She has lived life suffering and grieving over what was lost. She writes these words in her book, *Glorious Intruder*: *"Don't shake your head when you see a mom or dad with a Down syndrome child and say, No way could I face that. Most likely you couldn't. Which is precisely why God hasn't asked you to. Instead, take time to seriously consider how you will remain joyful within your own particular, unique, individual situation. Accept your circumstances as a gift from His hand. Dare to thank Him for them."*

Part of what we need to do during the saga of COVID-19 is to accept our circumstances as a gift. Dare to thank Christ for them. From his hand we've lost much. One of my favorite tweets over these past couple of weeks was from Andy Crouch, who said, "I didn't plan on giving up this much for Lent." It's a great summary statement. And yet even though we experience loss, verse 25 says, *"The Lord is good to those who wait for Him,"* and verse 31, *"The Lord will not cast off forever but, though he caused grief, he will have compassion according to the abundance of his steadfast love."*

So trust your portion. He's given us what we can handle if we handle it with his strength. Again, listen to the wise words of Joni Eareckson Tada in *Glorious Intruder*: "*Not everyone can be trusted with suffering. Not everyone can endure a fiery ordeal. So the Master scrutinizes the jewels and carefully selects those which can bear the refining, the branches which can stand the knife. It is given for some to preach, for others to work, and for still others to suffer.*"

Friends, it's okay not to be okay. It's okay to grieve the wedding you missed, the loved ones you see through the glass, the business you lost, or your health. As we grieve, we wait, and as we wait, we hope, trusting the character and kindness of God.

Thankfully, as it says in the New Testament, we don't grieve without hope.

A Prayer for those Infected

Father,

We pray now for those that are infected with COVID-19. They've got to be incredibly scared and tired. Perhaps they are not showing any symptoms but are curious about what will happen in the days ahead. We pray, Father, that you would give them the attention they need to their bodies and their minds. May this suffering and grief process make their soul elastic. May they experience anger or despair but also love and hope. And may they grow larger in their capacity to love.

And we do pray for healing; we know that you can heal and pray that you would. Please work with those that have trials of the vaccine. May there be a solution, but also, would you turn the tide of this pandemic.

Be with their loved ones that are worried about decisions. Help us to know that, whatever portion you've given them, their "boundary lines have fallen in pleasant places" (Psalm 16).

May we trust you as we hope in you. Teach us to grieve well as you grieve with us.

In a voice of lament, we pray,

Amen

Day Thirteen - Trusting

Joshua 1

1 After the death of Moses the servant of the LORD, the LORD said to Joshua the son of Nun, Moses' assistant, **2** "Moses my servant is dead. Now therefore arise, go over this Jordan, you and all this people, into the land that I am giving to them, to the people of Israel. **3** Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given to you, just as I promised to Moses. **4** From the wilderness and this Lebanon as far as the great river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites to the Great Sea toward the going down of the sun shall be your territory. **5** No man shall be able to stand before you all the days of your life. Just as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you or forsake you. **6** Be strong and courageous, for you shall cause this people to inherit the land that I swore to their fathers to give them. **7** Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to do according to all the law that Moses my servant commanded you. Do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may have good success wherever you go. **8** This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success. **9** Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go." ¹¹

The book of Joshua opens up startlingly with the scene of a funeral. The first five words are "after the death of Moses." It's referring to Joshua's mentor, leader, and friend. Moses had brought the Israelites out of their exile and slavery in Egypt. Because of disobedience, he was not allowed to enter into the promised land. He got them as far as he could go before the Lord took him. Now that Moses is dead, all the pressure of leadership falls on Joshua to guide them across the Jordan River and into the promised land to defeat their enemies, who are bigger and stronger.

It's a daunting task for a young leader, and I'm sure he was scared. He probably had all kinds of question marks running through his mind: will he be as wise as Moses? Will he be strong? Who will give him counsel when he doesn't know which way to go? In the midst of uncertainty, he remembers the words of his mentor spoken to him years earlier. It was a theme that he would hang onto throughout his life: "Be strong and courageous."

Earlier, in Deuteronomy 31:6, Moses declared Joshua to be his successor and said, "*Be strong and courageous, for you shall go with this people into the land that the Lord has sworn to their fathers to give them, and you shall put them in possession of it.*" It's a great message, and I'm

¹¹ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Jos 1:1–9). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

sure Joshua took it with sincerity, but it is easy to accept a message before everything hits the fan. Trusting looks easy right up to the point that we have to do it.

Here Joshua is being asked to trust, not in Moses, not in himself, but in the Lord. Therefore in his opening speech to the people, he repeats the same words, *“Be strong and courageous.”* Strength is something in the heart, more just physical strength. It is resolve. And courageous means to live life without regard to self.

Gilbert Keith Chesterton says it this way: *“Courage is almost a contradiction in terms. It means a strong desire to live taking the form of a readiness to die. ‘He that will lose his life, the same shall save it,’ is not a piece of mysticism for saints and heroes....A soldier surrounded by enemies, if he is to cut his way out, needs to combine a strong desire for living with a strange carelessness about dying. He must not merely cling to life, for then he will be a coward and will not escape. He must not merely wait for death, for then he will be a suicide, and will not escape. He must seek his life in a spirit of furious indifference to it; he must desire life like water, and yet drink death like wine.”*

Courage has a strange carelessness and also a desire at the same time. It is the quality that Aslan whispered into Lucy’s ear when he said, *“Courage, dear heart.”*

Courage doesn't leave us alone. We also have *“this Book of the law that shall not depart from our mouths, but that we can meditate on day and night.”* God's word isn't a self-help manual, but it is living and active, and the Spirit guides us as we read. His word teaches us to trust the character of God. Trust is what Joshua needed to do, and it's also our challenge today.

In his letters, Francis Schaeffer says, *“Our trusting the Lord does not mean that there are not times of tears, and I think it is a mistake as Christians to act as though trusting the Lord and tears are not compatible. As a matter of fact, it is my opinion that the greatest trust in the Lord comes when we trust him in the midst of tears.”*

So today, friends, we're called to trust in God who is the same God of Moses, Joshua, Ruth, Esther, David, Job, Mary, Joseph, Peter, and Paul. We should ask ourselves the simple question: what is it today that we need to trust in the Lord? Where do we need to be strong and courageous? As my wife often says to my kids, *“You can do hard things.”* Just know that you don't do these hard things alone. We use the Lord's strength, we ask him for help, and he's *“with us wherever we go.”*

One last point about trust. It's not just cognitive. Scholar J.I. Packer points out in his book *Knowing God*, *“But for all this, we must not lose sight of the fact that knowing God is an emotional relationship as well as an intellectual and volitional one, and could not indeed be a deep relation between persons were it not so. The believer is, and must be, emotionally involved in the victories and vicissitudes of God’s cause in the world, just as Sir Winston’s personal staff were emotionally involved in the ups and downs of the war. Believers rejoice when their God is honored and vindicated and feel the acutest distress when they see God flouted.”*

Let us trust God, emotionally, spiritually, financially, and physiologically. This is our time to “be strong and courageous.”

A Prayer for Businesses Large and Small

Father,

I pray today for people that we've not yet prayed for—those with businesses large and small.

Those with large businesses are forced to make decisions that will affect many people, sometimes hundreds. It's a daunting task to be responsible for so many. I pray that you would give them the facts that they need to think deeply and broadly for so many. Give them creative solutions to complex problems and surround them with good counselors.

Small business leaders are forced to make decisions about shutting down their life's work over a few bad weeks or months. They have poured their blood, sweat, and tears into their endeavors. I pray that you will help them to see that their work was not in vain. Many of them have served communities. Locally they brought joy to so many. Give them a heart that doesn't second guess, and may they trust you for the next step of their path. Make them strong and courageous and keep them from being frightened about the future.

Give us all the strength and courage that we so desperately need.

In the sweet, courageous name of Jesus, we pray,

Amen.

Day Fourteen - Worshiping

Zephaniah 3

- ¹⁴ *Sing aloud, O daughter of Zion;
shout, O Israel!
Rejoice and exult with all your heart,
O daughter of Jerusalem!*
- ¹⁵ *The LORD has taken away the judgments against you;
he has cleared away your enemies.
The King of Israel, the LORD, is in your midst;
you shall never again fear evil.*
- ¹⁶ *On that day it shall be said to Jerusalem:
“Fear not, O Zion;
let not your hands grow weak.*
- ¹⁷ *The LORD your God is in your midst,
a mighty one who will save;
he will rejoice over you with gladness;
he will quiet you by his love;
he will exult over you with loud singing.*
- ¹⁸ *I will gather those of you who mourn for the festival,
so that you will no longer suffer reproach.*
- ¹⁹ *Behold, at that time I will deal
with all your oppressors.
And I will save the lame
and gather the outcast,
and I will change their shame into praise
and renown in all the earth.*
- ²⁰ *At that time I will bring you in,
at the time when I gather you together;
for I will make you renowned and praised
among all the peoples of the earth,
when I restore your fortunes
before your eyes,” says the LORD.*¹²

In this amazing passage from the book of Zephaniah, God’s strength and heart are on full display. The result should be our enjoyment and worship of Him. After all, what’s the point of having a Savior unless we enjoy Him? Zephaniah 3:14 starts with a cacophony of praise to “rejoice and exult with all of our heart.”

But why would we?

¹² [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (Zep 3:14–20). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

Because The Lord has taken away our judgment, cleared our enemies, and is in our midst. So, verse 15, we never again have to fear evil. In other words, God has done what we cannot do. God's done the hard work of clearing away our sin. Like a King who protects his Kingdom, God is protecting us from all evil.

These true spiritual realities mean that our hands need not grow weak (verse 16). We can get about our daily work and worship, knowing we are protected. I like what Francis Schaeffer says in his letter: *"You need not be afraid to enjoy God. The beautiful thing is that He uses us, but never in the way a soldier would use a gun, only to throw it down and take another. He uses us, but He always fulfills us at the same time. In one way, I would agree that we cannot reach God with our human reasoning; but in another way, faith is never like a streak of lightning from the sky either. Faith is bowing before God."*

Faith is declaring during this time of uncertainty that we will still worship. One of the reasons we can worship is because of verse 17. He's a God who is in our midst, and He's not left us alone. He saves us. He suffers with us. He also rejoices over us.

How amazing it is to think that God rejoices over you! He doesn't just put up with you. He's proud of us because we're his sons and daughters.

Like sons and daughters, when we are distressed, he swaddles us in mercy, and he quiets us with his love. At other times, he rejoices with loud singing. He can't contain himself—like the Father watching his son break free for the touchdown. He is not afraid to say, "That's my son; that's my daughter."

He's not a God who's ashamed of us, but instead he has taken on our shame and has given us his righteousness. It's a beautiful picture of how God thinks of us. As Randy Alcorn says in his book, *Heaven*, *"God is the ultimate salvage artist. He loves to restore things to their original condition—and make them even better."*

God desires to make us who we could be if we were isolated from our sin. When sin is defeated and enemies of our soul tamed, life can be reimagined. Heaven is freedom from these ailments—life, the way God intended. Ultimate rest and worship.

René Pache writes, *"The emphasis on the present heaven is clearly rest, cessation from earth's battles and comforts from earth's sufferings. The future heaven is centered more on activity and expansion, serving Christ and reigning with Him. The scope is much larger, the great city with its twelve gates, people coming and going, nations to rule. In other words, the emphasis in the present heaven is on the absence of earth's negatives, while in the future heaven it is the presence of earth's positives, magnified many times through the power and glory of resurrected bodies on a resurrected Earth, free at last from sin and shame and all that would hinder both joy and achievement."*

Make no doubt; God is going to have to do the work. Our job is to worship. He's going to spit-shine our lives with his blood and restore our fortunes from his reserves. It's way above our pay grade to "save the lame and gather the outcasts." And he'll do this work in His timing. It's going to be amazing.

As we trust and rest in his promises, seek his will, grieve our losses, and wait on his return; we can rejoice in His plan. As Lewis says, *"He will make the feeblest and filthiest of us into a dazzling, radiant, immortal creature, pulsating all through with such energy and joy and wisdom and love as we cannot now imagine, a bright stainless mirror which reflects back to God perfectly His own boundless power and delight and goodness. The process will be long and in parts very painful, but that is what we are in for. Nothing less."*

So friends, enjoy God today. Enjoy who he is, cherish his character, and trust his plans. Worship Him as the God who can do what we cannot do. And praise the King of all creation—knowing that this too shall pass, but his Kingdom will endure forever.

A Prayer for Caretakers

Father,

We pray today for our caretakers, those who are caring for our elderly; our moms, dads, grandfathers, and grandmothers. They are behind the glass. We can't touch, laugh, or encourage with a hug.

But the caretakers are there when all else have had to abandon. They're probably tired as they deal with a population that might not understand why everything has changed, navigating a group of people that our society has put out to pasture. Forgive us for the way that we treat our elderly. And encourage their caretakers to bring them dignity this week.

May they also be dignified in their service. For the hospice nurses, that brings so much joy and strength to families; for those that cook food and clean the rooms and wash out the bed pans; for those in administration through all the uncertainty; give them all a newfound sense that while nobody else sees, you sing over them and you rejoice in them. They are caring for people who are made in God's image.

Keep them safe and protected so that they might keep others encouraged and nourished.

Care for them in only the way that you can because you are in their midst. You're in the place that we cannot be. Quiet them with your love; rejoice over them with singing.

In your precious name, we pray,

Amen