



The Narrow and Everlasting

A LENTEN DEVOTIONAL GUIDE

Way


TRINITY CHURCH
WOODBIDGE

Carole Abbate

INTRODUCTION

In his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says, “Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few” (Matthew 7:13-14). David writes in his psalm, “Lead me in the way everlasting” (Psalm 139:24).

The narrow and everlasting way. Jesus tells us it is not easy, but in it there is life. And this life is the heart of our guide — a journey to the center virtues that Christ embodied so perfectly during his earthly ministry.

This guide looks at seven virtues — charity, patience, temperance, chastity, generosity, diligence, and humility — and their corresponding sinful extremes that we so often fall towards.* To illustrate, with generosity as the virtue, on one end we find the sin of greed. Yet, on the other end of the spectrum, we find wastefulness. Through the work of the Spirit in our lives, the goal is to find our way back to the center of each of these virtues, where we find Christ.

Each day looks at these virtues, sins, and opposite extremes in light of a specific Bible passage that our writers have chosen for reflection. You’ll find that across some weeks, writers have selected the same passages, a beautiful testament to the richness of Scripture, that no matter how many times we look at a passage, we can draw entirely fresh and different insight from its verses.

We have included four readings each week, with the following options for Monday through Friday:

- The **Spotlight Passages** are the passages on which our writers have focused their reflection.
- The **Prayer Prompt** is designed to help you center down in God’s presence for a time of silence, reflection, and prayer.
- The **Candlelight Prayer** is a brief, scripted prayer. As you read, make these words your own.

On Saturdays, we will provide another **Spotlight Passage** and steps to lead you through a spiritual reading exercise, along with the **Prayer of Examen**. In this way, we will balance Bible study with listening to the Lord through his living and active Word.

Our prayer is that you find the center — the narrow and everlasting way, the way of hope, the way to life, and the way of Christ.

The Devotional Writing Team

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*Adapted from Fathers of Mercy, *The Seven Capital Sins and their Opposite Corresponding Capital Virtues and Extremes*,
<https://fathersofmercy.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Seven-Capital-Sins-Opposite-Corresponding-Virtues-and-Extremes.pdf>

Week 1

Charity

Envy

Sin / Extreme

Charity

Virtue

Pusillanimity

Opposite Extreme

Spotlight Passage: John 13:1-5

When I was a student teacher, I was instructed to wear a business professional wardrobe. Not much older than the teens I was teaching, the clothing helped separate me from the students. I was above them. I had authority. I was not there to be their bud. My dress and my demeanor helped distinguish me and create distance between us... even though they were the age of my brother.

At the Last Supper, Jesus took an opposite approach. He knew the Father had given him all authority and that his time on earth was ending. He could have emphasized to his disciples that they were the servants and he was Lord and Master. Instead, Jesus modeled perfect charity.

The Son of God took off his garment and took on the servant's role of washing feet before the meal. He got beneath them. He took time on each one, elevating them as he humbled himself. Completely confident in his identity, Jesus expressed charity towards every man in the room, even the one who would betray him. "He loved them to the end" (John 13:1).

If we are confident in our identity in Christ, we are freed to show charity towards others, even those who may desire our downfall. Let us draw close, serve, and love each one as our brother.

Prayer Prompt: Spend 60 seconds (or more!) in silence.

Reflect and answer these questions honestly in God's presence: Do you ever try to prove your importance? Make sure others know and recognize your authority? Do you feel threatened to elevate others, worried it may decrease your standing? Pray for a solid assurance of your identity in Christ. Pray for the grace to close the distance between you and others. Ask God for opportunities to express brotherly love by serving.

Candlelight Prayer: *"Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you." John 13:14-15 (NIV)*

Jesus, I confess my tendency is to raise myself up, not humble myself to love through serving. I don't mind serving you, but I'm often adverse to serving others. Let me be so confident in the love of the Father that I can freely and humbly love others, especially those I perceive as "below me." Forgive me, and grow your charity in me as I seek to follow your example.

Week 1

MONDAY

If we are
confident in
our identity in
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others.

Week 1

TUESDAY

Envy is a
vice with
no reward.

Spotlight Passage: Luke 15:25-32

In Jesus's parable of the Prodigal Son, the older son is grieved at his brother's restoration and celebration. Instead of rejoicing that his brother has returned and joining in the celebration, this man thinks only of himself. His father's blessing towards the younger brother threatens his identity and his envy grows.

Why doesn't anyone see how hard I've been working? Why isn't my obedience rewarded? Why haven't I ever been celebrated before? Why is someone so bad receiving blessings, while I'm good and receive nothing?

The older son had forgotten his identity in his father's house. Riches and blessings were readily available to him! His standing and love were secure. Instead of keeping his eyes on his father, envy turned his eyes towards his brother. Consequently, he refused to enter his father's joy.

Medieval theologian Thomas Aquinas stated, "the object both of charity and of envy is our neighbor's good, but by contrary movements, since charity rejoices in our neighbor's good, while envy grieves over it."*

Envy is a vice with no reward. Envy will always keep us from entering into the joy of our Heavenly Father. Thank heavens that, when envy turns our eyes towards others, we have a Father who pursues us even still.

*Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* (2, 36, art 3), www.newadvent.org/summa/3036.htm.

Prayer Prompt: *Spend 60 seconds (or more!) in silence.*

Sometimes we put others down behind their backs to make ourselves feel bigger. This is usually an indication that we are insecure in our identity in Christ and suffering from envy. When do you feel grieved by your neighbor's good rather than rejoice in it? Allow the Holy Spirit to search your heart, and confess any envy that comes to mind.

Candlelight Prayer: *"In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us."*
Ephesians 1:7-8a (NIV)

Father, why am I worried about my recognition and threatened by others' blessings? You have given me incomparable riches of your grace through Christ Jesus. I am your beloved child, richly blessed. Please rid me of my envy and bring me back into your joy.

Spotlight Passage: Matthew 25:14-19, 24-25

We have examined Jesus's example of *charity*. Jesus's secure identity in the Father freed him to humble himself and love others through self-sacrificial service. However, we often struggle to find our identity as children of God.

On the one hand, we drift into *envy*, feeling our self-worth threatened when others are lifted up. On the opposite extreme is a vice called *pusillanimity*, which means "smallness of soul" or "faint-heartedness," in which our self-worth is wrecked with wrong standards of greatness.

Pusillanimity leads to Imposter Syndrome: we compare ourselves to others and perceive that we don't measure up. This leads to a failure to develop our gifts, meet our potential, and serve God and others boldly. We imagine we are inferior, shrink back from action, and even fear revealing our weaknesses by asking for help.

This is the situation of the last servant in Jesus's parable, who, when entrusted with a talent, buried it instead of multiplying it for his master's glory. Let's not become paralyzed by defining our identity through comparison to other people! Pusillanimity is not humility. It's a vice, stemming from the lie that you are inferior.

Take heart! You are a child of God. You are loved, gifted, and empowered for good works for God's kingdom. Don't bury your talents in the dirt like the wicked and lazy servant in Jesus's parable. Find your worth in your Father. Then, you'll be free to serve him and others in charity.

Prayer Prompt: *Spend 60 seconds (or more!) in silence.*

One writer said, "The mistakes of the pusillanimous person are threefold: to whom they are listening, against whom they are measuring themselves, on whom they are relying."* Reflect on these three mistakes. Have you ever felt inferior, especially in relation to serving God and others where you are called and gifted? Ask God to speak truth from his Word into your heart regarding your identity, worth, and the gifts that he's given you.

*Rebecca DeYoung, "Aquinas's Virtues of Acknowledged Dependence: A New Measure of Greatness," <https://place.asburyseminary.edu/faithandphilosophy/vol21/iss2/5>.

Candlelight Prayer: *"We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully." Romans 12:6-8 (NIV)*

God, you call me child. My worth and my identity are in you. You prepared good works in advance for me to do. I need your help and grace to view myself accurately. Make me more like your Son Jesus, serving you boldly and humbly, and serving others around me in charity and brotherly love.

Week 1

WEDNESDAY

With
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Week 1

THURSDAY

Moses was defined by being a servant of the Lord, who lived in service of others. He exemplified charity, true brotherly love, and is a wonderful example of growth for us.

Spotlight Passage: Exodus 4:10-14a

They say, "God does not call the qualified; he qualifies the called." When the Lord appeared to Moses in the burning bush and commissioned him to liberate the Israelites, Moses responded with doubts that he could do the job. He was a reject from the royal household, a murderer on the run, and entirely insecure. Looking side to side, Moses believed there must be someone else better for the task. *Pusillanimity* was gripping his heart, which earned him a rebuke from God.

But God had protected and prepared Moses for this very moment. Furthermore, as Moses built a relationship with the Lord, God changed his heart. Moses learned to look up to God for his identity and self-worth in order to serve with humble charity.

Despite being used by God for amazing signs and wonders, Moses became "more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth" (Num 12:3b). And, at the end of his life, "Moses the servant of the Lord died there in Moab, as the Lord had said" (Deut 34:5). Moses was defined by being a servant of the Lord, who lived in service of others. He exemplified *charity*, true brotherly love, and is a wonderful example of growth for us.

Prayer Prompt: *Spend 60 seconds (or more!) in silence.*

Moses climbed God's holy mountain. He met with God in the tabernacle. "The Lord would speak to Moses face to face, as one speaks to a friend" (Exod 33:11a). Time with God grounded Moses's identity in God. From this, God grew humility and love in Moses's character. Are you struggling with envy or pusillanimity? How might you journey deeper into God's presence so he can grow humble charity in you?

Candlelight Prayer: *"I pray that from his glorious, unlimited resources he will empower you with inner strength through his Spirit. Then Christ will make his home in your hearts as you trust in him. Your roots will grow down into God's love and keep you strong." Ephesians 3:16-17 (NLT)*

Triune God, I don't want to look side to side, worrying about my reputation, how I measure up against others, or clinging to power or prestige. Help me deepen my roots into the Father's love. Grow inner strength in me through the Spirit so I can love others, serving them as I trust in Christ, my Savior and Lord.

Spotlight Passage: Matthew 5:43-48

When asked what the most important commandment was, Jesus took the *Shema* of Judaism, a creed adherent Jews recited daily, and set beside it another. "The most important one... is this: 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these" (Mark 12:29-31).

Author and Professor Scot McKnight calls this the Jesus Creed. McKnight says, "For Jesus, love of God and love of others is the core... Love, when working properly, is both emotion and will, affection and action... Love has arms that reach out, always."* Love for God is lived out in charity, brotherly love.

It's easy to love our besties. It's gratifying to love those who are grateful, who return love to us. And it feels good to demonstrate charity towards the poor.

But Jesus took it deeper. He tells us to love our enemies, to pray for those who persecute us, and to express love towards those who will never return the favor. Otherwise, what more are we doing than those who don't follow him?

*Scot McKnight, *The Jesus Creed* (Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press, 2004), 8-9, 227.

Prayer Prompt: Spend 60 seconds (or more!) in silence.

Notice your internal reaction to Jesus's command, "be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect." Remember, the virtue of charity (love) is a fruit of the Spirit. We need God's help to love the unlovable. Who are those you consider your enemies? Who is hardest to love? Who do you feel is persecuting you? Pray for them by name. Ask God to grow your charity, expressing your love for God through your love for others.

Candlelight Prayer: *"When they came to the place called the Skull, they crucified him there, along with the criminals—one on his right, the other on his left. Jesus said, 'Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.' And they divided up his clothes by casting lots." Luke 23:33-34 (NIV)*

Jesus, you prayed for those who crucified you, and you died for me while I was your enemy (Rom 5:10; Col 1:21). I want to love God and love others, but I confess I rarely love the unlovable in my life. Grow this virtue of charity in me. Let me love others and serve with humility out of my identity as a child of God and my love for you, my Savior and Lord.

Week 1

FRIDAY

Jesus tells us
to love our
enemies, to
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return the
favor.

Week 1

SATURDAY

Spiritual Reading

1. Ready

Take 60 seconds (or more) in silence as preparation for spiritual reading. Breathe deeply and center yourself on God's presence with you.

2. Read Spotlight Passage: 1 Corinthians 13:1-7

Read the Spotlight Passage using the text below or in your Bible.

Listen to the text by reading it slowly. Reread up to three times if desired. Ask God to speak through his Word.

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If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

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3. Receive

Reflect on what word, phrase, or sentence speaks to you from the text. Write it down in a journal. Notice your reaction to this word, phrase, or sentence without judging yourself. Sit in silence as you listen to the Lord.

4. Respond

Pray in response to the words God has stirred within you or spoken to you.

5. Rest

Rest in the presence of God, allowing the Scripture to take root and the Holy Spirit to transform you.

Prayer of Examen

Father, as I consider this past week, show me where you were present, and where I experienced your goodness. Where have I missed you speaking to me?
Pause, and reflect in prayer.

Father, show me the ways in which I have sinned this week, through neglect, through my weakness, or intentionally.
Pause, and reflect in prayer. Then, confess and receive forgiveness.

My Reflections on Charity

Week 2

Patience

Anger

Sin / Extreme

Patience

Virtue

Servility

Opposite Extreme

Spotlight Passage: John 4:1-30

Have you ever tried to explain a very important concept to your kids or friends, an important truth that you knew they really needed, and in doing so, you used several different ways to explain it? Yet they didn't get it. Not only didn't they get it, when they felt it was getting too personal, they would change the subject, more than once, to block your efforts. You feel your patience waning, your annoyance growing... until you throw up your hands in frustration and say to yourself, "Well, I really tried!"

Jesus, in this passage, shows infinite patience with this woman at the well. A woman of ill repute, an outcast. Jesus gently persists until the woman, finally having absorbed the truth of Jesus's words, becomes so excited over what he is saying that she leaves her water jar and rushes back to town to spread the word. "The Messiah has come!"

When we follow Jesus and learn to put others before ourselves, patience tags along. It is the willingness to endure and to confidently rest in the understanding that no matter how long we might wait, God's timing is always best.

Prayer Prompt: *Spend 60 seconds (or more!) in silence.*

Think back to a moment when someone acted impatiently towards you. It was very troubling, no? Have you ever lost patience with anyone? Reflect on ways that you have been impatient this week, and ask the Holy Spirit to help you remain calm.

Candlelight Prayer: *"Better is the end of a thing than its beginning, and the patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit." Ecclesiastes 7:8 (ESV)*

Lord God, help me to be humble at heart and other-focused instead of thinking of myself, so that the love of Jesus can flow through me. Show me ways in which I get in the way of your glory, and give me the strength to fix them.

Week 2

MONDAY

When we follow Jesus and learn to put others before ourselves, patience tags along.

Week 2

TUESDAY

Anger is called the first cousin of pride because, if we are prideful, then anything we deem a threat to ourselves, socially, mentally or physically, may unleash it.

Spotlight Passage: 1 Samuel 19:1-10

King Saul's anger was unjustified. It was wrath born out of jealousy and fear. Saul was envious of David's popularity and fearful that David would usurp him. Saul allowed evil to overtake him and tried repeatedly to have David killed, either by someone else or his own hand. These events are written in 1 Samuel 19-22.

Anger is called the first cousin of pride because, if we are prideful, then anything we deem a threat to ourselves, socially, mentally or physically, may unleash it.

But, anger itself is not a sin. "Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil" (Ephesians 4:26-27).

It is what we do with our anger that's important. Stifling it or pretending it's not there will only lead to bitterness. Anger needs to be recognized and expressed, preferably offered up to God in conversation and prayer in order that he might help diffuse it in a healthy way. Conversely, when confronted with injustice, righteous anger can be a powerful motivational force for good.

Prayer Prompt: Spend 60 seconds (or more!) in silence.

What causes your anger? Frustration? Criticism? Injustice? Stress? Betrayal? Feeling disrespected? It is important to identify these triggers so you can, with God's help, develop healthy coping strategies to manage your anger. Pray to know yourself better and for the grace to turn to God for strength.

Candlelight Prayer: "For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another." Galatians 5:13 (ESV)

Father God, help me love others as you have loved me. I can only do this if I am filled with your Spirit and given over to you. I am asking for your help, for your love to flow through me to those around me.

Spotlight Passage: 1 Kings 18:16-39

Here, in the story of the prophet Elijah and the prophets of the false god Baal, a severe drought has overtaken the land of Israel. Elijah, a prophet of the Lord, confronts King Ahab and challenges him to gather all of the prophets of Baal to Mount Carmel in order to test who is the true God. Each side is to prepare a sacrifice and then call upon their god to consume it. The god who answers will be the one, true God.

The prophets of Baal go first, calling upon their god to consume the offering. But nothing happens. Hours pass, and Baal is silent. The prophets, desperate to have Baal hear them, become frantic, even cutting themselves with swords and lances to get his attention.

It is now Elijah's turn. To increase the difficulty of burning the offering, Elijah has buckets of water poured over the wooden altar. He prays to God, asking that he show himself as the one, true God. And so, the fire of the Lord comes down and consumes not only the bull, but the altar, the stones, *and* the water. Elijah knew and trusted God to burn up the sacrifice. He only had to call upon the Lord in faith.

Servility is being overly willing to please someone else, often to our own detriment. If we find ourselves trying to please people to the point of harming ourselves mentally, emotionally, or physically, then that should be a red flag. Something is desperately wrong. The prophets of Baal felt they needed to *earn* the attention of their god. Rather, through Christ, we are *invited* to enter with boldness into his presence in prayer, assured of his tender compassion towards us.

Prayer Prompt: *Spend 60 seconds (or more!) in silence.*

Consider ways that you seek others' approval of you, perhaps in ways that even compromise your values or beliefs. Reflect in prayer on your identity in Christ, and how it can free you from this dependency on others.

Candlelight Prayer: *"...so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; being strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy." Colossians 1:10-11 (ESV)*

Lord, I want and need to please you first, above all else. Help me to put all things in perspective with you as the head. I know if I do this, everything else will fall into place. I will be able to serve others better and build the kingdom.

Week 2

WEDNESDAY

If we find ourselves trying to please people to the point of harming ourselves mentally, emotionally, or physically, something is desperately wrong.

Week 2

THURSDAY

God's
patience and
compassion
towards
Jonah
continues,
even in the
face of
Jonah's
stubbornness.

Spotlight Passage: Jonah 1

Jonah was called by God to go to the city of Nineveh and deliver a message of repentance. But Jonah did not want these people to be forgiven, and he became angry for being assigned this job. So he chose to ignore God and decided to head in the opposite direction, boarding a ship that was sailing away. Jonah, in his anger, ran away from God.

A great storm arose and threatened the ship and all of the men aboard. As soon as the men realized that Jonah was the cause of their misfortune, he was thrown overboard and swallowed by a huge fish. Within three days of being inside the fish's belly, Jonah repented, asking God for forgiveness and promising to finish what God had asked him to do at the start. God had the fish spit Jonah out onto dry land.

Jonah went immediately to Nineveh, delivering God's message of repentance to the people. Amazingly, the entire city, from the king to the common folk, repented, asking for forgiveness, and, by their sincerity, were spared from destruction.

God had to shake Jonah out of his selfishness in a rather dramatic fashion. While Jonah's anger returns once again in the fourth and final chapter, we see God's patience and compassion towards him continue as well, even in the face of Jonah's stubbornness.

Prayer Prompt: *Spend 60 seconds (or more!) in silence.*

Have you ever intentionally run from something you know God has asked of you? Are there areas of your life where you refuse to let the Holy Spirit speak into? Reflect on these parts of yourself, and why you keep them so guarded, asking the Holy Spirit to work in and through you.

Candlelight Prayer: *"Whoever heeds instruction is on the path to life, but he who rejects reproof leads others astray." Proverbs 10:17 (ESV)*

Heavenly Father, I ask you to give me wisdom to always heed your instruction even if it isn't what I want. Help me to submit to your leading and hear what you are telling me. Otherwise, I will stumble over my own folly.

Spotlight Passage: 1 Timothy 1:15-16

Paul states here that Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom, Paul says, he is the worst. But because of the immense patience of Christ Jesus, Paul not only was given grace and was saved but went on to become one of the greatest of the Apostles, traveling great distances to spread the gospel to others, both Jews and Gentiles.

Paul was beaten, imprisoned, persecuted and eventually killed for his beliefs. But Paul was so “on fire” for the Lord that nothing stopped him from what Jesus had appointed him to do. Even after his death, his teachings continue to bring people to salvation and make them realize there is nothing so bad they have done that God will not forgive them.

Jesus has immense patience for all of us. As for me, I would have given up on myself long ago. It wasn’t until I was 47 years old that I accepted Christ as my Lord and Savior. Now, when I sing the worship song, “Goodness of God,” I tear up, thinking of all the years he was so patient with me before I ever knew him. “All my life you have been faithful. All my life you have been so, so good. With every breath I am able, I will sing of the goodness of God.”

Prayer Prompt: *Spend 60 seconds (or more!) in silence.*

Has God shown you infinite patience? Have you shown this to others around you? Reflect on areas of your life in which you experience the most impatience, and ask the Holy Spirit to help you towards Christlikeness in these areas.

Candlelight Prayer: *“Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.” Ephesians 4:2 (NIV)*

Holy Father, forgive me for the times I have not shown patience to someone who crosses my path. I don’t know their whole story. I need to set myself aside and become like Jesus, listening to their pain and praying with them.

Week 2

FRIDAY

Reflect on
areas of your
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Week 2

SATURDAY

Spiritual Reading

1. Ready

Take 60 seconds (or more) in silence as preparation for spiritual reading. Breathe deeply and center yourself on God's presence with you.

2. Read Spotlight Passage: John 4:10-15

Read the Spotlight Passage using the text below or in your Bible.

Listen to the text by reading it slowly. Reread up to three times if desired. Ask God to speak through his Word.

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Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water." The woman said to him, "Sir, you have nothing to draw water with, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob? He gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did his sons and his livestock." Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life." The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I will not be thirsty or have to come here to draw water."

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3. Receive

Reflect on what word, phrase, or sentence speaks to you from the text. Write it down in a journal. Notice your reaction to this word, phrase, or sentence without judging yourself. Sit in silence as you listen to the Lord.

4. Respond

Pray in response to the words God has stirred within you or spoken to you.

5. Rest

Rest in the presence of God, allowing the Scripture to take root and the Holy Spirit to transform you.

Prayer of Examen

Father, as I consider this past week, show me where you were present, and where I experienced your goodness. Where have I missed you speaking to me? Pause, and reflect in prayer.

Father, show me the ways in which I have sinned this week, through neglect, through my weakness, or intentionally. Pause, and reflect in prayer. Then, confess and receive forgiveness.

My Reflections on Patience

Week 3

Temperance

Gluttony

Sin / Extreme

Temperance

Virtue

Deficiency

Opposite Extreme

Spotlight Passage: Matthew 27:12-14

One of the most challenging of character traits is temperance. Why? Because it requires strong self-discipline to control our fleshly desires, to be neither excessive or in want, so that Christ's light exudes from us.

Jesus was the epitome of temperance. He showed extreme restraint when faced with temptation and heinous injustice. He was verbally berated and brutally beaten, yet said not a word in his defense.

How quick we are to respond harshly when we feel offended! How often we fight to have the last word! When we strive to imitate Christ, we become like tempered steel, put under extreme heat in the process of refining. Painful as it is, this refining process results in strength that withstands future attacks from the enemy.

Although the Temperance Movement of the past focused on alcohol, there is so much more required restraint to be a shining example of Christ. Our words, our use of money, even our pursuits of pleasure can become major distractions from focusing on the Great Commission. Proverbs 25:28 states that "whoever has no rule over his own spirit is like a city broken down, without walls."

Only with full dependence on the transforming power of God can we maintain self-control under difficult circumstances — full surrender of our will to fulfill his will.

Prayer Prompt: *Spend 60 seconds (or more!) in silence.*

How do I react when I don't get my own way? When under stress, do I allow God's Spirit to rule in me or do I lash out at the person frustrating me? How am I representing Christ to the world around me?

Candlelight Prayer: *"For God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control." 2 Timothy 1:7 (ESV)*

Lord, remove any blinders from my eyes so I see the reality of my fleshly tendencies. Help me to see the areas where I am not exercising temperance, whether with words or deeds. The Spirit you have given us is not timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline. May my words and actions imitate Christ so they are balanced with grace and truth, and so the world can know we are Christians by our love.

Week 3

MONDAY

It requires strong self-discipline to control our fleshly desires, to be neither excessive or in want, so that Christ's light exudes from us.

Week 3

TUESDAY

Jesus
exemplified
self-control
in all
situations,
and this is
the model we
must commit
to.

Spotlight Passage: Romans 12:1

Isn't it ironic how quickly we judge those with an alcohol or drug addiction, but overlook our own addiction to food? Food is a gift from God for sustenance and enjoyment, but we cannot allow it to rule and overpower us.

Similarly, there are other forms of gluttony that we should consider — excessive shopping, or endless pursuits of pleasure in which we seek to gratify the flesh with hedonistic self-indulgence, or the constant pursuit to accumulate wealth beyond what is needed. All of these deter us from focusing on eternal priorities — kingdom work.

How about gossip? Careless and judgmental words demonstrate a lack of restraint and spiritual maturity. Gossip utters judgment against others, and it positions ourselves as superior, though we often don't even know the full story. Conversely, Jesus showed self-control in every conversation, even when he was angry.

We must recapture the disciplines of self-denial and fasting, temperance and self-control. Whether food, drink, words or actions, our full dependence on God will provide the temperance we need. Jesus exemplified self-control in all situations, and this is the model we must commit to.

Prayer Prompt: *Spend 60 seconds (or more!) in silence.*

Do my cravings for comfort lean towards overindulgence and neglect of my body, the temple of the Holy Spirit? When I am stressed, do my words and actions glorify God or the enemy? Do my anxieties overrule my dependence on God, our good Father who is faithful to provide in every situation?

Candlelight Prayer: *“All things are lawful for me,” but not all things are helpful. ‘All things are lawful for me,’ but I will not be dominated by anything.” 1 Corinthians 6:12 (ESV)*

Lord, I need your help. I have too often allowed my flesh to rule over my soul. Please pour out your Holy Spirit upon me that I might crave more of you than self-pleasure. May the joy of the Lord be my strength when I'm struggling with self-control. Keep your arm around my shoulder and your hand over my mouth when I am tempted to gossip, and instead, remind me to pray. May the only thing I feast on be your Word.

Spotlight Passage: 1 Peter 2:1-3

The majority of Americans have access to an abundance of food, and yet, we can deprive ourselves of vital nutrients in the pursuit of an ideal body image. Or, we might hold to an ideal image of success, and deprive our bodies of proper rest in our efforts to attain it. Our bodies are God's temple and must be treated with reverence, avoiding any extremes with food, drink, or work.

Even more detrimental are spiritual deficiencies, indicating a lack of evidence of the Holy Spirit working in our life. We neglect meditating on the Word of God to feed us, comfort us and exhort us, yet we may be puzzled why we feel anxious and unsettled.

As 1 Peter 2:2 encourages, we need to crave the pure spiritual riches God offers. This way, we will neither deprive ourselves nor overindulge in the good things God has given to us, and by doing so, be able to freely give out of our abundance to those around us.

Prayer Prompt: *Spend 60 seconds (or more!) in silence.*

Have I allowed apathy to permeate my life where I don't prioritize the reading and memorizing of God's Word? Is my body being neglected or malnourished in ways both physically and spiritually? Do I withhold money, possessions or words from others who could greatly benefit? Quietly contemplate where God wants you to change behaviors.

Candlelight Prayer: *"The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness."*

Lamentations 3:22-23 (ESV)

Sweet Jesus, please forgive me for falling short in so many areas. Often, I choose the rubbles and the meaningless in this world when you are offering treasures. But your mercies are new every morning, Lord, and great is your faithfulness. Enable me to depend wholly on you to fill every deficiency in my life and mold my heart to be more like you.

Week 3

WEDNESDAY

We must
crave the pure
spiritual riches
God offers.

Week 3

THURSDAY

Our restraint
must be
fueled by
applying the
living Word
against
temptation.

Spotlight Passage: Matthew 4:1-11

In this Scripture reading, Jesus was tempted with three strong human desires: instant gratification with food, recognition and honor, and complete power. These are areas that may be hauntingly familiar, as most of us struggle with at least one of these temptations.

We need total dependence on God to maintain temperance and self-control. Notice that Jesus uses the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God, to repel Satan, and not excuses or self-justification. His restraint was fueled by applying the living Word against the temptation.

To have victory, we must take up the full armor of God each day (Ephesians 6:10-17), and this can only be done by fully understanding the gospel message and applying the Word of God to our lives. This is not accomplished by checking off a to-do list, but by quiet meditation and memorization. This provides both defense and offense to thwart the attacks of the enemy and allows us to maintain restraint and self-control for every temptation. Be like Jesus – suit up with the armor of God.

Prayer Prompt: *Spend 60 seconds (or more!) in silence.*

Where am I most tempted – is it in possessions, recognition, power, pleasure? Reflect on which you most respond to, and ask the Holy Spirit to illuminate Scripture verses you can apply as armor against these temptations.

Candlelight Prayer: *“For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline.” 2 Timothy 1:7 (NIV)*

Lord, I too often start my day without the defenses you have provided in your Word. The attacks from the enemy come, and I tend to blame others or the circumstances while being blind to my own responsibility in the situation. Help me to be more proactive in reading and memorizing your Word, applying it to my life, and using it against the schemes of the devil.

Scripture for Memorization: *“For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline.” 2 Timothy 1:7 (NIV)*

Spotlight Passage: Galatians 5:22-23

If the world were to excel at possessing the fruit of the Spirit, perhaps wars would cease. Instead, we war with our flesh and our neighbors as we constantly wrestle to have our own way. Too often, the flesh wins.

Part of our problem is the ungodly influence in our lives that we have become desensitized to. Between TV shows, movies, social media, advertising and pop culture, we are bombarded with images of violence, strife, hatred, perversions, vulgarity, atrocities and more. These grieve God and should cause our spirit to recoil. Even when we proactively avoid this onslaught of darkness, this world can still be overwhelming at times.

God's Word offers advice and warnings that help guide our paths. In his letter to the Philippians, Paul writes, "Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things" (Philippians 4:8 ESV). Focusing on the good brings glory to God, as he is the author of all good things. It encourages the heart and mind and uplifts those around us.

The blessed hope of salvation that we can enjoy a world free of pain, crying, sickness and death is the best news on this side of heaven. Therefore, "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice" (Philippians 4:4 ESV). Meditate on it, speak of it, and rejoice in it!

Prayer Prompt: *Spend 60 seconds (or more!) in silence.*

When things in this world are overwhelming, do I choose to focus my thoughts on whatever is good, holy, and praiseworthy? Or do I tend to wallow in negativity and complaining before the Lord? Are my pastimes spent in healthy pursuits or are they just feeding the desires of my flesh?

Candlelight Prayer: *"Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths. Be not wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord, and turn away from evil. It will be healing to your flesh and refreshment to your bones." Proverbs 3:5-8 (ESV)* Lord, your Word is nourishment to my soul. Help me to focus more on what is good, excellent, and praiseworthy, and less on the anxieties and problems of this world. As I dwell in your light, the things of this world will dim in comparison. Help me to better comprehend the eternal riches you have in store, which will fortify my soul during dark days. Thank you for allowing me to understand the gospel message.

Week 3

FRIDAY

Meditate on
the gospel,
speak of it, and
rejoice in it!

Week 3

SATURDAY

Spiritual Reading

1. Ready

Take 60 seconds (or more) in silence as preparation for spiritual reading.
Breathe deeply and center yourself on God's presence with you.

2. Read Spotlight Passage: 2 Peter 1:3-7

Read the Spotlight Passage using the text below or in your Bible.
Listen to the text by reading it slowly. Reread up to three times if desired. Ask
God to speak through his Word.

.....

His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire. For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love.

.....

3. Receive

Reflect on what word, phrase, or sentence speaks to you from the text. Write it down in a journal. Notice your reaction to this word, phrase, or sentence without judging yourself. Sit in silence as you listen to the Lord.

4. Respond

Pray in response to the words God has stirred within you or spoken to you.

5. Rest

Rest in the presence of God, allowing the Scripture to take root and the Holy Spirit to transform you.

Prayer of Examen

Father, as I consider this past week, show me where you were present, and where I experienced your goodness. Where have I missed you speaking to me?
Pause, and reflect in prayer.

Father, show me the ways in which I have sinned this week, through neglect, through my weakness, or intentionally.
Pause, and reflect in prayer. Then, confess and receive forgiveness.

My Reflections on Temperance

Week 4

Chastity

Lust

Sin / Extreme

Chastity

Virtue

Prudishness

Opposite Extreme

Spotlight Passage: 1 Thessalonians 4:3; 1 Corinthians 10:13

The Webster Dictionary defines chastity as the abstinence from sexual relations and complete fidelity and loyalty to one's spouse after marriage. Chastity is part of our sanctification process, becoming more like Christ. Sexual boundaries and, particularly, reserving sex for marriage, are for our good.

Chastity goes against the desires of our flesh. In Philippians 1:21, Paul writes, "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain." Jesus calls us to a different way of living, to die to self and live for Christ. Chastity means dying to the desires of the flesh and to the desire of self every day. This goes against our nature. And yet this is part of becoming more like Christ.

Sometimes it seems lust is inevitable — a sin that we minimize and brush off. But the Bible is serious about lust. Matthew 5:28 says, "But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart." Just looking with lustful intent has to be repented of.

Take an inventory of your life. Are there websites you should not be on? Accounts you should not be following? Relationships you should not be engaging in? Pray that God would show you a way out and ask for his help. Where is lust creating a pseudo-form of connection in your life to soothe loneliness or feed selfishness? Confess these areas to another believer and ask for accountability. Sin thrives in the darkness; bring it into the light.

Prayer Prompt: Spend 60 seconds (or more!) in silence.

Ask God to help you identify aspects of your flesh that you need to die to. Thank God that we do not have to be enough — that within our weaknesses, God is our strength. Ask God to help you lean into him for help.

Candlelight Prayer: *"But he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong." 2 Corinthians 12:9-10 (NIV)*

God, in today's culture, sexual purity and the call to chastity seem like an impossible task and even offensive in the world's eyes. Help me to be set apart for you. Help me to find my strength in Jesus.

Week 4

MONDAY

Sin thrives in
the darkness;
bring it into
the light.

Week 4

TUESDAY

The world falls prey to the lie that sin will be for our benefit. However, the truth is that the pleasure will be temporary, and the consequences will lead to our destruction.

Spotlight Passage: 1 Corinthians 6:17-20

"You are not your own." So many things in the world around us point us to being "our own God and Savior" and that the way to achieve that is the pursuit of pleasure and freedom – the opposite of boundaries and limits. And yet, the Bible says, "you are not your own." Furthermore, "you were bought at a price."

The false narrative of freedom from limits and boundaries tells us that it creates happiness, when in reality, it creates bondage and despair. Limits and boundaries are for our good and for God's glory.

We have struggled to resist a desire to be "like God" since the original sin. The enemy twisted God's words to make Eve believe that a limit was to keep something from her, rather than a limit being for her good. Commercials and advertisements often present the same lie: indulge in the self, don't be held by any limit, and by doing so, true happiness and fulfillment can be found.

The world falls prey to this lie that sin will be for our benefit. However, the truth is that the pleasure will be temporary, and the consequences will lead to our destruction.

Prayer Prompt: *Spend 60 seconds (or more!) in silence.*

Pray Psalm 141:8 over your day, surrendering to the Lord and confessing your limitations to keep your eyes from faltering; that without His help, you will surely fail. "But my eyes are fixed on you, Sovereign Lord; in you I take refuge—do not give me over to death" (Psalm 141:8 NIV).

Candlelight Prayer: *"For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal."*
2 Corinthians 4:17-18 (NIV)

God, help me fix my eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen.

Spotlight Passage: Psalm 51:10

Lust focuses on the temporary, the immediate. It is pleasure- and present-focused.

David wrote this psalm after being confronted by Nathan for committing adultery with Bathsheba. David saw Bathsheba, lusted for her, and used his power and position for his own pleasure (see 2 Samuel 11:1-4). He sinned both against God and against Bathsheba. He ignored the fact that she was married, and furthermore, that she was created in the image of God — someone to be honored and cared for. Rather, he saw her as an object to be conquered.

This is what lust and, if acted upon, sexual immorality does. It objectifies another person for the pleasure of self. Imagine if David had turned his eyes away from Bathsheba. How different the story would have been! David's sin was not outside of God's redemption, but so much devastation could have been prevented.

Chastity calls for reserving oneself sexually for marriage. Marriage is the only relationship strong enough and safe enough for sex.

Tim and Kathy Keller, in their book *On Marriage*, write, "In marriage, spouses lose their independence and so become vulnerable and interdependent. They do not hold themselves back so that they only relate temporarily, provisionally, and transactionally. They give their entire selves to each other—emotionally, physically, legally and economically."*

God's design for the marital relationship is to create vulnerability to be known by and to know each other fully. Lust removes the opportunity for shared reciprocity and vulnerability within a relationship and replaces it with a focus on the self.

*Timothy Keller & Kathy Keller, *On Marriage* (p. 16)

Prayer Prompt: *Spend 60 seconds (or more!) in silence.*

Confess times that your flesh and your heart have failed. Thank God that *he* will never fail. Ask God to sustain you, to help you develop the virtue of chastity and to flee from temptation, and to be watchful for the enemy's traps. "Turn my eyes away from worthless things; preserve my life according to your word" (Psalms 119:37 NIV).

Candlelight Prayer: *"My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever." Psalm 73:26 (NIV)*

God, you are the strength of my heart and my portion forever. Help me develop the virtue of chastity, and give me the strength and wisdom to recognize and flee from all temptation.

Week 4

WEDNESDAY

Lust removes the opportunity for shared reciprocity and vulnerability within a relationship and replaces it with a focus on the self.

Week 4

THURSDAY

We must not
lose sight of
the reason
Jesus came,
which was to
save sinners —
you and me.
We are all in
need of grace
and mercy.

Spotlight Passage: Mark 2:17; Proverbs 28:13

The Webster dictionary defines prudishness as “a tendency to care a great deal about seemly behavior and morals especially in sexual matters.” This week, we have focused on lust and how to build the virtue of chastity. But the opposite of lust is prudishness, and prudishness can have its own problems.

As Christians, we often place a great deal of weight on sexual sin. And we should. It is serious and God takes it seriously. Jesus’s sexual ethics in the New Testament were radical, both to the culture he ministered to and for our culture today. But within this, we must not lose sight of the reason Jesus came, which was to save sinners — you and me.

We are all in need of grace and mercy. We have to be careful to not allow prudishness to lead to self-righteousness.

Jackie Hill Perry, in her book *Upon Waking*, states, “If ever you decided that anything you are or have done makes you good, you’re deceived. And the deceived tend to think so highly of their own selves that they move toward death daily, full of pride and self-righteousness. While God stands with two nail-torn palms waiting for them to come.”*

* Jackie Hill Perry, *Upon Waking* (p. 104)

Prayer Prompt: *Spend 60 seconds (or more!) in silence.*

Consider ways in which you have acted self-righteously towards others. Jesus was perfect, and yet was always reaching out to those around him. Pray for the Holy Spirit to illuminate the ways in which you have been prudish, and pray for a deeper awareness of his grace.

Candlelight Prayer: *“To him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy— to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen.” Jude 1:24-25 (NIV)*

God, I confess these sins [confess sins to God]. I receive your forgiveness. Purify me from unrighteousness. I confess times I have been preoccupied with prudishness and have allowed self-righteousness to get in the way of my own need for a Savior.

Spotlight Passage: 1 Peter 1:15-16

God calls us to be holy. On our own this is impossible. The meta-narrative of Scripture shows us that humanity seeks to accomplish this on our own, to be our own savior. But this is impossible without God.

God's redemptive plan was to send Jesus to earth, to be fully God and fully man. In doing this, God created a perfect model for us. This plan highlighted God's deep love for us and Jesus's servant leadership and humility that we must all seek to emulate.

In his letter to the Philippians, Paul describes Jesus, "Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness" (Philippians 2:6-7).

Jesus modeled what we are to do everyday in our own process of sanctification. In order to become holy, we must make ourselves nothing and take on the nature of a servant. True freedom is only found in Christ. Leave the striving and hiding behind and fall at the feet of Jesus.

Prayer Prompt: *Spend 60 seconds (or more!) in silence.*

Ask God to help you to resist the enemy's lie that you can be sufficient in your own power. Thank Jesus for coming in human likeness and modeling holiness and humility. Thank Jesus for being willing to draw near and live among us. Pray for growth to be more like him today and everyday.

Candlelight Prayer: *"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." Matthew 11:28-30 (NIV)*

Father, help me desire what you desire, which is my sanctification. Deliver me from evil, and from every temptation that would grieve your Spirit. Thank you for the rest I find in Jesus.

Week 4

FRIDAY

True freedom
is only found
in Christ.
Leave the
striving and
hiding behind
and fall at the
feet of Jesus.

Week 4

SATURDAY

Spiritual Reading

1. Ready

Take 60 seconds (or more) in silence as preparation for spiritual reading.
Breathe deeply and center yourself on God's presence with you.

2. Read Spotlight Passage: Galatians 5:16-24

Read the Spotlight Passage using the text below or in your Bible.
Listen to the text by reading it slowly. Reread up to three times if desired. Ask
God to speak through his Word.

.....

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

The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

.....

3. Receive

Reflect on what word, phrase, or sentence speaks to you from the text. Write it down in a journal. Notice your reaction to this word, phrase, or sentence without judging yourself. Sit in silence as you listen to the Lord.

4. Respond

Pray in response to the words God has stirred within you or spoken to you.

5. Rest

Rest in the presence of God, allowing the Scripture to take root and the Holy Spirit to transform you.

Prayer of Examen

Father, as I consider this past week, show me where you were present, and where I experienced your goodness. Where have I missed you speaking to me?
Pause, and reflect in prayer.

Father, show me the ways in which I have sinned this week, through neglect, through my weakness, or intentionally.
Pause, and reflect in prayer. Then, confess and receive forgiveness.

My Reflections on Chastity

Week 5

Generosity

Greed

Sin / Extreme

Generosity

Virtue

Wastefulness

Opposite Extreme

Spotlight Passage: Mark 6:30-44

Generosity, at its core, is the orientation of our heart towards the lovingkindness of God. It is seeing people as God sees them. It is a willingness, a desire even, to give of one's self for the benefit of another. It flows from *compassion*, the willingness to "suffer together."

In this passage, Jesus embodies the essence of generosity. Generosity is *seeing*. Jesus saw the needs of others. For his disciples, it was rest. For the people, it was their need for a shepherd.

Generosity is *giving*. Jesus gave his time and attention both to the people who met them on the shore and to his disciples, teaching and ministering to them until the late hour.

And generosity is *thanksgiving*. It is the acknowledgement that everything we have comes from God. The weary disciples did not need to go into town or carry back armfuls of food. Rather, Jesus took what little they had, and gave abundantly.

Generosity yearns. It sees the need in the lives of those around us, acknowledges that nothing we have is of ourselves or our own doing, and reaches forward to give to others as God has given so graciously to us.

Prayer Prompt: *Spend 60 seconds (or more!) in silence.*

Generosity first involves seeing. Pray for the Holy Spirit to illuminate the needs of those around you, and to show you the limitless and extraordinary ways he can use our limited and ordinary resources.

Candlelight Prayer: *"But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him?" 1 John 3:17 (ESV)*

Father, every breath is a gift from you. Give me the sight to see the need of those around me, and to see the abundance of what you have given me, even those times when it may seem like I have very little to give.

Week 5

MONDAY

Generosity yearns. It sees the need in the lives of those around us, acknowledges that nothing we have is of ourselves or our own doing, and reaches forward to give to others as God has given so graciously to us.

Week 5

TUESDAY

When you realize how God sees you and how much He loves you, the longing for worldly possessions will become a mere shadow in light of the true source of contentment.

Spotlight Passage: John 12:3-8

As we move away from the center of generosity, on one end we find greed. Where generosity breathes, greed inhales. Where generosity gives, greed takes. It grips. Where generosity yearns, greed cowers.

It was precious ointment. Mary poured it over Jesus's feet in a beautiful act of worship, the aromatic oil filling the room end to end. But where Mary saw worthiness, Judas saw uselessness. A year's wages for a laborer, wasted on the ground. Money he could have had for himself.

How do we escape greed?

Perhaps the answer lies not in anything we *do*. It is difficult, if not impossible, for us to will ourselves to see the world differently and somehow escape the lure of earthly possessions by thinking differently about them. That may only make them more desirable.

Rather, I believe the answer lies in understanding how God sees us. Dwell on how much God cares for you. He *created* you. He *loves* you. And he *died* for this love. Let this thought dazzle you.

When you realize how God sees you and how much He loves you, the longing for worldly possessions will become a mere shadow in light of the true source of contentment — a restored relationship with a God who loves you personally, every fault, every flaw.

Your understanding of how God sees you will transform you.

Prayer Prompt: *Spend 60 seconds (or more!) in silence.*

If only Judas had realized that his inner discontentment was not born from a lack of things, but a lack of *Jesus*. Where do you find yourself most susceptible to greed? Is it with your time, with your money, with your possessions? Spend time reflecting on what you "grip," and ask God to guide you in the courage of letting go.

Candlelight Prayer: *"Incline my heart to your testimonies, and not to selfish gain!" Psalm 119:36 (ESV)*

Father, I pray that you would search me and show me the areas of my life where I hold on too tightly — areas I may not even be aware of. Thank you for your grace and lovingkindness towards me. Give me the courage to let go of what is not mine to keep.

Spotlight Passage: Luke 12:13-21

While greed lies on one side of the spectrum of generosity, wastefulness lies at the other. Wastefulness is carelessness in the use of our resources. Where greed grips, wastefulness spills.

In this passage, Jesus tells the story of the rich man whose land produced plentifully. It is important to note that this man was already rich. The land and resources he possessed only continued to add to his riches.

It is also important to note that the barns he had worked just fine. They provided the means to store the grain he had produced for years and that had given him the level of success and comfort he enjoyed.

The man's fault lies not in his success. The fault was that this man could not see beyond himself. And so he wastes — he wastes the material to make bigger barns, he wastes the time and energy in rebuilding things that were already sufficient, and he wastes opportunity to share his abundance and himself to meet the needs of those around him.

We must see more than ourselves. We must see like Jesus sees, “the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God” (Hebrews 12:2).

Prayer Prompt: *Spend 60 seconds (or more!) in silence.*

To avoid wastefulness and carelessness in how we spend our time, our resources, and our money, ask the Holy Spirit to illuminate ways in which you can be a better steward of what he has given you, and for the wisdom to use it wisely and generously.

Candlelight Prayer: *“For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul?” Matthew 16:26*
ESV

Father, show me where I am being wasteful. Grant me the wisdom and the diligence to use all of what you have given me wisely, and the courage to make the changes in my life necessary to become a better steward.

Week 5

WEDNESDAY

Wastefulness
is carelessness
in the use of
our resources.
Where
greed grips,
wastefulness
spills.

Week 5

THURSDAY

To grow in
generosity,
we must see
ourselves as
we were and
as we are,
before Christ
and in Christ.

Spotlight Passage: 2 Kings 7:3-10, 16

The lepers were not welcome inside the gates. Their disease left them disfigured, outcasts among their people, and rejected. They were dying, and reasoned as such.

In their desperation, they traveled to the Syrians and stumbled upon a trove of food and treasure, and ultimately hope. While they enjoyed the spoils for a time, they remembered the city back home, a city in need — a city that had rejected them — and refused the temptation to keep the abundance to themselves.

What carries us from greed or wastefulness back to the center of generosity? What kept these lepers from being greedy of the spoils and careful to share the excess wisely?

First, they recognized their own pitiful estate, that they had nothing left to lose. Secondly, because of this, they recognized the incredible gift they had been given. And finally, they recognized that good news is meant to be shared.

To grow in generosity, we must see ourselves as we were and as we are. Before Christ, we were lepers in our sin, rejected, disfigured. But Christ, in his grace, took on our leprosy, being rejected and despised, and crucified in our place. Now, by grace through faith, we are restored, accepted, and given access to the riches of heaven.

Prayer Prompt: *Spend 60 seconds (or more!) in silence.*

A generous heart is a thankful heart. In Christ, we too can say with the lepers, “this day is a day of good news,” and seek ways to be generous with all that we have been given. Take a moment to recognize his goodness in your life, and thank him for it in prayer.

Candlelight Prayer: *“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” Matthew 6:19-21 (ESV)*

Father, my treasure is so often here on earth. Help me to see myself in light of Calvary, a sinner redeemed and forgiven by no works or merit of my own, simply loved by a Savior who put himself in my place. And through his death and resurrection, I have been given life and life abundantly. Thank you, Father, for your kindness towards me.

Spotlight Passage: Philippians 2:1-11

The early church was characterized by beautiful unity; believers knit together in faith, empowered by the testimony of the resurrection. No one saw their possessions as their own, and gave freely as they saw need (Acts 4:32-34).

We can find no greater expression of generosity than the cross of Calvary, where Jesus willingly laid down his life in our place. God, in Christ, “reconciling the world to himself” (2 Corinthians 5:19). Jesus, emptying himself of the riches of heaven, humbling “himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross” (Philippians 2:8b).

To be generous is to be like our Lord. He did not grasp onto his equality with God, but rather gave “his life as a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:28b). He gives us this commandment, that we love one another as he has loved us. “Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13).

Pray for the vision to see as our Lord saw. Pray for the courage to give as our Lord gave. And give him thanks for all that he has given.

Prayer Prompt: *Spend 60 seconds (or more!) in silence.*

Take a moment to reflect on Calvary. What does it mean to you that Jesus gave his life as a ransom? How can the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus empower you to be generous with all he has given you?

Candlelight Prayer: *“Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.” John 15:13 (ESV)*

Father, you have made me alive together with you, by nailing the record of my debt against the cross. There is no greater love than this, and you showed this love to me while I was yet a sinner. Give me the courage to see as you see, to give as you have given, and to love as you have loved.

Week 5

FRIDAY

Pray for the vision to see as our Lord saw. Pray for the courage to give as our Lord gave. And give him thanks for all that he has given.

Week 5

SATURDAY

Spiritual Reading

1. Ready

Take 60 seconds (or more) in silence as preparation for spiritual reading.
Breathe deeply and center yourself on God's presence with you.

2. Read Spotlight Passage: 1 John 3:16-18

Read the Spotlight Passage using the text below or in your Bible.
Listen to the text by reading it slowly. Reread up to three times if desired. Ask
God to speak through his Word.

.....

*By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our
lives for the brothers. But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in
need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? Little
children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.*

.....

3. Receive

Reflect on what word, phrase, or sentence speaks to you from the text. Write it
down in a journal. Notice your reaction to this word, phrase, or sentence
without judging yourself. Sit in silence as you listen to the Lord.

4. Respond

Pray in response to the words God has stirred within you or spoken
to you.

5. Rest

Rest in the presence of God, allowing the Scripture to take root and the Holy
Spirit to transform you.

Prayer of Examen

Father, as I consider this past week, show me where you were present, and
where I experienced your goodness. Where have I missed you speaking to me?
Pause, and reflect in prayer.

Father, show me the ways in which I have sinned this week, through neglect,
through my weakness, or intentionally.
Pause, and reflect in prayer. Then, confess and receive forgiveness.

My Reflections on Generosity

Week 6

Diligence

Slothfulness

Sin / Extreme

Diligence

Virtue

Workaholism

Opposite Extreme

Spotlight Passage: Matthew 25:14-30

Work is a good thing. In the Bible, work exists before the Fall as Adam is given charge over the garden and instructed to “work it” and “keep it” (Gen. 2:15). Biblically, it’s hard to find reason to think that work will not exist in the eternal presence of God in a New Heaven and a New Earth.

For some, that might seem hard to believe. Many people have jobs that they don’t enjoy. But work itself is not bad. Work can be purposeful and fulfilling. The ultimate work we’re called to in life is using the gifts that God has given us to serve him and build up his Church.

In Matthew 25, Jesus gives “The Parable of the Talents” where he talks about three men who each receive talents of gold (a talent was a unit of money in biblical times). In the parable, what matters is what the men do with their talents. Matthew 25:15 tells us that one of the men was given five talents of gold, one was given two, and the last was given one. The man who had five talents used what he had been given industriously and made five more talents. The second man likewise used his talents and doubled what he had been given.

These men are both commended by their master (who represents the Lord). They’re told, “Well done, good and faithful servant.” For these two men, they have used what the Lord had given them wisely. The parable is a picture of service to God and using what he has given us for his glory.

Tomorrow, we’ll talk about the third man.

Prayer Prompt: *Spend 60 seconds (or more!) in silence.*

In this passage, we see two men who take what the Lord had given them and they use it fruitfully. Ask yourself what talents and gifts the Lord has given you. Do you feel like you are using those to serve the Lord right now?

Candlelight Prayer: *“His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.’” Matthew 25:23 (ESV)*

Heavenly Father, I thank you that you have equipped me with talents and gifts that are meant to be used to serve you for your glory. I thank you that you have given us work to do in serving your kingdom. May I have a constant desire in my life to serve you.

Week 6

MONDAY

The ultimate work we’re called to in life is using the gifts that God has given us to serve Him and build up his Church.

Week 6

TUESDAY

We are not all gifted and equipped by God the same. But we all can use what God has given us to do great things to serve him and his mission.

Spotlight Passage: Matthew 25:14-30

In the Parable of the Talents, the third man was given one talent. Instead of increasing what he'd been given, the parable tells us that the man buried it. When the master comes and sees what he has done, he condemns this decision and says "you wicked and slothful servant" (Matthew 25:26).

One talent might not sound like much. But to the average person in a first century audience, they would have known that this was a comically large amount to the average person. A talent of gold weighed about 80 pounds! For perspective, one pound of gold is currently worth over \$20,000. One talent of gold would be worth roughly \$2 million!

The man might not have had as much as the first two people in the story, but he still had resources that could have been used greatly. We are not all gifted and equipped by God the same. But we all can use what God has given us to do great things to serve him and his mission.

Imagine another story. The man with one talent had doubled what he had been given and ended up with two. Imagine that the man who had five talents had only earned one more and ended with six. Both men would have earned one talent. And while the man who turned five talents into six talents could have accomplished much, he'd have ultimately underachieved. For the man who started with one and doubled what he had, he would have maximized what God had given him. We cannot control how gifted we are. But we can faithfully serve God today with what he has given us.

Prayer Prompt: *Spend 60 seconds (or more!) in silence.*

We live in a world that loves to celebrate talent. Do you ever feel like you don't measure up? Or do you sometimes have an unhealthy pride in feeling like others don't measure up to you? What matters isn't the amount of talent but diligent service to the Lord.

Candlelight Prayer: *"Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain." 1 Corinthians 15:58 (ESV)*

Heavenly Father, may I live a life of dedicating my talents to you. Lord, every day is a new day and a new opportunity to serve you. May this day be a day where I seek to wisely invest what you have given me.

Spotlight Passage: Luke 10:38-42

It is good to work hard. But in a fallen world, we are capable of taking anything that is good and distorting it in a way that is unhealthy. Hard work is good. But we can go too far and fall into workaholism.

In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus is invited to dinner with two friends: Martha and her sister Mary. Mary is sitting at the feet of Jesus. She is spending time with the Lord. Meanwhile, Martha is in the kitchen, busying herself with many things. She gets frustrated that Mary isn't helping and eventually comes and rebukes Jesus and tells him to intervene. With gentleness, Jesus responds by saying, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary" (Luke 10:41-42).

If our work interferes with our lives, if it interferes with our marriage, if it interferes with our relationship with God, then there is a problem in our work. Just as Martha was anxious and troubled by many things, we too can be anxious and troubled by a project, an activity, our calendar, an assignment, or a program at the church. It's good to work hard, but not if it takes us away from the one necessary thing.

There can be a fine line between working hard and an unhealthy pride that says we're the only one who can do something the right way. For some of us, no matter how much we do, we get trapped in a prison of never feeling like it's enough. This thinking robs us of joy and distracts from our time at the feet of our master.

Prayer Prompt: *Spend 60 seconds (or more!) in silence.*

Do you drift towards workaholism? Examine the valuable habits in your life that you struggle to maintain at the expense of getting work done.

Candlelight Prayer: *"Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you." James 4:8a (ESV)*

Lord God, in a world that is full of distractions, may my focus be on the one necessary thing. In the times when I'm tempted to coast, may I know that I should pursue you more faithfully. In the times when I feel my mind drifting, may I set my mind to the things above. In the times when I don't feel I have enough time for you, may I know that those are the times when I need you most.

Week 6

WEDNESDAY

If our work interferes with our lives, if it interferes with our marriage, if it interferes with our relationship with God, then there is a problem in our work.

Week 6

THURSDAY

We are called
to serve
Jesus with
our best.

Spotlight Passage: John 12:1-8

Yesterday, we looked at Mary sitting at the feet of Jesus. Her story with Martha is not a story about one hard working sister and one lazy sister.

Mary has her priorities. She sits at the feet of Jesus in Luke 10. In John 12, it's just before the time of the crucifixion, she comes to serve him.

John 12:3 says, "Mary therefore took a pound of expensive ointment made from pure nard, and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped his feet with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume."

This was an extremely expensive perfume and an extravagant gift. Judas is critical and argues the money from the perfume could have been used to feed the poor, but Mary has brought her best for Jesus.

In the same way, we are called to serve Jesus with our best. Jesus is not meant to get the scraps of leftovers of our lives. We are called to glorify Jesus in how we serve Him.

Prayer Prompt: *Spend 60 seconds (or more!) in silence.*

In terms of service, do you feel like you are currently giving Jesus your best? If not, the answer isn't guilt and shame, but to ask yourself what priorities in your life need examining in order to make sure you can faithfully serve Jesus.

Candlelight Prayer: *"Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth! Serve the Lord with gladness! Come into his presence with singing!" Psalm 100:1-2 (ESV)*
Heavenly Father, may I serve you with gladness. Lord, I ask that you bless the ministries in which I am serving.

Spotlight Passage: Matthew 11:25-30

Jesus was the most balanced person who ever lived. Jesus was fully human. He worked. He had been a professional carpenter. Throughout his ministry, we see him serving people, healing people, feeding multitudes. We see Jesus preach to large crowds. Jesus is at work during his ministry.

But we also see that Jesus finds time for solitude. He goes off alone to pray. And yet, Jesus still always has time for people. He goes to people's homes for meals. He is never rushed.

It can be so easy to drift to extremes. For some of us, we fall into workaholism and can suffer in other areas of life because of it. For others, we go to the opposite extreme and don't work hard enough. It can be tempting to coast and to do the minimum.

Jesus is Jesus. We are not. But in Jesus, we see a man who uses his time both purposefully and refreshingly. As with everything else in life, let Jesus be our example for how we use our time and our talents.

Prayer Prompt: *Spend 60 seconds (or more!) in silence.*

Some of us work too hard, some of us are too lazy. Do you have an extreme you tend to drift towards? Take time to consider why this might be a struggle for you.

Candlelight Prayer: *"Remove far from me falsehood and lying; give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the food that is needful for me, lest I be full and deny you and say, 'Who is the Lord?' or lest I be poor and steal and profane the name of my God." Proverbs 30:8-9 (ESV)*

Father, guide my work to be fruitful, purposeful, and refreshing, that I may build your kingdom and your mission, and serve those around me with grace and compassion.

Week 6

FRIDAY

In Jesus, we
see a man
who uses his
time both
purposefully
and
refreshingly.

Week 6

SATURDAY

Spiritual Reading

1. Ready

Take 60 seconds (or more) in silence as preparation for spiritual reading.
Breathe deeply and center yourself on God's presence with you.

2. Read Spotlight Passage: Matthew 9:35-38

Read the Spotlight Passage using the text below or in your Bible.
Listen to the text by reading it slowly. Reread up to three times if desired. Ask
God to speak through his Word.

.....

And Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest."

.....

3. Receive

Reflect on what word, phrase, or sentence speaks to you from the text. Write it down in a journal. Notice your reaction to this word, phrase, or sentence without judging yourself. Sit in silence as you listen to the Lord.

4. Respond

Pray in response to the words God has stirred within you or spoken to you.

5. Rest

Rest in the presence of God, allowing the Scripture to take root and the Holy Spirit to transform you.

Prayer of Examen

Father, as I consider this past week, show me where you were present, and where I experienced your goodness. Where have I missed you speaking to me?
Pause, and reflect in prayer.

Father, show me the ways in which I have sinned this week, through neglect, through my weakness, or intentionally.
Pause, and reflect in prayer. Then, confess and receive forgiveness.

My Reflections on Diligence

Week 7

Humility

Pride

Sin / Extreme

Humility

Virtue

Self-Loathing

Opposite Extreme

Spotlight Passage: John 13:12-17

My favorite definition of humility is “down-to-earthiness.”

Humility comes from the Latin root word “*humus*” which means ground or earth. The Greek translation refers to height and denotes making oneself low or close to the ground.

While our modern-day culture does not promote being humble, God certainly does. In fact, he clothed Jesus in humanity and literally sent him down to earth not only to die for our sins but also to show us how to live humbly without being weak. Jesus’s servant-oriented ministry, highlighted by washing the disciples’ feet right before his crucifixion, shows us that it takes inner strength and mindful intention to obey God and put others first.

It’s symbolic that Jesus had to physically bow down for the foot cleansing, since humility is a sacred way to show our low position relative to our great and mighty God. This deference to God’s authority provides a down-to-earth example of modesty, empathy and kindness.

Humility is also the key to unlocking respectfulness. Without a proper view of our position in God’s economy, we wouldn’t recognize our need for God and his grace. Nor would we have healthy self-respect or respect for others.

Prayer Prompt: *Spend 60 seconds (or more!) in silence.*

Think of ways to humbly serve those in your circle of family and friends today – perhaps by listening more and talking less, supporting their dreams or celebrating their successes. Ask for God’s help when you face circumstances in which it’s challenging not to be vain or controlling.

Candlelight Prayer: *“Humble yourselves, therefore, under God’s mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time.” 1 Peter 5:6 (NIV)*

Heavenly Father, thank you for sending your son Jesus who exemplifies a humble heart in word and deed. Show me ways to be more selfless, like him, in my daily round. Grant me an opportunity today to help someone else without expecting anything in return.

Week 7

MONDAY

Jesus’ servant-oriented ministry shows us that it takes inner strength and mindful intention to obey God and put others first.

Week 7

TUESDAY

God rescues
us from the
quicksand of
distorted
beliefs by
stretching
out his hand
of grace to
dismantle
us.

Spotlight Passage: Genesis 3:6-13

No sooner had I over-confidently motioned my friends down the mountain for a race, when one of my skis caught on a protruding tree root and I tumbled head-over-heels down the snowy path. In my literal-mindedness, it seemed God was reminding me that pride usually comes before a fall.

Pride certainly came before the Fall in the book of Genesis. When Adam and Eve presumptuously disobeyed God in the Garden of Eden, sin entered the world, cutting us off from relationship with God. Not surprisingly, prideful self-centeredness is the root of all other sins since it causes us to elevate ourselves above God and everyone else.

Appropriately, “I” is in the center of the word pride since it indicates a me-centric viewpoint. But we are not the center of the world. Our creator God who knows us best as well as what is best for us, warns us against falling into the miry trap of pride since it leads to misguided priorities, such as immediate gratification. It also deceives us into thinking we’re in control.

Thankfully, God also rescues us from the quicksand of distorted beliefs by stretching out his hand of grace to disentangle us. When we offer our hand in repentance, he pulls us onto the holy ground of faith where Jesus cleanses and restores us.

Prayer Prompt: *Spend 60 seconds (or more!) in silence.*

Consider your external actions and decisions this past week. Now ponder the internal attitudes and motivations which drove those behaviors. Open the doors of your heart and explore your emotional and mental rooms for corners of pridefulness that need to be swept clean. Keep those in mind heading into the coming week.

Candlelight Prayer: *“In his pride the wicked man does not seek him; in all his thoughts there is no room for God.” Psalm 10:4 (NIV)*

Father God, shine the light of hope when I slip into the dark hole of a prideful state of mind. Remind me that although it’s natural to be self-centered, you will continuously mold me to be more like Jesus and you will heal me from my haughty tendencies with your eternal love.

Spotlight Passage: Psalm 51:7-12

At first, wearing a mask during the global coronavirus pandemic felt unnatural. It took time to become accustomed to the look and feel of having a covering over my nose and mouth. But it was there to protect us from airborne contagions at the time.

Similarly, it takes time and practice to get used to using the filter of God's Word to view ourselves. But the impact on our self-esteem is well worth it since it always helps protect against false narratives.

Even though he had many reasons to feel regretful, David's psalm reminds us that no matter how far we have strayed, God is always waiting for us to repentantly return to him and he will help us start afresh. Therefore, there is no need for self-condemnation or self-loathing.

In fact, God wants us to see ourselves through his eyes – as beloved, forgiven, cherished and purposeful. When we focus on God's view, it keeps our perspective more positive in the face of mistakes, criticism and missed opportunities. Recognizing God's abiding love for us despite our shortcomings alleviates some of the self-doubt that can grow out of control if our thoughts aren't colored by the bright hope of grace. And the more we employ viewing ourselves through God's lens, the more self-accepting and others-centric we become.

Prayer Prompt: *Spend 60 seconds (or more!) in silence.*

Check your inner dialogue for self-criticism, unrealistic expectations and fault-finding. Combat these with God's truths that you are valuable, capable and loved. Create a visual reminder of your inherent worth from God's point of view, such as a sticky note on your mirror with these attributes.

Candlelight Prayer: *"In you, Lord, I have taken refuge; let me never be put to shame; deliver me in your righteousness." Psalm 31:1 (NIV)*

Dear God, thank you for your enduring promises which help me filter out negativity, shame and second-guessing. Remind me this week that with you I am enough. Keep my heart and mind clean, pure and hopeful. Teach me to consistently cherish myself as your beloved child.

Week 7

WEDNESDAY

God wants us to
see ourselves
through his
eyes – as
beloved,
forgiven,
cherished and
purposeful.

Week 7

THURSDAY

When my foundational beliefs are firmly established, I'm rooted in the deep understanding that God is always there to catch me when I fall into prideful tendencies.

Spotlight Passage: Ecclesiastes 7:16-19

Tree pose in yoga requires standing on one leg with the other leg bent toward it and arms outstretched. It requires substantial balance and core strength to remain steady. Having a static focal point is also essential.

I'm usually wobbly in this stance on my own, but when I'm in a circle with others and we form a chain of raised arms, our palms turned toward each other though not quite touching, I rarely fall out of the posture. The very proximity and presence of support helps me stand tall and secure.

The same goes for finding balance between the opposing behaviors of pride and self-loathing, examples of the type of extremes Solomon warns against in Ecclesiastes. When my foundational beliefs are firmly established, I'm rooted in the deep understanding that God is always there to catch me when I fall into prideful tendencies. I'm also more grounded; therefore, I'm less apt to be easily swayed by wayward winds of self-negativity and better able to be fruitful by focusing outward instead of on myself. And when I center on my true worth in light of God's Word, I'm anchored in my identity as his cherished handiwork and can more readily practice humility.

Prayer Prompt: *Spend 60 seconds (or more!) in silence.*

Confess to God the areas in your life which usually cause you to become prideful. Ask him to help you shift your focus away from yourself and trust that he will give you new opportunities to become more humble. Combat the heavy weight of self-condemnation with the unwavering truth of Philippians 1:6.

Candlelight Prayer: *"...being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus." Philippians 1:6 (NIV)* Almighty God, help me to be self-aware as I routinely fluctuate back-and-forth between pride and self-loathing. Teach me to become more balanced and steadfast. Allow me to rest in the recognition that my spiritual journey is about progress not perfection, as I look to Jesus's example.

Spotlight Passage: Philippians 2:3-11

TY. Most of us recognize this high-tech shorthand abbreviation for “thank you,” which is often used in digital communication to express appreciation. It’s no wonder then, that in this era of laptops and smartphones, when I see a crucifix, I also notice the t-shaped cross and Jesus’ body with his arms outstretched in the form of a “y”.

Jesus’s death on the cross is the ultimate act of humility. The one who lived a perfect life sacrificed his own life so that we may experience forgiveness. And Jesus’s arms are spread wide on the cross to reach out and embrace us in our sinful state, redeeming us for God’s eternal purposes.

Humility is freedom from pride, so it’s fitting that Jesus’s most humble act also frees us from the tyranny of pride. That doesn’t mean that we won’t struggle with it – after all, it is human nature – but, if we ask, God will work in our lives to help us develop humble hearts and will give us mercy to forgive ourselves when we fall short and start to slide down the slippery slope of shame.

Ultimately, God’s final word on the matter of our sinfulness is grace. And perhaps the only prayerful response we need is “Thank you.”

Prayer Prompt: *Spend 60 seconds (or more!) in silence.*

Focus on the power of the cross this Easter season. Remember that Jesus’s greatest gift of all, achieved by his public humiliation, is the only path to your personal salvation. Express your thankfulness for eternal life in your prayer time and ask God to soften the hearts of those in your circle who need to receive the gospel message.

Candlelight Prayer: *“...fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.” Hebrews 12:2 (NIV)*

Lord God, thank you for the hopeful symbolism of the cross, the endless blessing of your forgiveness and the abiding truth of your love. I humbly appreciate Jesus’ sacrifice for me. May I approach Easter Sunday with an open heart of gratitude, obedience and praise.

Week 7

FRIDAY

Humility is freedom from pride, so it’s fitting that Jesus’ most humble act also frees us from the tyranny of pride.

Week 7

SATURDAY

Spiritual Reading

1. Ready

Take 60 seconds (or more) in silence as preparation for spiritual reading.
Breathe deeply and center yourself on God's presence with you.

2. Read Spotlight Passage: Philippians 2:1-11

Read the Spotlight Passage using the text below or in your Bible.

Listen to the text by reading it slowly. Reread up to three times if desired. Ask God to speak through his Word.

.....

So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

.....

3. Receive

Reflect on what word, phrase, or sentence speaks to you from the text. Write it down in a journal. Notice your reaction to this word, phrase, or sentence without judging yourself. Sit in silence as you listen to the Lord.

4. Respond

Pray in response to the words God has stirred within you or spoken to you.

5. Rest

Rest in the presence of God, allowing the Scripture to take root and the Holy Spirit to transform you.

Prayer of Examen

Father, as I consider this past week, show me where you were present, and where I experienced your goodness. Where have I missed you speaking to me?
Pause, and reflect in prayer.

Father, show me the ways in which I have sinned this week, through neglect, through my weakness, or intentionally.
Pause, and reflect in prayer. Then, confess and receive forgiveness.

My Reflections on Humility

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