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How to Use this Book

Over the last few weeks of Common Ground we have been learning what it means to be kind, holy, and like-minded. This week we are learning what it means to be still. Over the next few days we will put that idea of being "still" to practice by resting in God by using this devotional booklet as a tool.

MEANT TO BE

THURSDAY, JUNE 27

Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, sinners, and purify your hearts, double-minded people!

James 4:8

I remember Christmas scenes from my childhood very well. They seem like they happened just yesterday. One in particular involved the telling of the Christmas story. Sometimes this took place in my house, and sometimes it was part of a Christmas program for the children's ministry at church. I always remember when it was time for the teacher to read the story. All the children suddenly gathered closely around with great expectation on all faces. Thinking back to this moment, I realize that we reacted this way because we were expecting something great to be told. We knew we were going to hear something amazing, and we did not want to miss a thing. We were excited and had great anticipation in our hearts that drove our actions to respond. We wanted to draw in and sit close. Even though some of us had heard the story for years now, we wanted to hear it again and know it better.

God is extending a great invitation to us to know Him in a very personal way. He is inviting us to sit close. Allow that truth to set in in your hearts. God who spoke all things into being is inviting us to draw close to Him. In return, He tells us that He will draw close to us. This is profound and worthy of every ounce of emotion within us. It is so good to know that Jesus continues to pursue us after we come to faith in Him. He came close to save us, and He continues to desire to meet with us in perfect relationship. Let us never forget this truth. Although we sing about it and hear it proclaimed often, let us always come with new excitement wanting to hear it again and know it better. Let the excitement of this never fade. Just like the Christmas story from childhood brought so much wonder, let the excitement of this never fade for we know the main character personally, and that invitation to know Him more is always before each and every day.

How do you view your encounters with God through the Word and prayer?

What are ways that you can grow in knowing God more deeply and intimately?

How will knowing God more create more excitement in you for Him and for His mission for your life?

Reflection Prayer Father, thank you for coming close to me in order to save me and make me your child. Please kindle my desire to know you more every day. I want to draw close and sit at your feet for you are the one I want to hear from. Thank you for knowing me. Help me to know you more. Amen.

FRIDAY, JUNE 28

³ Praise the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. According to His great mercy, He has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead ⁴ and into an inheritance that is imperishable, uncorrupted, and unfading, kept in heaven for you.

1 Peter 1:3-4

Have you ever had the feeling of complete hopelessness? Sometimes we have felt this way once the professor or teacher put our test in front of us. It sometimes seemed that no matter how we prepared, everything on that page looked like another language. In those moments, we feel our temperature rise, and sweat breaks out on our foreheads. This is because in an instant, we realize that we have found ourselves in a place that feels hopeless. We do not know what to do and know that we do not have the means necessary to escape from it. We just try our best and prepare for the inevitable failing grade that is on the way.

As many of us have experienced this feeling in life in some way or another and probably will again, we all were in this situation spiritually before we became alive in Jesus. All followers of Christ came to a moment when they realized that no matter how much they tried, they were not good enough to pass the testing standard, which is set by a righteous and perfect God. The great news is Jesus. He took our place and gave us a new birth in Him. He took the test for us. He stepped into our place. This is our living hope. It is not just a one-time perfect score on a test that we would have made a zero; it is an ongoing grade of perfection. Our call is to live that out in our lives through this hope knowing that our reward is being kept for us in Heaven. We also get to begin enjoying it now as we follow and know Jesus! So our response is praise and surrender to the one who has done it all to give us a hope that is alive and will never fade.

Why is choosing to praise God in the middle of our storms so powerful?

Why does our initial rescue from spiritual death help us have faith that God will continue to see us through life's trials?

How does the analogy of Jesus taking the test for us with a perfect score reflect the Gospel story?

Reflection Prayer God, I pray that you will anchor my heart in faith to constantly recognize your great mercy and living hope. Help me to live in freedom knowing that you are with me and all that you have for me is perfect according to who you are and your perfect will for my life. Amen.

SATURDAY, JUNE 29

¹⁰ Love consists in this: not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. ¹¹ Dear friends, if God loved us in this way, we also must love one another.

1 John 4:10-11

I remember early in my life what my parents once said to me. They said, "Allen, no matter what happens in life and what bad decision you may make, you can always come to us. In fact, if you ever find yourself in a bad situation, you can call us, and we will be there for you and we won't even ask questions until later. We just want to get you out of it. We will deal with the consequences later; we just want you to know that we are there to help you and love you first." I have never forgotten this! The older I have gotten the more of the truth behind those words have emerged. I realized that my parents weren't just letting me off the hook for some future mistake (which thankfully I never had to call them in an awkward moment). Instead, I came to understand that my parents' love for me was leading the way. They would always be there to help me and even rescue me from my own bad choices and possible self-destructive ways.

1 John 4 tells us that God operates in a similar way. Even while we were in open rebellion against Him, who is perfect and Holy, He still loved us to the point that He pursues us and sent His son, Jesus, to take our place and rescue us from our own destruction—even taking the consequences of our sin upon Himself. This is an incredible and life-changing love and grace. If we really see what this verse is saying, it will change us forever. It will send us to love others in the way that we were first loved by God. We are motivated by the love God has for us. The verse declares that these two realities are hinged together: if we really do believe that God loves us this way, it will be our reaction to love others in the same way. This is such a profound calling. First, we are with God because of His love, and then we get to live out that love to others so they may be pointed to Jesus—the ultimate source of perfect love. Although I was never perfect—far from it, I was always motivated to do right not to get my parents' love but because I knew that I already had my parents' love, and indeed their love came through when I messed up. God's love is perfect, and God's love won! Let us accept that love, be motivated by that love, and live that love out to the world around us.

As a sinner, what does it mean to you to know that God has a perfect love that He wishes for you to accept and experience?

What is it that should motivate us to love others?

What are some of the things that the enemy uses that tempts us not to love the way God calls us to?

Reflection Prayer God, thank you for loving me so much that you would pursue me and die in my place. Your love is so rich. Help me to accept it fully so that I will live it out in ways that make you look good and that other will come to know you. I pray that all of this would bring glory to your name. Amen.

SUNDAY, JUNE 30

⁴⁶ He also said to them, "This is what is written: The Messiah would suffer and rise from the dead the third day, ⁴⁷ and repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning at Jerusalem. ⁴⁸ You are witnesses of these things. ⁴⁹ And look, I am sending you what My Father promised. As for you, stay in the city until you are empowered from on high."

Luke 24:46-49

What is something that you had planned for that came together without incident? Isn't it nice when you see something come together perfectly? Maybe it was a trip you were planning. Perhaps it was a project you were completing for a class, or it could have even been a recipe that just turned out to be really delicious. It is always great when the plans you were making come together and the final result is just the way you were hoping. It brings this soothing peace to our spirits and level of satisfaction to our hearts.

In this final passage of Luke's Gospel, these verses come together to show how God's perfect plan has indeed come together in perfection. Jesus, the Son of God, has given His life to redeem man for the glory of His Father, and now believers are eagerly awaiting the arrival of the Holy Spirit to empower them to go on mission as the New Testament church is ready for birth and exponential growth. It is the Gospel coming together in perfection. This is God! He is perfect, and His will is without blemish. Our invitation is to fall into this flawless design with full confidence. So there it is. The invitation has been extended. First, know that Christ has suffered and died for you and that He is alive today having conquered death (v. 46). Know that His story of redemption is being proclaimed to the world beginning with where you are and extending to the nations (v. 47), and know that we are the ones that get to proclaim this good news (v. 48). Also, know that we are not alone as God continues to empower us and guide us by the power of His Spirit (v. 49). Now that is a plan that has come together like none other. All praise to God that we are part of His story that will extend into all of eternity!

How does the perfection of God's plan work to grow our faith in Him?

What does it mean to your relationship with God knowing that He suffered for you?

Reflect on that the fact that not only did God save you for Himself because He loves you, He also wants to use you to bring others to know Him. How do you respond to that calling?

Reflection Prayer God, thank you for loving me so much that you would pursue me and die in my place. Your love is so rich. Help me to accept it fully so that I will live it out in ways that make you look good and that other will come to know you. I pray that all of this would bring glory to your name. Amen.

MONDAY, JULY 1

⁴ Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. ⁵ Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; ⁶ do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Philippians 4: 4-7

One of my favorite things to do is to watch the sunset behind the mountains and observe how as it casts its shadows of the tall peaks into the valley below. The best place to watch the changing of day into night is on a porch with a cup of coffee not far away. Deep in the North Georgia mountains the communities are small, and the evenings are not filled with a lot of light pollution making it easier to see the stars in the night sky. Looking at the stars is a peaceful activity for many people. But have you ever considered the stars? The stars are not anxious for anything. All through the night, they're doing what they have been created to do.

Here in Philippians 4, Paul is writing and explaining that we shouldn't be anxious for anything. In verse 4, he tells us that we should rejoice in the Lord. He says it twice! Rejoicing in something is taking pleasure in it or delighting in it. In verse 5, we should let our "reasonableness be made known to everyone." Meaning, that we should strive for community. In the ESV study Bible, the footnote explains that being reasonable is essential for keeping the peace between people in your community. Being reasonable with the people around you will help combat relational anxiety. Paul reminds us that God is near. He is not far and distant from His children. God desires dialog with us. We should approach Him with thankfulness and the reverence He is due, but we shouldn't be afraid to approach our heavenly Father. *The God of the universe can handle our stresses and fears!* The peace the Holy Spirit gives is more peaceful than a night of sitting on the porch gazing at the stars. Don't get me wrong, I think memories like that help to remind us that the God who created the stars cares for us even more, but the peace of the Holy Spirit is even greater. The peace He gives is there when a family member commits suicide or when our heart gets broken by someone we love. Our anxiety does not compare to the beauty and splendor of God. Our anxiety cannot trump God's power. Learn to let God guard your heart and mind by learning His Word.

There's a song that I'll think about every now and then when I feel anxious about something. It's called *Consider the Stars* by Keith and Kristyn Getty. Here's a sample of the lyrics:

*Consider the stars in the sky; look up and wonder, can you count their number?
Consider the stars in the sky; umbrella to hide in, a dance floor of heaven.*

*Consider the stars in the sky; when it is darkest they shine out the brightest
Consider the stars in the sky, in every anguish, oh, child take courage*

*Do not be afraid. Do not be afraid.
He who made all of this, and who holds all of this, holds you in his hands*

Have you truly ever considered the stars?

Consider the stars. When was the last time you let your mind wander/wonder in the beauty of God's creation?

What are some ways that you can learn the Word of God? Create a plan of action.

Reflection Prayer Father, you are Holy and powerful. You are so much greater than my anxiety and fears. Father, in the moments my mind is overwhelmed I ask that you help me remember your Word and your promise that you are near to me. Amen.

TUESDAY, JULY 2

⁵ And now do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life. ⁶ For the famine has been in the land these two years, and there are yet five years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvest. ⁷ And God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. ⁸ So it was not you who sent me here, but God. He has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt.

Genesis 45:5-8

One of the many great stories of perseverance in the Old Testament is of Joseph. Talk about a difficult life. Joseph was sold into slavery by his own brothers, but only after they decided to not kill him! Read through chapters 37- 50 in the book of Genesis, and you will see for yourself the life that Joseph led. If you fast-forward to chapter 42, Joseph's brothers had to come to Egypt to buy food for their family during the 7 years of famine (which Joseph knew about many years before by correctly interpreting the Pharaoh's dream). In Genesis 45, Joseph finally reveals his identity to his brothers, but instead of treating them harshly, he provides for them and expresses genuine compassion. Joseph is not mad at his brothers. He explains to his brothers everything that happened between them was to lead to this very point in time: so that he could help them. He told them "it was not you who sent me here, but God..."

When Joseph was sold into slavery, he persevered. When his fellow cell mate in jail forgot about him, Joseph persevered. When Potiphar's wife wrongly accused him, he persevered. Joseph had a great faith in God. In worldly standards, Joseph had the right to be angry and bitter, but instead, he had an attitude of thankfulness. Earlier in chapter 42:16, we see Joseph telling the Pharaoh, "It is not in me, but God will give Pharaoh a favorable answer." He was quick to give God the glory, when he could easily say it was by his own power that he was able to interpret the Pharaoh's dreams. We can learn from Joseph's example. Joseph lived his life in a manner that showed his faith. He knew that God would not forsake him. He knew that God would not leave him in that well his brothers threw Him in as a young man.

Joseph's life is a great picture of the Gospel. Much like how Joseph's brothers did not love him and wanting nothing to do with him, we were born not loving Jesus and with a desire to have nothing to do with him. When Joseph could have easily turned his brothers away when they needed help, he showed them compassion and redeemed them from their circumstances, even though his brothers did nothing to deserve compassion. And just like us, God could have easily said that we did not deserve His love and compassion, " but God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast." (Ephesians 2:4-9)

How does the your behavior and language in the midst of trials point to your faith in God?

What does your behavior and language point to God when everything in your life is good?

Reflection Prayer Father, how great you are! Thank you for the example of Joseph. Help me in my pursuit of you, so that my faith grows strong and that I may persevere in trials. God, I need your help in shaping my actions and language, so that in whatever I do, my life and words point to You. Amen.

WEDNESDAY, JULY 3

In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

Matthew 5:16

Everything comes back to *The Office*. The show it's basically a "mockumentary" of the modern day work place. The more you watch the show, you'll realize that you have an Andy Bernard or a Dwight Schrute in your life! Hopefully, you're not a Toby Flenderson! You might even have a Michael Scott in your life. If you are not familiar with the show, Michael Scott is the regional manager of Dunder Mifflin (the paper company in the show). Michael loves being the center of attention, and if he is not, he will find a way to make himself be the center of attention, even if he makes a complete fool of himself! The man has no shame! Michael Scott's behavior is something to reflect on. At Phyllis's wedding (season 3, episode 15), Michael's need for attention gets him into some serious trouble! When the attention should have been on the bride and groom, Michael took every instance he could to make the ceremony about him. It makes you wonder, are we as believers in Jesus Christ, ever like a Michael Scott? How many times do we try and steal God's glory?

Matthew 5:16 tells us that in our good works we should give glory to God, which is completely opposite of what culture teaches. Each of us has a platform of influence. It may be for five people or five thousand people, but these platforms are not to advance our own agendas or careers. Even the talents and gifts we have been given are not ours, but instead given to us for a short time to bring glory to God. Our purpose in life is to bring Him glory. The cool thing is that each of us have a different way of doing so. Some of us are good at teaching, so teach in a manner that brings glory to the One who made you. Some of us sing, so sing about His goodness. Some of us are good listeners, so give wise council to others to bring glory to God. Don't steal attention away from God.

Boasting in ourselves is vanity and will lead to destruction, often in embarrassing ways. Avoiding selfishness is difficult. Combat those thoughts and ideas by recognizing who you really are by comparing yourself to a holy God. Yes, we fall *incredibly* short and are helpless in the sense that we can't change our condition, but if we are God's children we were called out of death and into life through Jesus! Knowing that, let's remember to live our lives in a manner that is worthy of the Gospel. Boast in the Gospel. Boast in Jesus, because you and I had nothing to do with our salvation. Don't be a Michael Scott who stole the attention from the bride and groom on their wedding day. Instead, be someone who boldly and unashamedly brings glory to the One who saved you.

What are some ways that you are stealing glory from God? What are some ways you can fight against that?

What do you enjoy doing? How can you use that hobby or talent to bring glory to God?

Reflection Prayer Father, your salvation is sweet and so good. Thank you letting me live in your grace. Help me to remember that my life was bought at the cost of Jesus' death, and help me to remember that I can boast of His amazing resurrection! Amen.

THURSDAY, JULY 4

⁹The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it? ¹⁰"I the Lord search the heart and test the mind, to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his deeds."

Jeremiah 17:9-10

For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander.

Matthew 15:19

Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me.

John 14:1

Follow your heart. We all have heard that phrase before. You may have even said it at one point. But do you know that scripture teaches something quite the opposite of "following your heart". Our hearts aren't meant to follow every impulse or desire, but rather our hearts should be led. We live in a world that is fighting for our attention. Each commercial or sponsored ad you see on social media is specifically designed to target you. These ads want you to desire their products. They're after your heart. We've even heard it said before that you need to "follow your heart" when you are thinking about whether or not to date someone. Let me point you to what scripture says on "following your heart."

In Jeremiah 17:9, the word "deceitful" is used to describe our hearts. It also says that our hearts are "desperately sick". No one likes to think about themselves as deceitful or sick, but it is what scripture says. Why is that? Well, you have to remember the natural condition of mankind, we are sinful. We've lied. Cheated. Stolen. We have sinned against a holy and righteous God. Our sinful behavior, thoughts, and language all reflect a sinful heart. We were born sinful. No one teaches a two-year-old to throw a tantrum, it just comes naturally when they don't get their way. Just like no one teaches us to be disrespectful to our parents.

In Matthew 15:19, we see that from “the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander.” Again, no one likes to think that they are a murderer or slanderer, but when was the last time that you spoke badly about someone? Have you ever said that you hate someone? The Bible says that whoever hates their brother has committed murder in their hearts (1 John 3:15). Scripture has some harsh words to say about our hearts. If we follow our hearts, we are not following Jesus. Our hearts lead us to sin, but Jesus leads us to salvation from our sins.

John 14:1, invites us to not let our hearts be troubled, but rather believe in God. Our hearts are most protected when we are led by Jesus. When we are led by Jesus, we will make better and wiser decisions. Decisions like where to go to college, or what your major will be, or who to pursue in a relationship will be guided by the One who made your heart and knows its depths from the moment you were conceived in your mother’s womb. Follow God, instead of your heart.

Reflection Prayer God, thank you for creating me and then calling me into your salvation. God, I desperately need your help to guard me from my own sinful desires. Place in me desires that glorify you instead. God make what I dream of be what you plan for me. You are so much wiser than I will ever be, and I trust you to lead me well. Amen.

FRIDAY, JULY 5

¹⁴Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. ¹⁵For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. ¹⁶Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Hebrews 4:14-16

Hopelessness is the doorway to hope. You have to give up on yourself before you will be excited about the hope that is yours in Christ Jesus.

– Paul David Tripp

- We tend to give ourselves far too much credit:
- We tend to attribute too much righteousness to ourselves:
- We tend to think we have more wisdom than we do.
- We tend to pride ourselves on having the “right” character.
- We tend to think of ourselves as being more patient than we are.
- We tend to think we are submissive and obedient.
- We tend to believe we are more committed to the kingdom of God than we are.
- We simply tend to see ourselves as more godly than we are.

Here’s the problem with this tendency: when you name yourself as righteous, when you attribute to yourself more maturity than you actually have, you don’t seek the grace that is your only hope. We don’t think we devalue grace, but that’s exactly what many of us do. Because we look at ourselves and conclude that we’re spiritually okay, we don’t tend to have a deep esteem and appreciation for the grace that is our only hope in life and in death. You see, only people who acknowledge how deep their need is and who admit that they have no ability whatsoever to meet that need on their own get excited about the grace that meets every one of their spiritual needs.

On the other hand, we don't like to think of ourselves as needy, so we tend to minimize our sin. Sadly, many of us are far more concerned about the sin of others than our own. We pay far more attention to the spiritual needs of others than our own. Because we minimize our sin, seeing ourselves as righteous, we don't cry out for and run after the rescuing and transforming grace that is ours as the children of God. As long as we still have hope in us—that is, hope in our ability to be righteous on our own—we won't run after the grace that is given to us in Christ Jesus. It's only when we are willing to give up on us that we seek the rescue that God holds over us.

Yes, it really is true that hopelessness is the doorway to hope. Seeing yourself as hopeless and helpless if left to yourself initiates and ignites your pursuit of God's grace. The fact is that we all give daily evidence of our continuing need for grace. Simply put, we have no ability to make it on our own. We still stand in desperate need of divine help. Are you willing to admit that and run to where grace can be found?

Reflection Prayer Lord, help me to see who you are in the face of who I am. Help me to find myself helpless without you. It is in you and through you that my desperation is found and answered. You are where my help comes from. May I never forget that. Amen.

SATURDAY, JULY 6

1 John 2:1-17

Never underestimate sin while remembering you cannot overestimate grace.
– Jason Teal

Think for a moment: whose sin do you tend to minimize? Your friends'? Your spouse's? Your children's? Your neighbors'? Your extended family members'? Your father's or mother's? Your boss's? For most of us, the problem is not that we underestimate the sin of others. No, we tend to do the opposite. We're typically all too focused on the failure of others. It is all too easy to point out their flaws. We're all tempted to keep a running record of the special sins of the people around us. If we were honest, most of us would have to humbly confess that we tend to be far more concerned about the sin of the people around us than our own. We tend to be hyperaware of the weaknesses of those living near us while we appear to be functionally blind to our own. For this reason, we begin to forget that we are more like them than unlike them, that there are few things that we can see in the lives of others that are not present in our own lives in some way.

Now, this outward concern/inward denial dynamic is not okay. Blindness to your own sin is a denial of the presence of personal spiritual need. Such a denial always leads to a devaluing of and a resistance to God's grace. Denying your need for grace and underestimating the power of what that grace can do never, ever leads to anything good.

Here's the problem—this side of forever, we are all very good at doing both. We're all very good at looking at our sin and naming it less than sin, and we all tend to degrade the glory of what grace has done, is doing, and will do. People who deny sin tend to not progressively conquer it, and people who devalue grace tend not to run to it for help. What we're talking about here are the two sides of a healthy Christian life. You confess that although you are in Christ, the presence of sin is still within you. However, it is being progressively defeated, and you humbly embrace the fact that you have been given glorious grace that can do for you what you could never do for yourself.

The admission of sin doesn't lead you somewhere dark and depressing, because you know you've been given grace that is greater than your sin, and your celebration of grace is real and heartfelt because it's done in the context of your confession of the very sin that grace addresses. Confession of sin without the celebration of grace leads to guilt, self-loathing, timidity, and spiritual paralysis. Embracing grace without the admission of sin leads to confident theological "always rightism," but does not result in change in your heart and life. So today, refuse to minimize sin, reject the temptation to devalue grace, and run to Jesus weeping and celebrating at the same time.

Reflection Prayer Lord, I struggle daily with the temptation to devalue grace. My prayer this morning is that you allow me to see with eyes wide open the measure of grace that you poured out specifically and especially for me. Help me to grasp it and live in it. Amen.

SUNDAY, JULY 7

¹Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain. Unless the Lord watches over the city, the watchman stays awake in vain. ² It is in vain that you rise up early and go late to rest, eating the bread of anxious toil; for he gives to his beloved sleep.

Psalm 127:1-2

“God will, generally speaking, not compete for our attention. If we will not withdraw from things that obsess and exhaust us into solitude and silence. He will usually leave us to our own devices.”

- Dr. Dallas Willard

Do you ever feel exhausted?

Recently, as you can imagine, Honey and I have found ourselves waking up three or four times a night. We are bound to this because of our newborn whom needs to eat about every three hours, however, the bulk of our issue has been Nola. She just will not sleep through the night. So, when the alarm clock finally does awaken us in the mornings we find ourselves fatigued and tired.

Does this sound familiar? You know, the tired and fatigued part, not the I’m getting up every few hours with my children familiar, ha! As I lay there, I remember my promise to spend 15 minutes every morning praying and having a devotion time with Jesus. Maybe I could do it later? But, later never came. Instead of spending time with God, my nights would be filled with activities and homework until I crashed. My mornings would usually wind up like this one... a battle to even get out the door on time for another crazy filled day.

What is really going on here? In Luke 10:38-42, we see a picture of what it looks like to just sit in the abundance of grace and rest. Martha, choking back tears, goes back into the kitchen. How could He be the Son of God and give an answer like that? Jesus words echoed endlessly through her head: "Martha, you're worried about many things, but Mary has chosen what is better." Listen to those words... "chosen what is better."

I can process what Martha might be mumbling in the kitchen. "Does he think the food's going to appear miraculously like manna from heaven? Or maybe He's planning on whipping up something from nothing, like He did on the mountainside." I'm sure she was in the kitchen perplexed. Probably feeling alone and disillusioned.

Verse 41-42 is really the important piece of this passage tonight. "But the Lord answered her, Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but one thing is necessary."

God doesn't expect us to be on the go all the time. The Psalmist indicates that such a life is lived in vain, even if it is to provide food. God desires to give us both physical rest through sleep and spiritual rest by stopping to be with Him. Busyness drains us, but God energizes us so that we can live the life he created us to have.

So, the real question is, are we willing to say no to some things in our lives if it means making sure we get the time we need with the Lord.

Reflection Prayer Lord, help me to say no to the things I desperately want to hang on to so that my hands may be free to hang on to you. Amen.

MONDAY, JULY 8

After him was Shamgar the son of Anath, who killed 600 of the Philistines with an oxgoad, and he also saved Israel.

Judges 3:31

Influence is not about our increase; it's about blessing those we serve.
— Jason Teal

Who was the first man to walk on the moon? Most people know the first man to walk on the moon was Neil Armstrong, who uttered those famous words: "That's one small step for man, one giant leap for mankind." With that accomplishment, he secured a place in the history books.

Do you know the last man to walk on the moon? It was a seasoned astronaut named Eugene Cernan. When the Apollo 17 crew finished up their mission, he was the last one back inside the lunar module, making him the last man to walk on the moon. Though Eugene Cernan will never be a household name the way Neil Armstrong is, he made an indelible extraterrestrial mark that will still be legible in 50,000 years: he wrote his daughter's initials in the dust of the moon. We tend to think that only the rich, the famous, or the powerful have influence in our world. But most of us have been impacted by someone who will never rise to the level of celebrity or make it onto the Forbes 400 list.

The Book of Judges contains the stories of people like Samuel, Gideon, Deborah, and Barak, but it also includes a brief account of this guy we just read about and you've probably never heard of—Shamgar. He gets just one verse devoted to his rescue and rule: "After Ehud, Shamgar son of Anath became judge. He delivered Israel by striking down 600 Philistines with an oxgoad." That's all we know about Shamgar. But for the Israelites of his day, he was a man of tremendous influence.

Israel had become a fearful nation. So much so that no one was on the streets. That would suggest that it was unsafe to be in Israel. The word even says that those who had to travel through Israel had to take ways around Israel for fear of their lives. During this time there was a man named Shamgar who fought for Israel. Now, we don't know if these 600 Philistines were destroyed at one time like that destruction of Samson or if this was a record over time, but what we do know is that there is no mention of how long Shamgar reigned. There is no long list of accomplishments or greatness. The word simply says "he saved Israel".

Let me ask you this. Is there someone in your life who has made an impact on you? Today, take some time to call, text, or write that person. Let them know what it is that made an impact on you. Encourage them to continue on. Share with them what you will do to be an impact on others. We were set apart for "such a time as this".

Reflection Prayer Lord, I often feel as though my life is insignificant. There are days that I wonder why I even exist, but TODAY, that changes. Help me to know that you have actually called me to be an influencer. That influence begins to faithfulness and obedience to You and Your word. Increase that confidence in me to walk in You and through You every day. Allow me to see the small moments of influence I have for Your kingdom. Amen.



TUESDAY, JULY 9

6 "For you are a people holy to the Lord your God. The Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. 7 It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the Lord set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, 8 but it is because the Lord loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers, that the Lord has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.

Deuteronomy 7:6-8

Do you ever wonder why God has decided to save you? The Israelites were probably wondering the same thing. They had been set free from slavery in Egypt by God's power, but God was sure to tell his people why he had chosen to loosen their chains. The Lord told them that his salvation did not depend on their own merit or worthiness. God even implied Israel's total worthlessness. So why did God save them? Simply, God chose to love his people in spite of their shortcomings. This kind of love is unconditional and unearned, and it belongs to you who are believers in Christ. Christian, you are the Lord's treasured possession. Because of the finished work of Christ, God has set you free from your slavery to sin. It's not because of anything you have done, but because he has set his love on you. Rest in that truth today.

Reflection Prayer Lord, if your love was something to be earned, we would fail in attaining it. Thank you for loving us despite our unworthiness. Amen.

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