

P U R S U I T

Twenty-One Day Prayer Intensive

Day 1

God wants to give us the gift of Himself. All this week, we are focused on investing extravagant time with Jesus. Our focus is to position ourselves with Him and to quiet ourselves to hear what He wants to say and to see what He wants to reveal to us as individuals and to us as the Good News Movement.

John 15 says "I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing."

Jesus and his life are the Source of our life. We live in such a busy and distracted culture, inadvertently we may find ourselves hurried, overwhelmed and spiritually dry. Even in our good doing, if we are not careful, we forget about the refreshment, renewal, relationship we need to thrive and can only be discovered in Jesus. We find three important truths in this passage.

1. Jesus is the true vine. Our life is found in Him. This also tells us there will be things masquerading as life-giving when in reality, they are not. They may be good things, valuable things with promising benefits. There may also be things that drain us spiritually. But there is only one true source of life. In this season and this year, decide to connect to the true Source of our life. We are to remain in Him, and He promises He will stay connected to us.

2. God the Father and cultivator, desires to remove anything that chokes life within us. He wants to remove things, thoughts and desires which do not produce life within us. He knows how to remove things so fruit and abundance may come. Things we are pursuing, relationships we hold on to, and desires within us may be bad for us, or they may be producing some good things right now but may hinder growth later. God may cut back some areas in our life so we will be even more abundant in growth. God is good and we can trust Him even when we don't understand all He is doing. We will experience pruning because God desires for us to grow.

3. We cannot bear fruit in any way except to remain in Jesus. Don't you hate reading the words apart from Me, you can do nothing? I don't want to rely on anyone else and yet Jesus reveals this eternal truth. To remain means we trust; we stay engaged and we allow God to direct His life within us. Remember, it is God who develops fruit in us. He is always at work to produce life in and through us.

All our planning, studying, preparing and trying, while they are good things, cannot sustain life. To bear fruit, to produce health and change in our life, we must stay connected to Jesus. And His life flows into us as we stay connected to Him.

We have one focus this week and this year, to remain in Him. We want to spend extravagant time, worship, reading the Word, silence and solitude as we get away from all distractions for a moment. All of these disciplines produce a deeper relationship and commitment to right thinking and to God. It also allows God to renew us in places we can't always identify as needing change. He has access to the depths of our hearts and souls and as we spend time with Him, we are changed.

The Father is the Master Gardener, Jesus is one we are to stay connected to and Holy Spirit will direct God's life into the areas needing healing and the areas God wants to produce abundant fruit. One thing we must consistently remind ourselves in our relationship and devotional times: Pursuit, not perfection. Be with God and let Him be with you.

Questions:

- 1. What stood out or what did God highlight to you as you read the devotional?**
- 2. What invitation is God extending to you personally?**
- 3. What action step do you need to take to move in obedience?**

Day 2

God wants to give us the gift of Himself. All this week, we are focused on investing extravagant time with Jesus. Our focus is to position ourselves with Him and to quiet ourselves to hear what He wants to say and to see what He wants to reveal to us as individuals and to us as the Good News Movement.

"The people remained at a distance, while Moses approached the thick darkness where God was." Exodus 20:21 (NIV)

Ok. Why are we connecting our fast and extravagant prayer time with what Moses experienced? God is not calling us to climb a mountain and enter a cloud of lightning and utter darkness. True. But I do think it speaks to our tendency to choose passivity over intentionality in our relationship with God. We all have our reasons why we do not take time to be with God, right? It is easy to allow other things to crowd out the most important things. They call it the tyranny of the urgent and if we are not intentional, we allow distractions and disruptions to keep us at a distance instead of drawing near to Him.

Moses was about to receive the Ten Commandments and would have a powerful encounter with God. God had always wanted Israel, His people, to draw close. In leading the people out of Egypt, their past and bondage, God wanted to draw near. He wanted to seal a covenant relationship with them. But the people consistently chose sin over intimacy. So, God called Moses to draw near on their behalf.

And we see two important truths in this verse. Most people are more comfortable standing far away and letting someone else find out what God may want to say or reveal to them. We have all heard someone request, "Just let me know what God says to you and find out, if you can, what He wants to say to me." Or maybe, deep down, they incorrectly believe God does not want to speak to them personally or they can't hear for themselves.

Secondly, if we are being honest, our prayer times, devotionals and learning to be quiet as we wait on the Lord can feel like we have to enter a dark cloud. It seems both mysterious and foreboding at times. Our flesh desires ease while our spirit craves and calls out for the deep things of God.

We lose patience in our waiting and praying. We think of all the things needing attention for the day or week. And maybe at times, we walk out questioning if anything really happened at all. Spiritually, we know it matters more than words can convey. And yet, many Christians struggle with this part of their spiritual walk. And secretly, some begin to dread their devotional time with God alone and settle for living through someone else's spirituality.

I love Exodus 33:11 when it says, "The Lord would speak to Moses face to face, like a friend would speak to a friend." This is so much more than a transactional relationship, but one built over time, established in trust resulting in a spiritual intimacy. Ephesians 1 speaks of this in Paul's apostolic prayer when he says in verse 17, "I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better." This is one of the main reasons we spend time with God: to know His heart and to be changed by Him.

Paul writes these words because He knows the Lord wants to reveal Himself to us more than we desire to know Him. All true desire originates with God first. He calls and beckons to us to be with Him, pray to Him, ask of Him, call on Him, to trust Him. All of these moments are building a rich history with God and a history that not only changes us, but our families, homes, city and our future lineage. Our time with God matters. Time is one of the key ingredients for any relationship to thrive.

So no, we don't have to enter a cloud or anything as dramatic as Moses. But we will have to fight the feelings and doubts associated with learning to be still and wait with God. We may have a desire to microwave our Christianity by listening to a podcast or another thought leader about God instead of being with God. Podcasts and any other resources to help us grow are fantastic. But there is a difference between learning about Him and learning to be with Him. There are no shortcuts in growing in our maturity with God. It takes pursuit, it takes time.

Here is what I can promise, God wants to meet with you individually, every time. He is there. The Healer, the Redeemer, the Revealer of hidden things, our Creator and our Savior, the One who knows us better than we know ourselves, and longs to meet with us. We are changed as we seek Him and spend time with Him. Make a decision to move past the feelings, fears and frustrations of meeting with God alone. He is there to meet with you, every time.

God, we ask for you to speak to us as we pursue You. Holy Spirit, we ask that You would help us to hear that we may know Jesus better. Amen.

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P.S. Did you follow through on what God showed you yesterday?

Day 3

"No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you. You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask the Father in My name He may give you."

John 15:15-16 (NKJV)

Jesus reveals a secret to intimate relationships. In our case, friendship. All relationships consist of differing levels of access. Coworkers, neighbors, people we know at the gym or even people at church are all examples of different types of relationships with varied levels of access.

The closer we become to someone else, the more likely we are to open our hearts and lives, to share personal details and reveal the inner workings of what is happening inside of us. Where relationship has been established, trust has been earned. Jesus tells the disciples they have entered different territory than everyone else. They have been given access those on the outside simply will not have. They are now friends. And with friendship comes sharing. They have been entrusted with God's heart and God's plans.

Jesus tells us we too have been chosen and selected to represent Him as beacons of hope, grace and forgiveness. We have also been appointed to go represent Him and His kingdom, do His works, lay down our life and invite people into the kingdom of God through Him.

Lastly, He tells the disciples and us, that our lives should bear the fruit, the mark of His work within us, displayed by our actions in the world around us. In loving Him and loving others, eternity will speak of the impact of our devotion to Him. We have been transformed and our lives are not our own.

We are free now to give our lives away by serving the world, the people, around us. And Jesus tells us the impact of laying down our life for Him will result in lives changed. This is fruit that will remain.

Then Jesus makes a remarkable statement. As our hearts and desires have been transformed, our hopes, prayers and decisions will reflect the will of the Father. Less selfish, now the focus becomes the Father's heart for humanity and to see His kingdom come and His will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

We boldly pray and act on our confidence in God and burning zeal for Jesus to be glorified. We pray bold prayers and we take God-inspired, Spirit-led risks because it is God's delight to answer the prayers of His children, His friends.

We are not Catholic of course, but part of the Westminster Catechism is a great summary statement in our relationship with God. When asked what the chief aim, the main purpose, of mankind is, it states: "Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever." What an incredible thought.

Our world can be changed as we glorify our God and enjoy Him now and forever. Jesus no longer calls us servants but friends. Truly remarkable.

Today, may you have confidence in the relationship you have with God. Pray bold prayers and ask God to show you God moments waiting for us to step into. And may your obedience bring Jesus the glory due His name.

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Day 4

God wants to give us the gift of Himself. All this week, we are focused on investing extravagant time with Jesus. Our focus is to position ourselves with Him and to quiet ourselves to hear what He wants to say and to see what He wants to reveal to us as individuals and to us as the Good News Movement.

Mark 6:31-32 says "Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, "Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.""

Jesus was teaching His disciples a life-saving lesson. The ability to rest is a gift. We have physical bodies and minds that fatigue. Jesus, the creator of human life, also experienced human limitations. In John 4, we read how Jesus was tired from His journey and needed to rest. We find throughout scripture how Jesus would get away from the demands of life, the demands of ministry and the demands of people, even His disciples, to pray and be with His heavenly Father. We know Sabbath, though a command, was established to remind Israel they were no longer slaves. God will take care of us. We can rest in this promise.

Rest is a gift, but it is also a necessity. In this story, Jesus and the disciples are doing so much ministry, they have not had any time even to eat.

We all have days like this. We are working, we are doing good things, we are helping other people. Mom, you are usually last because you take care of the family. We are serving, loving and helping, working. All good, noble and necessary. So are the disciples here in this moment. Yet Jesus reminds the disciples, and all of us today, we have to get away to rest.

Don't you love the invitation of Jesus we find in these verses?

1. "Come with me..."
2. "...by yourselves to a quiet place ..."
3. "...and get some rest."

Rest in this verse means to give rest, give intermission from labor, by implication, to refresh. God desires for us to rest. Not just sleep. He wants us to be able receive deep, soul abiding rest and refreshment.

So my question is this: Does your time with Jesus, your quiet time with God feel like work or rest? If it feels like work, perhaps we are approaching it incorrectly. God wants to be with us; learning to be with Him takes time and practice.

We all turn down opportunities to meet or gather with people if we think we will leave tired or stressed. It is why this invitation to be with Jesus is so important. His invitation and promise is to Come away with Me to get some rest.

Where does Jesus want to take them? Verse 32 says "So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place." The word solitary means deserted, abandoned, desolate. If we were to put it in modern language, it would be like saying go to a place where you will not be interrupted. Notice he didn't put a time frame on it. He didn't say all of things needing to be accomplished spiritually. He simply wants to take us aside for some time to be with Him.

No tv, no scrolling through our phones. You can almost hear Jesus having to correct Peter because he would've been on his phone all the time, checking his social media feed, updating everyone on his latest spiritual accomplishments and looking for the next ministry opportunity. "Peter, put away your phone. C'mon, let's get away for a while."

Rest is not vegging on the couch. Taking the day off, kicking up our feet is needed too. But Jesus wants us to have a rest that is soul refreshing by being with Him, away from distraction and disruption, simply to receive from Him. He readjusts our priorities and meets our needs as we reflect on Him.

The interesting part of the story is the disciples on this day never got to rest. The crowd discovered where they were and because of His compassion, Jesus made a pivot and performed one of the greatest numerical miracles by feeding the 5000, not including woman and children, who were in attendance on this day.

Listen, sometimes, life interrupts our time to meet with Jesus. Our daily prayer time and bible reading may get interrupted occasionally. Sometimes, a God moment occurs on the way to our rest and we have the opportunity to step into a God moment on behalf of another. It's ok when life happens. And it is amazing when God changes directions. But the principle remains: Jesus desires for us to meet with and find our rest in Him and with Him. Today, find a time and a place to be with Jesus without distraction and let Him refresh your soul.

In this season, let's focus to hear the call to be with Jesus and to find rest with Him and the rest that truly replenishes our soul.

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P.S. Did you follow through on what God showed you yesterday?

Day 5

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Luke 10:38-42 says "Now it happened as they went that He entered a certain village; and a certain woman named Martha welcomed Him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, who also sat at Jesus' feet and heard His word. But Martha was distracted with much serving, and she approached Him and said, "Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Therefore, tell her to help me." And Jesus answered and said to her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things. But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her."

So normally, inside our Christian circles, there is a low-key debate about this set of scriptures. Those who love to sit and soak in the presence of Jesus will say we need more worshipers like Mary in our culture. I would agree. In John 4, Jesus said true worshipers will worship the Father in Spirit and truth. Worship is part of the DNA of a Christian.

On the other side, we have people who love to honor the Lord by serving Him and others with what they do. And they would say I worship Jesus as well. I just know there are things that have to be done. And we need more people who will give their life to serving so we can move the kingdom of God forward. And I would agree. 1 Corinthians 3:9 calls us fellow workers in God's service. So, which is it? Worshiper or worker? I think both.

I know, it sounds like a cop out, right?

You may be thinking c'mon, pick a side, end the debate. But you see, I think we gravitate toward worship or work, sitting at the feet of Jesus or serving Him with our life based on what we most naturally enjoy. And I don't think scripture is wanting us to choose one or the other. I think Jesus understands the need for both. Jesus did not spend all of His time in prayer, He did ministry as well. But I do think Jesus wants us to prioritize and recognize our moments with Him and what is most important as He leads us.

When God asked Adam to till or tend the ground in the garden of Eden, God was asking of Adam to do more than just work. Avodoh in Hebrew has three meaning that can speak to us as well. There was work Adam was responsible for but it also included worship and service. God wants us to live our lives, in all we do, in worship, work and service to Him and others. And learning to do all three of these while not compartmentalizing them, is a growth process. Jesus tells Martha she is distracted, worried and troubled about many things. In this moment Martha, one thing is needed, and the work, worship and service needed in this moment is to be solely with Jesus. This is what matters now. It means learning to give our heart full to the most important thing.

I have found in my Christian walk there have been seasons where it was easier to do things for God than to meet with and wait on God. And there have been other times where it was easier to stay in the prayer room or in my office than to serve a messy situation or engage a need. Both are needed. Both are important to God and others. Jesus is inviting us to discern and prioritize the most important thing. Remember, God does not want to be a task or something we check off the list. He wants us to prioritize Him for the purpose of relationship.

Continue daily to choose the good part like Mary and don't allow distraction, worry and trouble to rob you of time spent with your Creator. With God, your waiting is never wasted.

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P.S. Did you follow through on what God showed you yesterday?

Day 6

"Then Jesus said, "Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy to bear, and the burden I give you is light."

Matthew 11:28-30 (NLT)

If you notice, so much of this week is learning to rely on and lean into God. To learn to be with God and allow the life God promises to provide within us to be of a greater measure than the life we experience around us. Life is not easy. Jesus promised we would have trouble. But He also reminded us to be encouraged because He has overcome the world. Throughout the Bible are many invitations from the Lord for help, rescue, and blessing. This is a personal invitation to surrender our burdens.

This invitation from Jesus is an anchor point for us. A reminder of what Jesus actually offers us in our Christian walk. It provides parameters for when we are stepping outside of grace and into a form of religious performance, where it feels like we are constantly jumping through one hoop after another only to find there is always another hoop in front of us.

Religious performance can be deceptive because it looks to the people around us like we are being faithful to the Christian requirements. But internally, we remain overwhelmed and exhausted. Jesus sees this as He looks at Israel here in Matthew 11. Israel is trapped under Roman occupation and most have little hope for a political answer. He recognizes humanity crushed under the weight of their own sin. And religious leaders who have made hope more difficult because of laws focused on external behavior and rules at the expense of heart transformation. Jesus even told the Pharisees in Matthew 23, "What sorrow awaits you teachers of religious law and you Pharisees. Hypocrites! For you cross land and sea to make one convert, and then you turn that person into twice the child of hell you yourselves are! Wow, Please, tell us how you feel Jesus.

Again, I love this picture of Jesus. Jesus sees the weariness of soul and He is moved with compassion. And He provides a road map in our daily life.

Come to Me - invitation

All who are weary and heavy laden - recipient

And I will give you rest - promise

Then He explains how we are to walk with Him. "My yoke is easy to bear and My burden is light." Jesus is inviting us to learn how to live life with Him. In an agricultural community, animals were used to break up the hard ground. Whenever a young animal was to be trained, they would be connected to an older animal such as an oxen, so the younger would learn how to fulfill its responsibility safely. And the weight of the yoke would rest upon the older animal until the younger had been trained. Jesus is offering to teach us how to be with Him in life and taking the weight of sin and world upon Himself. All the while we are learning to rest, to live and be with Jesus as we live our life in Him.

Admittedly, learning to trust God with our burdens is not easy. But this is exactly what Jesus desires for us. Today, cast your cares on Him because he cares for you. Rest and receive. Lay aside the weights and burdens and learn to trust the rhythms of grace every single day. God really is good.

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Day 7

"And Jesus said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you become fishers of men." Mark 1:17 (ESV)

God calls us to grow. He calls us to surrender. And it takes a lifetime to become malleable and moldable. When Jesus went after Peter, He gave him a personal invitation. Peter understood change would happen. If he were to answer the call, Peter would be transformed. Jesus did not tell them how it would happen or all the changes necessary. Did not inform them of the trials, the revelations, the failures and ministry victories. He let them know they were being invited into a concentrated discipleship lifestyle that would alter them forever. Their old life was over. And a new one had begun. This was not a part time invitation. This decision would cost everything and it wasn't to be taken lightly. These disciples were not the best of the best and had been passed over by other teachers of the time. They didn't make the cut so to be extended an offer from Jesus was both humbling and bewildering. And yet, Jesus knew who He is selecting, issues and all. Do you know why? He knows how to make them, as well as us, become. I will make you become fishers of men.

It helps to have pictures for certain parts of my walk with God. He is the great Redeemer and one of these pictures is found in Jeremiah. There is a beautiful picture about what God is like toward us. God sends Jeremiah to the Potter's house and Jeremiah notices there is clay on the wheel. The Potter is working the clay and a truer reality is revealed. There are places in the clay that are marred. Messed up. Maybe it could be considered to the average person unusable. But as the prophet watches, the Potter does not get rid of the clay but reworks it, remakes it, to be of use in a new capacity and new way.

So, it is with us. Our whole life is on the Master Potter's wheel. He is always at work in our life. He knows who we are, who we have been but more importantly, who we will become. Don't resist God's desire to transform you. You don't have to run, hide or cover up. David said God desired truth in the inward areas of our heart. And Jesus told us truth will set us free. So I know, as I go into God and allow Him access into all areas of my life, including the marred and messed up places, He is removing, healing, testing and refining, and remaking me to be like Jesus. God never discards but instead, refines us.

Jesus knew what He was getting in the disciples He chose. He also understands who He is getting in each of us. And still He invited, beckoned and called us. And He is delighted, whatever condition we may find ourselves in, that we have committed our lives to Him. Our confidence is never in our ability to attain to a perfect standard or to ever be good enough. Our confidence is in the One who makes us become. And makes us become more and more like Jesus.

We have all been called and commissioned to give our lives for the sake of the gospel. We all have a part to play. Say yes to the invitation because He is worthy of it all and know the Master is amazing at repurposing broken things.

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