

DAYS
6-12
OF THE  40 DAY
CHALLENGE

WEEK OF

BEING



"COME TO ME, ALL WHO ARE
WEARY AND BURDENED,
AND I WILL GIVE YOU REST."

MATTHEW 11:28

DAY 6

ABIDE IN MY WORD
JOHN 8:31

What if I told you God could speak to you at any moment? Sometimes people say, "I just keep waiting to hear God's voice, and I'm getting nothing." **If there was a way to hear from God right now, would you do it?** Of course you would! You would probably do whatever it takes to hear directly from God! Well, the Bible is the book that contains God's words. The Bible is the place where God reveals Himself to you. Yet often the same people who claim to love God so much and who say they want to hear from Him often steer clear of reading the Bible. As a result, they miss out on opportunities to hear from God.

LifeWay Research surveyed more than 2,900 Protestant churchgoers and found that while 90 percent "desire to please and honor Jesus in all I do," only 19 percent personally read the Bible every day.¹² 19 percent. That's pathetic.

Maybe you are a part of the 19 percent who reads the Bible, and if you are, I want to encourage you to keep reading as often as you can. But if the numbers are accurate, that means more than four out of every five people who are going through this Challenge don't regularly read the Bible. How can we truly expect to make an impact for Jesus Christ if we don't even invest some time into reading what He said and growing in our knowledge of who He is?

Listen, I'm not perfect. There are days I fail. My job as a pastor certainly helps keep me in the Bible on a regular basis, but that doesn't mean I'm always learning and growing from God's Word. So this is something even I struggle with at times.

The full quote from Jesus is found in John 8:31-32: "If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." The word "abide" can mean to dwell or reside. Jesus essentially tells us to live in His Word. He wants us to make the Bible, His words, a part of our life. We are to read, mark, and inwardly digest them. They are to become such a part of us that we can't imagine what our lives were like before we knew the Bible. The Word of God is supposed to go with us wherever we go!

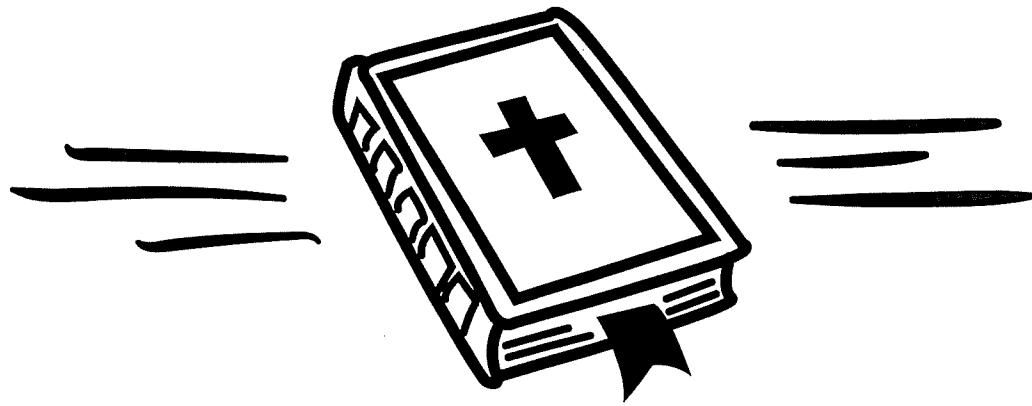
In fact, in the Old Testament, God actually told Ezekiel to eat the Scripture. Ezekiel 3:3 says, "'Feed your belly with this scroll that I give you and fill your stomach with it.' Then I ate it, and it was in my mouth as sweet as honey." God wanted Ezekiel to consume these words so these words would literally take life inside of him. The same is true of us today. God wants us to be reading and studying the Bible so much that the Bible becomes a part of us. His words have the power to actually change us and move us. That's what this Challenge is all about: bringing Jesus' words to life today!

The Bible is the one true story of life. The Bible reveals the one true God: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. It's in the words of the Holy Bible that we see that through Jesus' life, death, and resurrection we are offered grace, forgiveness, freedom, and new life! Because of this

new life, we can't help but want to make a difference and point people to know more about our amazing God. And where do we point them to find out more about God? To the Bible!

There is perhaps no greater spiritual discipline than reading God's Word, because whenever you open its pages, it always accomplishes something. Second Timothy 3:16-17 says, "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." Every time you spend time in Scripture, you are being trained, corrected, and equipped. You are always hearing from God!

We'll be doing a lot of good works in this Challenge. The Word of God will prepare us for these good works, because, after all, our doing flows out of our being with Christ.



THE BIBLE
IS THE ONE
TRUE STORY
OF LIFE.



#REDLETTERCHALLENGE

In our Bible reading for today, God calls Ezekiel to be a prophet and speak difficult but true words to the nation of Israel. God is giving the words to Ezekiel to proclaim to the Israelites. Like Ezekiel, we are called to consume God's Word and then share those words and the Gospel message with the rest of the world.

EZEKIEL 2:7-3:4

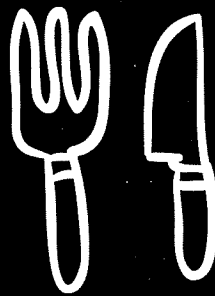
7 You must speak my words to them, whether they listen or fail to listen, for they are rebellious. 8 But you, son of man, listen to what I say to you. Do not rebel like that rebellious people; open your mouth and eat what I give you."

9 Then I looked, and I saw a hand stretched out to me. In it was a scroll, 10 which he unrolled before me. On both sides of it were written words of lament and mourning and woe.

3:1 And he said to me, "Son of man, eat what is before you, eat this scroll; then go and speak to the people of Israel." 2 So I opened my mouth, and he gave me the scroll to eat.

3 Then he said to me, "Son of man, eat this scroll I am giving you and fill your stomach with it." So I ate it, and it tasted as sweet as honey in my mouth.

4 He then said to me: "Son of man, go now to the people of Israel and speak my words to them.



OPEN THE BIBLE TODAY AND HEAR FROM GOD.

If you haven't ever read the Bible, I would recommend starting in the book of John. John is the 4th book of the New Testament and tells the story of Jesus in a way that helps people understand who He is.

This Challenge today, is a great discipline to practice every day for the rest of the Challenge and thereafter. If you are wondering where to start or how to read the Bible effectively, a great place to start is by downloading the YouVersion Bible App or searching online for a daily Bible reading plan.

DAY 7

PRAY EARNESTLY
MATTHEW 9:38

Okay, let's just admit it: prayer can be weird! You've seen it. I've seen it. If you want a room of middle school or high school students to be quiet, what do you do? Ask someone to pray. It's amazing how they will quiet down and look at the floor! There's another weird side of prayer as well, and many of you probably know what I'm talking about: The guy who starts praying and enters into another state of intelligence by offering large, verbose, superfluous words you've never even heard come out of his mouth before. Like this one:

"Dear omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent God, we beseech thee to justify us through thy vicarious atonement, and sanctify your ekklesia through thy Holy Spirit. Though we inhabit a "simul iustus et peccator" world, we are forever grateful that we receive nourishment and are sustained through the Eucharist. Help us properly exegete the Bible and this world until the coming parousia. Most sovereign, infallible, immutable God, Amen."

Translation: "Hey awesome God, thanks for your grace and continue to guide us with your Holy Spirit until you return! Most awesome God, Amen."

Will Davis, author of *Pray Big*, says, "Somehow we've gotten the impression that true prayer requires big words, lengthy phrases, and choice theological terms."¹³ Everything that is said seems to be "just right" and even

rhymes. To some degree you are impressed by this, but another part of you is actually turned off. I'm not saying those prayers aren't genuine, but sometimes they can do more harm than good. I think this sort of prayer can actually give a bad impression of what prayer is.

You see, at the heart of it all, **we have a God who desires to have a relationship with us.** Prayer is about being in relationship with God, and God wants you to be who you are. It's not about coming to God with all the right words. It's not about saying everything perfectly. It's about talking, listening, and spending time with Him. And when we spend time with Him, He wants us to be who we are! He doesn't want a fake version of who we think the world wants us to be. He wants you, with all your imperfections, to simply spend time with Him and to grow closer to Him. He wants you to tell Him what's on your mind.

We all come to prayer differently: some of us with good motives, some with bad motives, and some with mixed motives. And that's okay. Prayer isn't pretending that everything is perfect before God. It's not telling God things that aren't true. It's simply being real before Him: telling Him how it is. I'm not saying we shouldn't be respectful, but I'm also saying we shouldn't be afraid to address Him. In fact, in the Lord's Prayer, Jesus teaches us to address God as a father. And so, in many ways, prayer is like me listening and talking with my dad. Richard Foster says, "*Our children come to us with the craziest requests at times! Often we are grieved by the meanness and selfishness in their requests, but we would be all the more grieved if they never came to us even with their meanness and selfishness. We are simply glad that they do come—mixed motives and all.*"¹⁴

Jesus tells us in Matthew 9:38 to pray earnestly. Prayer is such an important part of our journey on this Challenge. Some of the Challenges will be easy; some will be difficult. I'm grateful that no matter how easy or hard the Challenge will be, God is always ready to listen. **Prayer is the most powerful tool we have on this earth**, yet for so many of us it is not a part of our regular daily routine.

It's okay if you don't know exactly how to pray or what to pray. Even Jesus' disciples had to ask Jesus to teach them how to pray. God is glad when you come to Him in prayer. Praying earnestly is the Challenge we are taking up today, but this discipline is truly meant to be a part of our lives every day. Continue to ask God boldly and specifically for the things you desire. The more you come to know Him and spend time in prayer, the more you will find yourself praying for things that you want and that He wants.

PRAYER IS THE
MOST POWERFUL
TOOL WE HAVE
ON THIS EARTH.



#REDLETTERCHALLENGE

We learn from this parable to never give up praying.

LUKE 18:1-8

Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up. 2 He said: "In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared what people thought. 3 And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, 'Grant me justice against my adversary.'

4 "For some time he refused. But finally he said to himself, 'Even though I don't fear God or care what people think, 5 yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won't eventually come and attack me!'"

6 And the Lord said, "Listen to what the unjust judge says. 7 And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? 8 I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?"



SPEND SOME TIME TODAY IN PRAYER. HERE'S A GREAT MODEL:

- A** Adoration (Tell God what you love about Him)
- C** Confession (Tell God about the sins in your life and how you plan to turn/repent from them)
- T** Thanksgiving (Thank Him for His forgiveness and for all the blessings in your life)
- S** Supplication (Ask Him specific things that you need in your life)

Ask God to give you the strength to make it through this Challenge. Boldly ask Him to strengthen your faith and help you share Him with others.

DAY 8

WORSHIP THE LORD YOUR GOD
LUKE 4:8

Everyone worships someone or something.

I grew up near Memphis, Tennessee. During those years, there was a basketball player known as "Penny" who was lighting up the NCAA with his talent at Memphis State University. In fact, Anfernee "Penny" Hardaway was so good he would later get drafted by the Orlando Magic and team up with Shaquille O'Neal.

I couldn't get enough of "Penny." I went to the basketball camp that he held in Memphis. He once signed a blank sheet of paper for me and I cherished this paper so much. It had a special place in my room that no one was allowed to see or touch. I collected his basketball cards, hung posters of him on my wall, and even bought his basketball shoes which were called the "Air Pennies." (By the way, they are still the coolest pair of basketball shoes ever made.)

I didn't realize it at the time, but I was essentially worshipping Penny. In fact, I thought a lot more about him than I did of the One who created him. Don't get me wrong: "Penny" had a great basketball career that only ended because of injury, and even today, he is known for his charity work. He has a great reputation in Memphis and across basketball. But as great as he was, Anfernee Hardaway is just a man, and one day he will die.

As a child, we can understand this sort of adoration and devotion to a hero or sports star. But there are many of us as adults who still struggle with worshipping the wrong things or people. We worship things that will not last.

- ➔ Some of us worship a person.
- ➔ Some of us worship money.
- ➔ Some of us worship stuff.
- ➔ Some of us worship sex.
- ➔ Some of us worship a political party.
- ➔ Some of us worship our careers.

The definition of worship is: *"The reverent love and devotion accorded to a deity, an idol, or a sacred object."*¹⁵ Many people, even Christians, equate worship with a 60 or 75-minute service on Sunday morning. (Please nothing more than 90 minutes!) And that service certainly is worship. But worship is much more than that. **God is not confined to a building or a time frame, and neither is our worship.** Worship describes who we are 24/7. If to be worshipful means having expressions of reverence and adoration for a deity, doesn't that mean we are, or at least can be, worshipping at all times? Harold Best says, *"We do not go to church to worship, but, already at worship, we join our brothers and sisters in continuing those actions that should have been going on—privately, family, or even corporately – all week long."*¹⁶

Paul expresses this idea in Romans 12:1. He writes, "Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to **offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship.**" He's saying that our whole lives are worship. Whenever we reflect the love of God, we are worshipping Him! Martin Luther once said, "*The worship of God.... should be free at table, in private rooms, downstairs, upstairs, at home, abroad, in all places, by all peoples, at all times.*"¹⁷

What they are all saying is that worship happens when I'm around others and when I'm alone. In public and in private. Worship happens when I'm out with friends and when I'm at work. It happens when I'm watching TV, when I'm watching sports, and when I'm online. Worship ought to happen at church with others and at home on my own. No matter where you are or what you are doing you have the potential to be ascribing worth, praise, and glory to God. Everything you do could be an act of worship. Look at your life this way and it will start affecting the everyday decisions that you make! Pretty soon you'll be asking yourself, "If I'm worshipping God right now, would I do this? Would I go here? Would I buy this? What would I do here?" And if you find yourself asking those questions more often, you are on the right track!

**GOD IS NOT
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#REDLETTERCHALLENGE

The Psalms are a great place to see the heart of worship. Psalm 96 is a favorite of mine.

PSALM 96

1 Sing to the Lord a new song;
sing to the Lord, all the earth.

2 Sing to the Lord, praise his name;
proclaim his salvation day after day.

3 Declare his glory among the nations,
his marvelous deeds among all
peoples.

4 For great is the Lord and most
worthy of praise; he is to be feared
above all gods.

5 For all the gods of the nations are
idols, but the Lord made the heavens.

6 Splendor and majesty are before him;
strength and glory are in his
sanctuary.

7 Ascribe to the Lord, all you families
of nations, ascribe to the Lord glory
and strength.

8 Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his
name; bring an offering and come into
his courts.

9 Worship the Lord in the splendor of

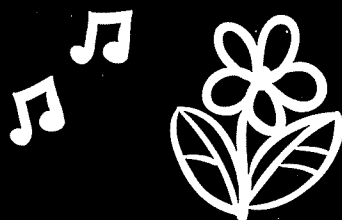
his holiness; tremble before him,
all the earth.

10 Say among the nations, "The Lord
reigns." The world is firmly
established, it cannot be moved; he
will judge the peoples with equity.

11 Let the heavens rejoice, let the
earth be glad; let the sea resound,
and all that is in it.

12 Let the fields be jubilant, and
everything in them; let all the trees of
the forest sing for joy.

13 Let all creation rejoice before the
Lord, for he comes, he comes to
judge the earth. He will judge the
world in righteousness and the
peoples in his faithfulness.



OUR THIRD DISCIPLINE...

IS TO WORSHIP GOD. PEOPLE WORSHIP DIFFERENTLY, BUT MOST PEOPLE THINK OF MUSIC WHEN THEY THINK OF WORSHIP.

Music can help usher us into God's presence and feel things in ways that otherwise we would not. Your Challenge for today is to listen to worship music. Here are a few ways you could do this:

- 1 Go for a walk and listen to praise/worship music
- 2 Turn off your phone and computer and read through some Psalms with background music playing
- 3 Listen to praise/worship music free from distraction
- 4 Rather than listening to politics, sports, or the top 40, tune into your local Christian radio station on your drives around town

If you need help finding great Christian worship music, I would recommend any of the following: Elevation Worship, Hillsong Worship, Bethel Music, Jesus Culture, and Passion.

DAY 9

COME WITH ME BY YOURSELVES TO
A QUIET PLACE AND GET SOME REST
MARK 6:31

Michael Zigarelli, an associate professor at Charleston Southern's School of Business, polled more than 20,000 Christians of all ages from 139 countries about the busyness of their lives and how it affects their relationship with God.

His report tells us the obvious: we're busy people! In fact, almost 60% of Christians around the world say their hectic lives prevent them from spending time with God. Even more interesting is that pastors are the most likely to say they often or always rush from task to task - beating out business owners, lawyers, teachers, and salespeople!

Writing as a pastor, Zigarelli says, *"But maybe a study like this will wake some of us up to this reality: We, of all people, must find a way to place the Lord above every urgent need, every pressing appointment, every desperate cry."*¹⁸

You probably don't need statistics to tell you we are busy. It's hard for us to spend significant amounts of time with God.

But when we fill our schedules every minute of the day, we lose focus. We get wrapped up in things that aren't important and just don't matter. My grandfather, who is also a pastor, recently watched a basketball game on TV with me. I am a huge sports fan and so was my grandfather, but over the years, his passion for sports has dwindled. While we were watching the

game he said to me, "Sports are interesting, but not important."

I realized I spend a lot of time on interesting but unimportant things. I put a lot of hope, time, energy, money, and passion into following sports, but I am always supporting teams that let me down (I am a Cleveland fan after all!).

Then I realized I also follow a lot of important things in this world, but they too will let me down. Family, friends, job, house, and money are all important, but all of them will let you down at some point.

Some of you have families that ended in divorce, or your kids rebelled against the way you tried to raise them. Perhaps you've been there for your friends when they needed you, but when you needed them, they were nowhere to be found. Some of you have lost jobs. Others bought a house and couldn't keep it. Or maybe you are like me and bought a home only to sell it later and lose tons of money. Speaking of money, it has the potential to let you down, as well. Many of you experienced that in the early 2000's with the economic recession.

My point is that Jesus wants to be our top priority. We fill our lives with interesting and even important things, but fail to create time for Jesus, the most important thing! **We need to say "No" to many good things, so we can say "Yes" to the best thing.** What's amazing is that we spend time, money and energy on things that will let us down, but Jesus will never fail us. He will never leave us or forsake us. We are focused on the wrong things!

Jesus wants us to make Him the most important thing in our lives. In fact, in Luke 14 He demands to be our top priority. We need to get more serious about spending quality time with God, even times of solitude where it's just us and God. In solitude, we purposely abstain from interaction with other human beings and shut ourselves off from other distractions.

Jesus modeled this. Before He made the very difficult decision of which twelve disciples He would choose, the Bible says He went up on a mountainside and prayed through the night. Many times Jesus sought out places to either rest or pray, which were both ways of being alone with God. If Jesus needed this time, how much more do we! Not only do we benefit from spending time alone with God, but He loves it when we come to Him. After all, He created us for His pleasure. It gives Him joy when we make Him a priority. But when we squeeze Him out of our lives and place other things where He should be, it's the opposite of what God wants. This is one area where Christians really struggle. We can do better!

WE NEED TO SAY
"NO" TO MANY
GOOD THINGS,
SO WE CAN SAY
"YES" TO THE
BEST THING.



#REDLETTERCHALLENGE

60

Here Jesus tells us to hate our families. That's awkward! His point is that if you want to follow Him, you have to put Him first. He asks you to give everything you have for Him, just as He gave everything He had to us.

LUKE 14:25-33

25 Large crowds were traveling with Jesus, and turning to them he said,
26 "If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even their own life—such a person cannot be my disciple. 27 And whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.

28 "Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Won't you first sit down and estimate the cost to see if you have enough money to complete it? 29 For if you lay the foundation and are not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule you, 30 saying, 'This person began to build and wasn't able to finish.'

31 "Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Won't he first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand? 32 If he is not able, he will send a delegation while the other is still a long way off and will ask for terms of peace. 33 In the same way, those of you who do not give up everything you have cannot be my disciple."

SPEND SOME TIME IN SOLITUDE TODAY.

Take your Bible with you and get away from all the distractions. Try it for 30 minutes and if you are able, do it even longer.

9/40

DAY 10

AND WHEN YOU FAST, ANOINT YOUR
HEAD AND WASH YOUR FACE
MATTHEW 6:17

One pastor said, *"It is now my regular practice to fast before and during the times I preach. I have a deeper sense of dependency on God and of the immense power of the spoken word. This has been demonstrated by the dear individual in my congregation who runs our tape ministry. She said that since January of this year, her orders for sermon tapes have doubled. 'I can't explain it,' she said, 'but whatever it is, keep it up!'"*¹⁹

I'll have to check with the lady running my "tape ministry" to see if fasting might make any difference for me!

To fast means to abstain from something. Out of all the disciplines we are looking at this week, this one might be the most foreign for us in America.

One time a friend of mine fasted from the mega-tub of popcorn at the movie theatres for the forty days of Lent (the forty days before Easter). This is not really the kind of fast we are talking about here. As much as he tried telling me it was a sacrifice, it wasn't! Also, guys, while it's tempting to fast from doing laundry and chores, that's not what we're talking about here, either!

To truly fast you ought to abstain from something important in your life, something you think you can't go without, something that you will miss. It's in those moments of craving or missing that you can go to God with your thoughts and also thank Him that He does provide for your needs. The

hunger or the sense of want for what you're fasting from also reminds you to make Jesus your primary want.

Jesus also tells us that when we fast, we don't do it to get recognized by others. You don't fast to make others say, "Wow, that person is so spiritual," or, "Did you see Bob is giving up food for a week? He must have such a good relationship with God." That's not why we do it. **Fasting** is something you do for your own relationship with God. It is an exercise, a discipline, which **brings you closer to God and helps you realize just how much God provides for you**. That's why He tells us to wash our faces when we fast. The Pharisees would fast and make their faces look disfigured and gloomy so when someone noticed something was wrong, they would be able to talk about how they were fasting. They fasted in order to receive the attention, praise, and glory from man. That's not what Jesus wants when He calls us to fast. He wants us to give up something important and remember that He provides.

It's so easy to get caught up in this world with all of its distractions. There are so many days when I get to the evening and realize, "Wow, I didn't spend any time with God today!" I'm sure I'm not the only one. And when I look back at my day, it all seemed important at the time, but if I'm honest I know that no matter how busy I thought I was, there were moments in the day that I wasted or moments I could have included God.

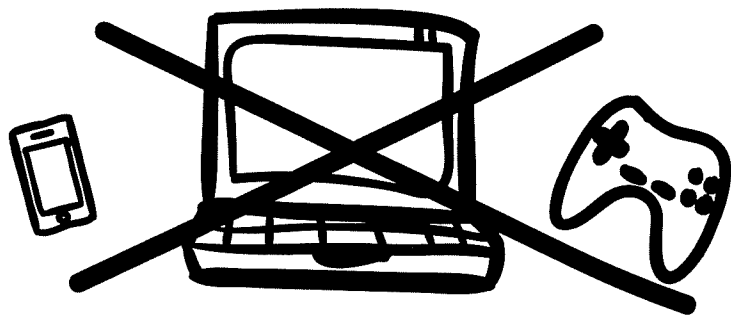
Fasting is a great way to remember God throughout the day. If you fast from food, for example, you will get hungry, and you will remember why you

are not eating that particular day. In that moment, you can go to the Lord and thank Him that He provides for you.

Ultimately God wants our hearts. When we fast, we are giving Him our hearts. We are telling Him, "You are what's most important in my life...all of this other stuff pales in comparison to you. I find everything I need in this world in you."

Many people fast before making difficult decisions. This is a very godly practice. If you've been unsure of a decision, fasting is a good way to clear your mind from worldly things and perhaps receive clarity from God with what He is calling you to do.

Some might choose to fast from food. For others, it might be a fast from television, video games, your cell phone, or Facebook. Some of you may decide to fast for more than a day. Whatever you do, use the time you free up for prayer, and be open to what God might want to do in your life.



**FASTING BRINGS
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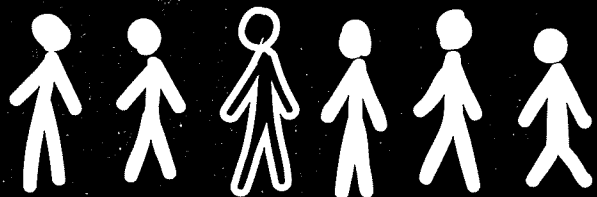


#REDLETTERCHALLENGE

These verses mention the kind of fasting the Pharisees were doing versus the kind of fasting God is interested in!

MATTHEW 6:16-18

16 "When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show others they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. 17 But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, 18 so that it will not be obvious to others that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you."



GO ON A FAST TODAY.

Make sure you abstain from something that's meaningful to you and will make a noticeable difference in your life not having it. Most people will choose to fast from food, but you could also give up social media, your cell phone, video games, television, etc. As you are fasting, and you think about what it is that you are giving up, use those moments to pray to God and thank Him for His provision in your life.

10/40

DAY 11

LET US EAT AND CELEBRATE
LUKE 15:23

Now this is something that I can get behind: eating and celebrating! I should make this my life verse! I love to eat and I love to celebrate. Who doesn't love a good party with great food? Amongst all of the grace, forgiveness, love, and healing we see in the life of Jesus, it may be hard for you to imagine Jesus saying a phrase like this. But I would argue that eating and celebrating is why Jesus came! However, before we get to that, let's just call a spade a spade and say that among non-Christians, and even among many Christians themselves, the perception of current-day followers of Jesus is we don't have much fun. A lot of people think Christians are boring and not interesting at all.

Why is that? Jesus talked a lot about food and a lot about celebrating. This was a constant theme for Him. Celebration and thanksgiving for all that God has done is a discipline that ought to be a part of our lives each day.

Yet many people believe that in order to follow Jesus, you have to give up a life of celebration. They believe Christianity in general is restraining. In fact, Emma Goldman once said that Christianity is *"the leveler of the human race, the breaker of man's will to dare and to do ... an iron net, a straitjacket which does not let him expand or grow."*²⁰ That's a pretty brutal assessment of Jesus' followers and sounds nothing like our quote today from Jesus.

People from the outside view Christianity as a set of rules that say we must live a certain way, look the same way, and that we "must not smoke, drink, dance, or associate with those who do." Personally, I think it's sad that people view Christians like this and I think it's our fault for not truly living the way God has made us. John 10:10 tells us that Christ came to give us an abundant life. Too many times we make this life look more boring than abundant!

In his book *Ragamuffin Gospel*, Brennan Manning quotes Robert Hotchkins from the University of Chicago, who says, *"Christians ought to be celebrating constantly. We ought to be preoccupied with parties, banquets, feasts, and merriment. We ought to give ourselves over to veritable orgies of joy because we have been liberated from the fear of life and the fear of death. We ought to attract people to the church quite literally by the fun there is in being a Christian."*²¹

I know that if you are following Jesus, your life isn't always easy. Sometimes we go through really difficult times. In fact, Jesus assures us that as His followers we are to expect persecution, suffering, and trials of all kinds. I'm not oblivious to that either. We don't need to walk around with fake smiles. But it's also imperative that we change the world's perception of Christ and His followers. If He gave us an abundant life and if we have all received His grace, then our lives should show it.

The reality is that Christ came to free us to live a life of excitement, adventure, and fulfillment. In Christ, we have received all the grace, mercy, and peace that we could ever want or need. Through the Holy Spirit we have confidence, strength, and power to do things others won't. In fact, if we are honest, **God has already answered all the hard questions in this**

life by sending Jesus Christ. No matter what happens, even in the difficult times, we can have a hope, joy, and peace that those who don't know Christ don't have. Why in the world are we demonstrating that a life with Christ isn't joyful, celebratory, and just overall awesome?

Remember that in the end, after Jesus comes back, we will be with Him forever in heaven. Revelation 19:9 tells us we will be invited to the wedding feast of Jesus Christ! We're going to eat and celebrate forever in heaven with our God. Why not practice today?

Today, I want you to celebrate what God has done for you. I want you to live your life with joy and peace today, because that's what Christ has won for you! It's time to embrace the life that Christ has made for you!



WE OUGHT TO
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THERE IS IN BEING A
CHRISTIAN.



#REDLETTERCHALLENGE

There are many psalms that express that we have joy in the Lord. Psalm 98 is one beautiful example!

PSALM 98

1 Sing to the Lord a new song,
for he has done marvelous things;
his right hand and his holy arm have
worked salvation for him.

2 The Lord has made his salvation known
and revealed his righteousness to the
nations.

3 He has remembered his love and his
faithfulness to Israel; all the ends of
the earth have seen
the salvation of our God.

4 Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth,
burst into jubilant song with music;

5 make music to the Lord with the harp,
with the harp and the sound of singing,

6 with trumpets and the blast of the
ram's horn— shout for joy before the
Lord, the King.

7 Let the sea resound, and everything
in it, the world, and all who live in it.

8 Let the rivers clap their hands, let
the mountains sing together for joy;

9 let them sing before the Lord, for
he comes to judge the earth. He
will judge the world in righteousness
and the peoples with equity.



HAVE SOME FUN WITH THIS ONE TODAY.

Start the day by celebrating and thanking God for five things He has done for you. If you want to keep the good times rolling, throw a party. Call together a few friends or neighbors and eat and celebrate with them!

11/40

DAY 12

THE SABBATH WAS MADE
FOR MAN
MARK 2:27

The Sabbath is one of the most misunderstood among Christians today. Some Christians will go into an interview and say, "I can work whenever." Others will say, "No, Sundays are a deal breaker. I can't work that day." Why do some work and others don't? Why does Chick-Fil-A give up more than \$40 million a year by closing on Sundays while almost every other business stays open?

Sabbath is from the Hebrew word which means "rest." It was first used in Genesis 2 after God created the world. God created the world in six days and then rested on the seventh day. Why? Was He tired? No, **God rested because what He made was worth enjoying.** We are created like our Creator, so we also create and rest. We work and we play. **After all, if God takes a day to enjoy his Creation, shouldn't we?**

Have you ever mowed your lawn? Even though it may not have been fun while you were doing it, afterward you took your shower, grabbed a drink, and then just looked at the lawn because you were so proud of your work. This is what Sabbath is like – you are resting and enjoying something you created. This is why God made the Sabbath. We were made to work, but also to rest.

God instituted the Sabbath as a gift for the Israelite people in the Old Testament. God says, "Above all you shall keep my Sabbaths, for this

will be a sign between me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I, the Lord, sanctify you. You shall keep the Sabbath, because it is holy for you."²² This was a way the people could prove they were in relationship with God. It was a big deal! People who broke the Sabbath or profaned it in any way were actually supposed to be put to death. Talk about harsh! But remember, the Sabbath was always meant as a gift: an opportunity to rest and enjoy life.

However, by the time Jesus came, the Pharisees had changed the Sabbath into something it was never meant to be. In their desire to uphold the law, they had written chapter upon chapter about what it meant to keep the Sabbath. These were some of the rules they came up with:

- ➔ You could only eat an egg which had been laid on the Sabbath if you killed the chicken for Sabbath-breaking.
- ➔ It was not permitted to wear false teeth on the Sabbath (that must have been a hit in the synagogue services).
- ➔ It was fine to spit on a rock on the Sabbath, but you could not spit on the ground, because that made mud, and that was work.²³

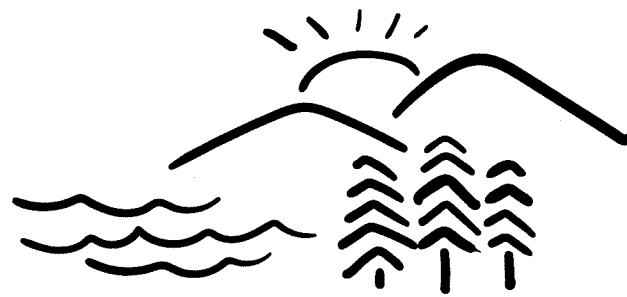
The Pharisees twisted the Sabbath into something it was never meant to be. You can understand why the Pharisees were so upset with Jesus when it appeared He "worked" on the Sabbath. But Jesus knew what the Sabbath was really about. It wasn't about being miserable and doing nothing. It wasn't about sitting in your house like a bump on a log. It's about enjoying

what God has created and what you have created through your work.

Today, we also miss the big idea of the Sabbath. We work all the time because we like the things we get from it – money, possessions, or status. We look to our work to give us some of the things God promises to give.

In Romans 14:5-6, Paul writes, “One person considers one day more sacred than another; another considers every day alike. Each of them should be fully convinced in their own mind. Whoever regards one day as special does so to the Lord.”

Paul could have said, “This is exactly how you should keep the Sabbath...” But he doesn’t. What he says is that regarding this issue you just have to be convinced in your own mind that you’re doing the right thing. Paul isn’t telling us to abandon the practice, but to have flexibility in how we live it out. If you take Sundays off, great. If it’s Saturday, cool. Maybe one week it’s a Tuesday morning with a Thursday afternoon and a Friday evening. As long as your motive is to the Lord and you are enjoying and resting in His creation then it doesn’t matter when you do it. Just make sure you do it. **The more we keep the Sabbath, the more we will find the life we were made for.**



IF GOD TAKES A
DAY TO ENJOY
HIS CREATION,
SHOULDN'T WE?



#REDLETTERCHALLENGE

Here we read the story of Jesus upsetting the Pharisees on the Sabbath. He had just picked some heads of grain and the Pharisees accused Him of being unlawful.

MARK 2:25-3:6

25 He answered, "Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need? 26 In the days of Abiathar the high priest, he entered the house of God and ate the consecrated bread, which is lawful only for priests to eat. And he also gave some to his companions."

27 Then he said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. 28 So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath."

3:1 Another time Jesus went into the synagogue, and a man with a shriveled hand was there. 2 Some of them were looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, so they watched him closely to see if he would heal him on the Sabbath. 3 Jesus said to the man with the shriveled hand, "Stand up in front of everyone."

4 Then Jesus asked them, "Which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?" But they remained silent.

5 He looked around at them in anger and, deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts, said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He stretched it out, and his hand was completely restored. 6 Then the Pharisees went out and began to plot with the Herodians how they might kill Jesus.

TAKE A DAY OFF!

Use this day to enjoy what God has given you. It could be your faith, your family, or your house. In addition, what do you enjoy doing? Spend some time doing a hobby or pursuing an interest. Enjoy the day but don't be too legalistic about it, and at some point spend some time reading your Bible and praying. If you can't take today off, intentionally take one of the next seven off. What did you do? How did you rest and enjoy this world?

12/40