



The Saint Paul's Baptist Church
"A Church for People On the Grow!"

40 DAYS OF
CHALLENGE



FEB 14 -
MAR 24

PRAYER & FASTING

THE SAINT PAUL'S BAPTIST CHURCH
WWW.MYSPBC.ORG

'Perfection isn't the goal - progress is. Keep going.'

WEEK 2 GUIDE

What is the *40-Day Challenge*?

Researchers have long claimed that it takes twenty-one days to turn a particular behavior into a habit. Some say it takes longer. A lot depends on the difficulty of the hoped-for habit and how important it is to the person who is hoping for it.

This study was prepared with that in mind. It is intended to develop or strengthen habits that will bear fruit in your life that will last for eternity. Its effectiveness, however, will depend in great measure on your desire and determination to discover and put into practice the real purpose of the church and its life-changing benefits.

This study is at the heart of this *40-Day Challenge*, a total church campaign designed to stir and stretch everyone in our church—those who are new and those who have been engaged for awhile. Together with the weekend worship celebrations and the weekly small group curriculum, this study has the potential to do more than change your habits. It can change your life.

Based on the book of Acts, the daily readings and challenges included in this study are designed to help you understand, internalize and externalize the five great callings and purposes of every follower of Jesus, they are to:

- **CONNECT IN COMMUNITY:** *All the believers were together and had everything in common (Acts 2:44).*
- **CELEBRATE IN WORSHIP:** *They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people (Acts 2:46-47).*
- **CULTIVATE SPIRITUAL GROWTH:** *They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching (Acts 2:42).*
- **CONTRIBUTE MONEY AND MINUTES:** *No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had (Acts 4:32-34).*
- **CARE FOR ONE ANOTHER AND THE WORLD:** *You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8).*

The following is a sampling of the things you will discover and begin (or continue) to practice on our journey through these daily readings and challenges:

1. Living in community opens the door to growth and joy in a way that nothing else does.
2. With our redemption comes the call to live differently, to be better.
3. In God's eyes, it is "not good" if we are not linked to others in healthy, helpful community.
4. Our worship should be a day-by-day and moment by moment habit.
5. The loving sacrifice of Jesus redeems our fallen souls, restores our fellowship with God, reverses our self-centeredness, and returns us to the purpose for which we were created.

6. Worshiping God is like a symphony that begins with praise.
7. An ungrateful heart cannot truly worship, because a worshipful life is a grateful life.
8. Joy is both the content and the overflow of a worshiping heart.
9. Our tendency as human beings is to turn romance into routine, and rhythm into meaningless repetition.
10. God cannot give more to those whose hands are already full.
11. Prayer will change the person who prays.
12. One small step can result in amazing growth and development in a person's life.
13. We human beings tend to mistake our role, thinking we are owners when God has repeatedly made it clear that we are not.
14. Money is a test. Always.
15. Your spending today has a direct correlation to where your heart will be tomorrow.
16. Everyone you know is a faithful tither.
17. God can take whatever you put in His hands and multiply it.
18. Jesus calls us to seek relationships with people not for what we can *get* but for what we can *give*.
19. The gospel of Jesus 'Christ is a "Come and See" gospel.
20. Real give-and-take relationships with the people around us will open many doors.
21. Jesus did not give up on the people everyone else gave up on-and neither should you.

Finally, this study will have the greatest and longest-lasting impact if you read and use it (see next section, *How to Use the 40-Day Challenge Guide*) at the same time our church and your small-group are participating in the campaign. God bless you for taking this extraordinary challenge!

Accepting the Challenge

How to Use this 40-Day Challenge Guide

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved. - Acts 2:42-47

Those first followers of Jesus in Jerusalem had an amazing impact on the world. Though the church started with just a handful of people praying in an upper room, they witnessed many signs and wonders. Not one of them was in need, for they shared generously with each other. They prayed and worshiped and ate together daily. And they quickly experienced exponential growth, adding as many as three thousand new members in one day.

Wow! Wouldn't it be great to be part of a church like that? Of course, they had advantages. Some of them had walked with Jesus. They had preachers like Peter, James, and John, and they were in on the ground floor of this new thing called the Church.

Still, they had jobs. And families. And problems. Even persecution. In fact, if you read much further in the book of Acts in the Bible, you may see that the main difference between their church and yours was not in their circumstances. It was in their practices.

They "devoted themselves" to things we are not much devoted to. But that can change and when that changes, we will change. Our churches. Our families. Our lives.

Getting Started in the 40-Day Challenge

The readings in this *40-Day Challenge* book begin on Monday after Ash Wednesday. Six daily readings are provided for each week—Monday through Saturday. There are no Sunday readings.

To get the most from this experience, set aside a specific time each day to work on the reading and simple step. This should take no more than twenty minutes, depending, of course, on the rate at which you read and the degree to which you apply yourself.

Take your time; don't read ahead or try to complete more than one day's reading at a time. They are designed to build on each other, and will have the maximum effect if they are read once a day, ideally, in the morning. This allows you to process and meditate on the topic throughout the day. Also, you will draw the most benefit if you try not to skip readings, forcing yourself to have to play "catch up."

Each "day" in this *40-Day Challenge* booklet contains the following content:

Devotional Lesson

Each day's content begins with a short reading. Most of these won't take you more than three or four minutes. They are designed to get you thinking about a particular aspect of the week's topic.

Scriptures

Carefully selected Scriptures follow the daily reading. Some are drawn from the reading, while others are intended to add to the content of the reading. You are encouraged to look these up in your Bible and read them in their broader context.

Prayer

After the daily reading and the Scripture selections, a prayer has been included. We encourage you not only to read this prayer but to actually pray it-out loud even. You may want to add to it or personalize it in some way in response to your personal thoughts and emotions.

Simple Step

Another component of each day is the Simple Step, a small but impactful challenge to help you immediately apply the truth or lesson of the day's reading. These action steps are crucial to making the *40-Day Challenge* part of your life throughout the forty days and beyond.

Journal Page

The final section is a journal page with a question or prompt for you to think about and space to write out your thoughts. Take your time with this, as this activity often produces great insight and important breakthroughs for the participant.

Partner

Select a partner and share with them your thoughts and actions about each day's readings.

Weekly Challenge Page

After Saturday's reading there is a one-page recap of the weekly challenge. This weekly challenge section will touch upon some of the main points of the week's message, and the primary step that you are being challenged to make in your life.

Small-Group Study and Discussion Questions

After the Weekly Challenge page there are two pages of small group study and discussion questions that should be used during your small-group time. The small-group study and discussion questions in

this booklet are located at the end of each week; however, your small-group may meet earlier in the week.

Therefore, you may want to review the thoughts, questions, and Scriptures found in this section before your small-group starts. And you will want to bring your study with you to that weekly meeting so you can follow along with the progression of thoughts, Scriptures, and questions being discussed. You are on the verge of a greater growth experience than you ever thought possible. As you apply yourself, may God add to your growth, the growth of the church and the glory of God's name.

Week Two: Worship

OVERVIEW OF WEEK TWO

Main Message Point: Church is a great atmosphere to cultivate a spirit of worship. God's sacrificial love motivates us to give all of ourselves to Him and live our lives completely for Him. That is the basis of real worship.

THIS WEEK'S CHALLENGE: Commit to worshiping God by making regular attendance at church a cornerstone of your worship lifestyle and giving your life completely to God.

Day 1: Worship is a Verb

Imagine yourself among the children of Israel when they arrived at Mount Sinai. Only recently delivered out of slavery, they found themselves approaching a mountain that seemed to be on fire, its topmost height enshrouded by storm clouds, and the voice of God issuing from the mountain like a blast from a giant ram's horn.

What would have been your reaction? Would you have assembled a praise team or sung a few verses of a hymn? Would you have clapped, lifted your hands, or even moved your feet a little bit in worship?

Those are some of the things we label as "worship" today. We speak of "worship leaders" or "worship pastors." We talk about worship as though it is the singing part of our church gatherings. But **worship is a verb.** It is much more than singing our praises to God. It is more than the hour or two we offer to God on Sundays. And, as the writer to the Hebrews points out, our worship ought to be even greater, more intense, and more pervasive than what the people of Israel experienced at Mount Sinai:

*"You have not come to a mountain that can be touched and that is burning with fire" (Hebrews 12:18).
"But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. (Hebrews 12:22-23)*

"Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that confess his name. And do not forget to do good, and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased." (Hebrews 13:15-16)

As those verses make clear, worship is far more than singing songs during a service. Just as Jesus, the Word that was given for us all on Calvary is far greater than the words that were given on Mount Sinai, so our worship—as those whose names are written in heaven—should be greater than the worship offered in Moses' day.

Our worship should be a continual "sacrifice of praise." And our sacrifices ought to far exceed a spotless lamb or bull. They should be a day-by-day and moment-by-moment habit of doing good and

sharing with others. Acceptable worship for those of us who have come to Mount Zion, who have been saved not by law but by grace, through faith (See Ephesians 2:8) encompasses our whole being.

"Here's what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life, your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking around life and place it before God as an offering. Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for him." (Romans 12:1 MSG)

This is the worship that most pleases God.

Scriptures

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. - Romans 12:1

Dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to give your bodies to God because of all he has done for you. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice—the kind he will find acceptable. This is truly the way to worship him. - Romans 12:1, NLT

Dear friends, God is good. So I beg you to offer your bodies to him as a living sacrifice, pure and pleasing. That's the most sensible way to serve God. - Romans 12:1, CEV

Here's what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking around life and place it before God as an offering. Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for him. - Romans 12:1. MSG

Prayer

Almighty God, I confess that I have long had a limited view of worship. I have worshiped you with singing and prayer, but have too often and for too long neglected to truly, properly, and constantly worship you with my life, my body, my *"sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life."* Please enlarge my definition of worship. Deepen my experience of worship. And let everything I learn and do this week be a sweet and pleasing sacrifice to you. In the Name of Jesus, Amen.

Simple Step: A Phone Call

Spend some time talking to God, and as you do, focus on praising Him for who He is and what He has done for you. Be specific. Date and initial this page when you complete this simple step.

Journal Prompt

Brainstorm and write down some ways you can consciously make your *"sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life"* a sacrifice of worship today.

Partner

Share with your partner your thoughts and actions about today's reading and your actions.

Day 2: Wired for Worship

Since the dawn of recorded history, every human culture—no matter how isolated, primitive, or advanced has worshiped someone or something. The ancient Persians served a daily ritual meal to their god. The Canaanites worshiped Molech (among others), to whom they offered their children as sacrifices. Egyptians worshiped a hierarchy of gods, dominated from time to time by the sun god Aten or the bull god Apis. The Greeks and Romans worshiped a pantheon of gods.

The first North Americans worshiped the sun and other forces in nature. Many African cultures worship one supreme god, but recognize other deities as well. And some Asian and African cultures practice the worship of ancestors. As different as such cultures are from each other, they all illustrate a central fact of human existence: **We are wired to worship.**

The human heart and soul longs to connect with God—even to bow before His greatness, whether it recognizes it or not. Ecclesiastes 3:11 (NLT) says, *“God has planted eternity in the human heart,”* and that spark of eternity seeks union with the eternal God. As Augustine wrote in his Confessions, *“You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.”* There is no escaping it. **You are wired for worship.**

Your heart, mind, and soul are programmed to reach out to God, bow before Him, praise His greatness, and give yourself to Him in happy surrender and grateful abandon. As C. S. Lewis wrote, *“We delight to praise what we enjoy because the praise not merely expresses but completes the enjoyment.”* In other words, we are never more ourselves than when we are worshiping God in spirit and truth. We are never closer to the Garden of Eden than when we are walking with God in a continual *“sacrifice of praise”* (Hebrews 13:15), like Adam who walked with God without sin or shame before the Fall.

We are never more in tune with the happiness of heaven than when our hearts and souls and lives cry out with the angels and the elders and the four living creatures around God's throne:

“Amen! Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God forever and ever. Amen!” - Revelation 7:9-12

Isn't it true that when a sunset takes your breath away, your soul instinctively rises in worship? When an unexpected blessing comes your way, you naturally want to say thank you. When a thousand little graces permeate your day, your heart's reflex is to praise the God who sent them.

The sin that separated us from God may have short-circuited the natural, instinctive flow of worship from our hearts to God's heart. But the loving sacrifice of Jesus redeems our fallen souls, restores our fellowship with God, reverses our self-centeredness, and returns us to the purpose for which we were created, our "chief end," as the Westminster Shorter Catechism phrased it is "to glorify God and to enjoy him forever."

Scriptures

"You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being." - Revelation 4:11

"I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice: 'Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.' All the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures. They fell down on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying: 'Amen! Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God forever and ever. Amen!'" - Revelation 7:9-12

Prayer

Creator God, You are worthy to receive glory and honor and power. You are worthy to receive the highest praise of my heart and life. You are worthy to be praised continually. You are worthy to be thanked for all I have and honored in all I do. You are my King and my God, and I worship you. In the Name of Jesus, Amen.

Simple Step: A Prayer of Praise

Sometime today, spend five minutes admiring God's creative hand in nature. Take a walk, study a tree, pick a flower, watch a bird up close, or revel in the sunrise or sunset. Note your heart's response to the beauty you see in creation. Tell God how you feel about it and how you feel about Him. Date and initial this page when you complete this simple step.

Journal Prompt

Reflect on the last few times you felt sincerely and spontaneously grateful, and record how you responded at those times, and why.

Partner

Share with your partner your thoughts and actions about today's reading and your actions.

Day 3: Begin with Praise

You enter the cavernous concert hall, surrounded by other music lovers. You show your ticket to an usher, who directs you to your row, and you find your seat. The great room is electric with excitement. Your eyes measure the distance from your seat to the stage. It's closer than you expected.

A few musicians wearing black gowns or tuxedos are already seated. Before long, they are joined by others, and soon a delightful cacophony of sound fills the place, as each musician warms up for the program.

Someone enters from the wings with a violin in hand and, standing before the group, plays a single note. That sound is followed by waves of instruments playing the same note. Finally, the conductor enters, and the crowd applauds. He bows. Turns. Raises a baton. And the music begins.

Whether it's your first such experience, or the latest of many, attending a concert by a symphony orchestra is a unique experience. You may hear a concerto or a sonata, an etude or a suite, but the program typically consists of four movements, the first played "*allegro*," a musical notation meaning brisk and lively.

In some ways, worshiping God is like a symphony that begins with praise. Focusing on God's praiseworthy attributes serves to orient your heart and mind like a compass pointing to True North. It will set the tone and the direction for the rest of your prayers, your day, and your life. Like the first movement of a symphony, praising God will pave the way for whatever themes and melodies may follow.

David, the musician-songwriter-giant killer-king, clearly knew this. He is a model of the worshipful heart and life. He began Psalm 8 with the words, "*O LORD, our LORD, how majestic is your name in all the earth!*" (Psalm 8:1). He started Psalm 18 with, "*I love you, O LORD my strength,*" and Psalm 19 with, "*The heavens declare the glory of God.*" The twenty-seventh Psalm opens with the words, "*The LORD is my light and my salvation,*" and Psalm 46 begins, "*God is our refuge and strength, an ever present help in trouble.*" He made "*Great is the Lord, and most worthy of praise*" the first words of Psalm 48, and his masterpiece, his "*magnum opus*," commences with "*The Lord is my Shepherd*" (Psalm 23:1). Worship begins with praise, because praising God's greatness orders the heart and orients the soul. Focusing first on who God is and praising Him for His nature and character affect the sincere heart in four crucial ways:

1. Praising God puts us in our place. Literally. It exalts God and humbles us, which is the ideal attitude for the worshiping heart. Beginning our worship with praise overcomes our native self-centeredness. It helps to overcome the common tendency to view our needs, cares, and ideas as most urgent and most important. It reminds us that nothing is greater than God, not even our needs of the moment.
2. Praise changes our perspective. Truly and sincerely praising the almighty, incomparable God tends to shrink our pain and problems.
3. Praising God's limitless power can also enlarge our vision and dreams, helping us to see that nothing is impossible for God we praise. Praise reminds us that God is God-and we are not. It can eliminate our need to control things and help us submit to God's control, as we realize the truth of Psalm 100:3-5, which says:
4. *“Know that the LORD is God. It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, the sheep of his pasture. Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name. For the LORD is good and his love endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations.”*

Scriptures

“Ascribe to the LORD, you heavenly beings, ascribe to the LORD glory and strength. Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; worship the LORD in the splendor of his holiness. The voice of the LORD is over the waters; the God of glory thunders, the LORD thunders over the mighty waters.”

- Psalm 29:1-3

“Shout for joy to the LORD, all the earth. Worship the LORD with gladness; come before him with joyful songs. Know that the LORD is God. It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, the sheep of his pasture. Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name. For the LORD is good and his love endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations.”

- Psalm 100

Prayer

Heavenly Father, I adore you. I praise you for your almighty power. I praise you for your great glory. I praise you for the splendor of your holiness. I praise you for your mercy and kindness. I praise you with my whole heart. In the Name of Jesus, Amen.

Simple Step: Make a List

On a piece of paper, write down as many names or attributes of God as you can. For fun, see if you can come up with at least one for each letter of the alphabet. Date and initial this page when you complete this simple step.

Journal Prompt

What is your *"praise default"* when your heart turns to praising God? Do you praise Him most often for His power? His love? His grace or His patience? Or for something else? And what (if anything) do you think that *"praise default"* reveals?

Partner

Share with your partner your thoughts and actions about today's reading and your actions.

Day 4: When Your Heart is Grateful

Ann's story is certainly not a fairy tale. It is more like a Shakespearean tragedy. When she was a child, her baby sister chased a cat into a farm lane and was crushed under the wheels of a delivery truck. Unable to cope, her mother checked herself into a psychiatric hospital and her father was never the same. A devastating loss like that can mark a family. A life. A soul. But Ann's story doesn't stop there.

Challenged by a friend, she embarked on a daily task of noticing, listing, and giving thanks for the good things she enjoyed each day, no matter how small or routine. Ann Voskamp's book, *One Thousand Gifts*, in which she tells the story of that challenge and how it changed her life, was an instant best seller. **Gratitude is life-changing.** And it is an integral part of worship.

Some of the psalms written by David, the shepherd-king of Israel are inscribed, stating that they were written in a particular place or a specific period of his life. But Psalm 103 bears no such inscription. So we have no idea when David wrote this psalm of thanks. It may have been when he was celebrating the return of the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem or when he was grieving the death of his infant son.

Maybe he wrote it after Bathsheba gave birth to Solomon or while he was fleeing the murderous hand of his rebellious son Absalom. Perhaps it was composed for a court occasion, such as David's coronation or the beginning of his reign in Hebron. Or it may have originated in Jerusalem, after Judah and Israel were united under David's rule. We just don't know.

Maybe it's better that way. After all, the thanks David expresses in this psalm are appropriate for any occasion—much as gratitude is fitting for good times, bad times, and all times in between. When was the last time you thanked God for forgiving all your sins, healing your diseases, redeeming your life from the pit of hell (or from the pit of depression), or for crowning you with love and compassion? When was the last time you thanked Him for meeting your needs, satisfying your desires, renewing your strength?

David does all those things—in just the first five verses! Yet we, too often, hold back or tone down our thanks because, well, God hasn't yet healed *that* particular ailment or we still desire more than He has so far given us. But, as David says, "*The Lord works righteousness and justice for all the oppressed.*" God is compassionate and gracious all the time. God is slow to anger all the time. God is abounding in love all the time. We have much for which we can be thankful, even in the midst of our darkest moments and our most taxing trials.

An ungrateful heart cannot truly worship, because a worshipful life is a grateful life. Maybe that's why we aren't told just when Psalm 103 was written. Because expressing our gratitude to God should not depend on circumstances. Regardless of what situations we might find ourselves in, God remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself. (See 2 Timothy 2:13.)

The greatness of God's love continues to exceed the highest heavens, and the completeness of His forgiveness still extends as far as the east is from the west. Even the broken heart perhaps, especially the broken heart can give thanks in all circumstances (See 1 Thessalonians 5:18), as Paul the apostle commanded. David did. And Ann Voskamp learned.

Scriptures

“Praise the Lord, my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name. Praise the Lord, my soul, and forget not all his benefits who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion, who satisfies your desires with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagle.”

- Psalm 103:1-5

“Praise the Lord, you his angels, you mighty ones who do his bidding, who obey his word. Praise the Lord, all his heavenly hosts, you his servants who do his will. Praise the Lord, all his works everywhere in his dominion. Praise the Lord, my soul.”

-Psalms 103:20-22

Prayer

Thank You, Lord, for all the blessings I enjoy-those for which I have thanked you repeatedly and those for which I've never thanked you. I thank you for air and my lungs that allow me to breathe. I thank you for the food I eat and the taste buds and sense of smell that enhance my enjoyment. I thank you for your mercies, which are new every morning, your love that is higher than the heavens, and your forgiveness that is wider than the distance from horizon to horizon. Thank You for the mind and spirit and breath with which to thank you. In the Name of Jesus, Amen.

Simple Step: Make a “Thank God” List

Make a list of at least ten things you are thankful for today. When your list is complete, read it out loud to God. Date and initial this page when you complete this simple step.

Journal Prompt

Take a few moments to think about what it is that keeps you from giving thanks. Is it busyness? Hardship? Something else? Take a few moments to jot down your thoughts about those personal impediments to greater gratitude.

Partner

Share with your partner your thoughts and actions about today's reading and your actions.

Day 5: The Joyful Heart

Imagine working your fingers to the bone for your family and fellow citizens, only to be repeatedly rejected by them. Imagine having to sneak around and stay constantly on the move to escape numerous plots against your life. Imagine preaching passionately and lovingly in cities large and small, at your own expense, and having the people of faith in those towns—many of them your own flesh and blood—pursue you, slander you, and even imprison you for your trouble.

Imagine enduring exhausting days and sleepless nights, extreme hunger and thirst, bitter cold and brutal heat, while sacrificing for others, many of whom delight in your suffering. Imagine being mugged by hostile, rowdy mobs and left in the street to die or being deserted by people you thought were your friends.

Imagine being involved in a near-fatal accident while being transported to the capital for a politically-charged trial. Imagine taking charge and saving not only your fellow prisoners but also the guards and government officials traveling with you. And imagine, in spite of your exemplary behavior, being delivered nonetheless to a government prison to await trial. Imagine being broken by years of hardship and suffering, yet continuing to love and pray for all who cross your path.

Does all of that sound to you like a recipe for a worshipful heart? Surprisingly, it is. All these situations were taken from the life of Paul, the great first-century church planter, who endured beatings and betrayals, shipwrecks, suffering, and disappointment for his faith. This is the same Paul who wrote these words from a Roman prison: *"Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!"* (Philippians 4:4).

Paul's admonition reveals the heart of a true worshiper. True worship of the one true God will always be joyful worship. How is that possible? How can almost constant hardship, rejection, and persecution produce joyful worship? Paul goes on to reveal the secret:

"Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable, whatever is excellent or praiseworthy, think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you. I rejoiced greatly in the Lord that at last you renewed your concern for me. Indeed, you were concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it. I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do all this through him who gives me strength." -Philippians 4:6-11

This passage describes the difference between joy and happiness. Joy is a choice. Joy is the overflow of a heart that is focused on God. A joyful heart claims God's promises and focuses on those things that are true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent, and praiseworthy. It gives thanks in every situation and can be content in any circumstance. Joy is both the content and the overflow of a worshiping heart.

Scriptures

Rejoice always, pray continually, and give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

- 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

- Philippians 4:4-7

Prayer

I praise You, God and Father of my Lord Jesus Christ! In Your great mercy, you have given me new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil, or fade. Through faith I am shielded by your power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. In all this, I greatly rejoice, though for now I suffer grief in all kinds of trials. But I rejoice in that, too, for I know that these have come so that the genuineness of my faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire may result in praise, glory, and honor when Jesus Christ is finally and fully revealed—Him whom I love, though I have not seen Him, and Him whom I believe in, and thus am filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for I am receiving the end result of my faith, the salvation of my soul. Amen!

Simple Step: Write a JOYFUL Prayer

Write a prayer to God, using some of the concepts in Philippians 4. Since joy is a choice, identify one circumstance in your life right now where you can *choose* joy, whether or not you *feel* joyful. Tell God about it, and acknowledge that He knows more about your situation than you do. Date and initial this page when you complete this simple step.

Journal Prompt

Take some time to list the things that bring you joy.

Partner

Share with your partner your thoughts and actions about today's reading and your actions.

Day 6: A Lifestyle of Worship

Even in these busy times, people find all sorts of things to do with the moments of their lives. Many people enjoy restoring and showing off their vintage automobiles. You will often see them driving in procession and gathering in parking lots to see and be seen with their coddled cars. Others are model train enthusiasts. They construct elaborate routes through miniature villages, across tiny rivers, and over undersized mountain ranges.

Some people often referred to as "*storm chasers*," monitor weather channels on the radio and often drive great distances in the hope of encountering a tornado or severe storm. Some folks prefer to chase ghosts. They spend their spare time taking weekly or monthly jaunts with protective gear and electronic devices intended to help them detect ghosts, orbs, or paranormal activity. Still others opt for tamer pursuits, such as frequenting yard sales and flea markets, riding as many roller coasters as possible, attending sporting events, or crafting their own jewelry.

People who pursue such fancies are as busy as any of their neighbors. They hold down full-time jobs, raise children, pay their bills, and mow their lawns. They simply find ways to incorporate their passions into the rhythm of their daily lives. Some of the same people attend church. They worship God every week or so. But it apparently never occurs to them that God's good plans for their lives encompasses far more than a weekly dose of worship.

When God delivered His people from slavery in Egypt, He prescribed a pattern for their lives. He commanded a weekly Sabbath, a day of rest and worship and established a series of national festivals for the people to observe. These brought them together for worship every few weeks throughout the year, every year. His people even developed a daily routine of prayers-morning, noon, and night-that integrated well into their agrarian lifestyle.

Very often, our human tendency is to turn romance into routine, and rhythm into meaningless repetition. But worship as God intends it, is not meant to be something we "*check off*" our to-do list. Worship should not be something that is done merely because it is on our schedule. True worship gets into the blood and finds its way into the rhythms of our daily lives.

God did not prescribe a weekly Sabbath for His people in order to fulfill some cold religious duty. The sacred feasts He commanded were never intended to be routine. They were to be touch points that would keep them in a lifestyle of worship, infiltrating and infecting all the moments of their lives.

How does worship become a lifestyle?

Commit to weekly worship with others. Develop and maintain the habit of meeting together with other worshipping followers of Jesus, as Hebrews 10:25 says: "*Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another-and all the more as you see the Day approaching.*"

Schedule fixed times with God. If morning, noon, and night prayer times are impossible, prioritize at least one daily time and place to be alone with God in prayer, Bible reading, and worship.

Find ways for your weekly and daily routine to intersect with your passion for God. Make your morning commute a time to sing God's praises. Pray while exercising or mowing the lawn. Download an inspiring podcast to listen to on your way to pick up the kids from soccer.

Cultivate a habit of unscheduled worship. Turn off the television and radio sometimes so you can listen to God. Let a sunset prompt a prayer of praise or a siren turn your heart to intercessory prayer for the sick and injured. It may take a little practice, but this will soon become a precious habit and turn your everyday life into a lifestyle of worship.

Scriptures

“Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant, nor your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns. For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.”

- Exodus 20:8-11

“Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth.”

- Psalm 46:10

“This is what the Sovereign LORD, the Holy One of Israel, says: “In repentance and rest is your salvation, in quietness and trust is your strength, but you would have none of it.”

- Isaiah 30:15

“Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another and all the more as you see the Day approaching.”

- Hebrews 10:25

Prayer

Almighty God, so much of what I call *“my lifestyle”* happens by mistake or because I've said *“yes”* to so many other things, but I want to live a life of worship. I want my love for you to invade the days between Sundays. I want to be so passionate about loving you back that worship pervades all my moments, all my days. Make me faithful in weekly worship. Help me fix daily times with you and find ways for worship to intersect with the rhythm of my life, so that worship will overflow and spill into unscheduled moments, too. And help me to start now, today. In the Name of Jesus, Amen.

Simple Step: Listen to God

Take four to five minutes in quiet to listen to a favorite worship song from your music collection or on the web, and then pray your response to the song. Also, commit in your heart to attend church this week. Date and initial this page when you complete this simple step.

Journal Prompt

Describe some of the best opportunities for worship in your daily and weekly routine and how, if you haven't already, you could turn them into worship.

Partner

Share with your partner your thoughts and actions about today's reading and your actions.

The Weekly Challenge for Worship

Like a cell phone is wired for communication, we are wired for worship. And worship is important because we were created to give glory to our Maker. The Bible describes a lot of positive habits that help us give God glory. Gathering for weekly worship is the primary, foundational habit, because it's the one that resets our priorities for the week to come. Hebrews 10:24 starts out by saying: *"Let us not give up meeting together."*

So the challenge this week is to commit to attending weekly worship at least for at least the next 40 days. Then you can judge for yourself: Do you feel your life is better lived because you're being refueled by God and doing what He's asked you to do?

Having said that, it's important to know that worship is more than attending church on weekends. It's a verb that describes an action you should engage in with every breath you take. Weekend worship is incredibly important, but from God's perspective, worship is a way of life. Colossians 3:23 says, *"Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as if you were working for the Lord and not for a person."* That's worship.

Romans 12:1 in The Message Translation says: *"Take your everyday, ordinary life, your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around lives and place it before God as an offering (an act of worship)."* That's how you worship!

Therefore, the challenge this week is not only to commit to coming to weekly worship every weekend, but also to develop a daily worship lifestyle. We were made to do it and God asks us to do it. In view of who God is and all that God has done for us, how could we do any less?

Small-Group Study and Discussion Questions

For use by small-groups after the Week 2 readings on the topic of **Worship**. Below is a complete list of small-group study and discussion questions that will cover some of the important themes for this week.

In order to stay within the time limits of your small-group meeting, your small-group leader will choose what questions he or she wants your group to focus on. You will need to bring your guide with you to your small-group meeting. Please use this agenda to guide your meeting:

40 Day Challenge Small Group Meeting Agenda (Small Groups should meet for a minimum of 90 min.)

<i>Time: 90 min</i>		
	<i>Agenda Item</i>	<i>Time</i>
	1. Welcome & Opening Prayer	3 min.
	2. Identify Timekeeper and Share Ground Rules	5 min.
	3. Icebreaker	20 min.
	4. Bible Study-Small Group Study & Discussion Questions	40 min.
	5. Announcements	5 min.
	6. Celebrations (Answered Prayers, New Job, Birthdays, Anniversaries, Promotions, New Homes, New Babies, etc)	10 min.
	7. Prayer Requests & Closing Prayer	5 min.

1. **Icebreaker:** Go around the room asking everyone to briefly answer this question: When is the last time you were speechless or awestruck by something?

2. **Bible Study:** Read Psalms 150.

3. Psalm 150 is the "*grand finale*" of the Bible's collection of psalms. Why do you think it might have been chosen as the final psalm?

4. Verse 1 says, "Praise the Lord" [Hallelu Yah] and then "Praise God" [Hallelu El]. "Hallelu Yah" occurs many times in the psalms, but this is the first place we see "Hallelu El." Can you think of any reasons for the songwriter to use "Yah" in the first phrase and "El" in the second?

5. Which verses in this psalm suggest **where** to worship? Which answer the question of **why** we worship? Which mention **how** to worship? And which discuss **who** should worship?

6. Of verses 3-5, St. Augustine wrote, *"No kind of faculty is here omitted. All are enlisted in praising God."* How are the following faculties employed in worship as depicted in verses 3-5?

- a. Breath
- b. Fingers
- c. Hand
- d. Feet
- e. Arms
- f. Legs
- g. Hips
- h. Ears
- i. Eyes

7. How many times does the word "praise" (hallelu) appear in this psalm? Do you think there is any significance to that number? Why or why not?

8. This past week's readings in the 40 Day Challenge mentioned a few key ingredients of worship such as praise, thanks, and joy. Do any of those come more naturally to you than the others? If so, why do you think that is?

9. This past week's readings in the 40 Day Challenge also talked about cultivating a *"lifestyle of worship,"* in which *"your everyday, ordinary life-your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking around life"* is placed before God as an offering. (See Romans 12:1, MSG.) Have you ever tried to do that? If so, how?

10. Do you think God is prompting you to expand your worship, so that it isn't something that happens exclusively on the weekends? If so, how do you think you can do that? Name something you will do this week to worship God with your life. Close in prayer.