

A STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE FOR
PASTORS AND LEADERSHIP TEAMS

— DAYS 50-100 —

100 DAYS

— TO A —

HEALTHIER

CHURCH

DEVOTIONAL GUIDE

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INTRODUCTION

This devotional is a companion to the book *100 Days to a Healthier Church*, by Karl Vaters. Like the book, the principles laid out here are not one-time, quick-fix solutions. They are long-term principles—nudges, not jumps. It's about being the tortoise, not the hare. It is divided into four main steps over 14 weeks. It works best when it starts on a Saturday, so this devotional is designed with that in mind.

HOW TO GET STARTED

This will be the first day of what will be a new experience for many participants—a daily devotional with a specific goal. The idea is to use every one of the 100 Days to build principle upon principle, without overburdening everyone with meetings, but actually using it as a time to slow down, ponder, reflect, and consider where God wants to take His church.

The pattern for the daily devotional is as follows:

- **FIND A SPECIFIC TIME AND PLACE TO SET ASIDE 15-30 MINUTES.**
- **DO IT AS EARLY IN THE DAY AS POSSIBLE (IF YOU HAVE TO GET UP EARLIER THAN USUAL, IT WILL BE WORTH IT).**
- **TAKE A MOMENT TO QUIET YOURSELF AND ASK GOD TO SPEAK TO YOU.**
- **READ TODAY'S BIG IDEA.**
- **READ THE KEY VERSE.**
- **FIND AND READ THE PASSAGE OF THE DAY IN YOUR BIBLE (IT WILL PUT THE KEY VERSE IN CONTEXT).**
- **READ THE THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER ABOUT THE PASSAGE.**
- **USE A JOURNAL TO RECORD YOUR THOUGHTS, FEELING AND PRAYERS.**

STEP 3
TRAIN THE TEAM

“And each one of you is a part of it.”

1 Corinthians 12:27

EXPAND YOUR LEADERSHIP CIRCLE

DAY 50 (FIRST ALL-TEAM BIG SATURDAY)

TODAY'S BIG IDEA: What Kind of Church Are We? Today's Key verse and Passage of the Day are the same—the entirety of 1 Corinthians 12:12–31.

KEY VERSE: “Just as a body, though, one has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. ¹³For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. ¹⁴Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many. ¹⁵Now if the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. ¹⁶And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. ¹⁷If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? ¹⁸But in fact God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. ¹⁹If they were all one part, where would the body be? ²⁰As it is, there are many parts, but one body.

²¹The eye cannot say to the hand, “I don’t need you!” And the head cannot say to the feet, “I don’t need you!” ²²On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, ²³and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, ²⁴while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has put the body together, giving greater honor to the parts that lacked it, ²⁵so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. ²⁶If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.

²⁷Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. ²⁸And God has placed in the church first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, of helping, of guidance, and of different kinds of tongues. ²⁹Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? ³⁰Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? ³¹Now eagerly desire the greater gifts. And yet I will show you the most excellent way.” (1 Corinthians 12:12–31).

PASSAGE OF THE DAY: 1 Corinthians 12:12–31

THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER: In the coming week, we’ll be looking at this passage one piece at a time. For today, just read it, sit with it and prepare your heart to spend the next seven days in it.

DAY 51 (SUNDAY)

TODAY'S BIG IDEA: One body with many parts. If you're new to this team and this is your first devotional day with us, welcome! You'll find each day to be short, biblical, practical, and applicable to the task at hand—helping the church you serve become healthier in the next 50 Days.

KEY VERSE: *Just as a body, though, one has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ (1 Corinthians 12:12).*

PASSAGE OF THE DAY: 1 Corinthians 12:12–31

THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER: Our Passage of the Day is really the Passage of the Week. Every day, we'll use this passage to learn how we, the Church, can work together under the Lordship of Christ. Today's Key Verse tells us that the Church of Jesus exists in both unity and harmony. Like your physical body has hands, legs, feet, blood cells, nerves, and a heart, the body called the Church has different parts, too. While each body part does a different task, they all do something important, united under the head—that is Christ. We're not all the same. We're not supposed to be. But we all serve the body. *Take some time to reflect on and pray about your part in the body and to thank the Lord that no one else serves quite the way you do.*

DAY 52

On Day 17, the members of the Church Leadership Team (those who have been in this process since Day 1) were asked to remember and write down how they felt and what they thought about the church at the start of this process. Today, new members of the Project Teams are encouraged to do the same. If you're a member of the CLT, let your team members know you're available to them as they work through this process like you did.

TODAY'S BIG IDEA: Don't despise your role. Have you ever felt unimportant because you don't have the same role as someone else in the church, like a teacher, a worship leader, or the pastor? Today is the day to give those feelings to Jesus.

KEY VERSE: Now if the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” it would not for that reason stop being part of the body (1 Corinthians 12:15).

PASSAGE OF THE DAY: 1 Corinthians 12:12–31

THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER: It’s an interesting picture the apostle Paul draws here, isn’t it? Imagine one of your feet thinking it’s not of any value because it’s not a hand. The sad reality is, we do that in the church. But in Christ’s church no gift is more important than any other, which means the reverse is also true—no gift is less important than any other.

Jesus made you as you are. There’s no unimportant part of the body. There may be some parts that are less visible, but they all matter to Jesus—and they all matter in His church. You matter.

DAY 53

TODAY’S BIG IDEA: Don’t despise the roles of others. As we saw yesterday, we can easily despise the role we play in the church. And if we don’t deal with those feelings in a healthy, biblical way we often turn those toxic feelings outward to others.

KEY VERSE: The eye cannot say to the hand, “I don’t need you!” And the head cannot say to the feet, “I don’t need you!” On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable (1 Corinthians 12:21–22).

PASSAGE OF THE DAY: 1 Corinthians 12:12–31

THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER: You are “indispensable.” I didn’t say that, the Bible does. So is every other part of the body of Christ, known as the church. In fact, like the human body, the parts that seem weakest and most vulnerable are often the most important for the functioning of a healthy body. Have you ever looked at someone else’s role in the church and devalued them? “They’re too young to matter.” “They’re too old to be relevant.” “They have different theological positions from mine so they must not be a mature Christian—maybe they’re not a Christian at all!” The truth is, only God knows the heart. It’s not our job to judge others—it’s our command to love them. You’re indispensable. They’re indispensable. Loving one another is indispensable.

DAY 54

TODAY'S BIG IDEA: Value the roles of others. When was the last time you went out of your way to thank someone in the church who does something behind the scenes?

KEY VERSE: God has put the body together, giving greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other (1 Corinthians 12:24–25).

PASSAGE OF THE DAY: 1 Corinthians 12:12–31

THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER: God despises division in the church. One of the biggest causes of division is when we don't value the role everyone plays in the body. This is especially true of people who serve in areas that aren't as visible as others. The pastor and worship leader get thanked a lot (and criticized, too). But what about the person running the sound board? The only time we even think about them is when something goes wrong. Before leaving this devotional, think about someone in your church who works behind the scenes and take a moment to thank them. Right now. Send them a text, an email, or give them a phone call.

Did you do it? Great! You may now get on with the rest of your day.

DAY 55

TODAY'S BIG IDEA: Value your role. You matter. Yes, you.

KEY VERSE: Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it (1 Corinthians 12:27).

PASSAGE OF THE DAY: 1 Corinthians 12:12–31

THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER: The word you appears twice in today's Key Verse. The first one is a plural, like when my southern friends say, "y'all" or "all y'all." It refers to the church as a gathered group.

The second “you” is singular—as in just you, by yourself. Both you matter. When we gather on Sunday to worship, fellowship and minister together, we are the body of Christ. When you’re all alone on Monday, or perhaps in an environment that’s neutral, even hostile to the gospel, you are just as much a part of the body. We are always connected to each other through Christ’s body. Never forget that and be grateful.

DAY 56 (SABBATH)

A quick note for those who are new to these daily devotionals. Today’s your day off. For one day every week, we take a Sabbath like God commanded in the Ten Commandments. It’s your day to rest, slow down, and do something else. Certainly, you should still spend time in God’s Word and prayer, but for this day, we give everyone a break from thinking and working on the 100 Days to a Healthier Church process.

We’ll see you tomorrow!

ADJUST THE PLAN

DAY 57 (SATURDAY)

TODAY'S BIG IDEA: Something new is happening. This week, we'll spend every day in a different portion of a single story—the extraordinary story of Peter and Cornelius in Acts 10. This passage deserves so much time at this spot in the 100-Day process because it was a watershed moment for change in the early church. In this chapter, a new need arises, God proposes a change, and Peter adapts to meet those needs under God's guidance. It's hard to imagine a situation more suited to what we're hoping to accomplish over the next 40+ days together.

KEY VERSE: At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion in what was known as the Italian Regiment. He and all his family were devout and God-fearing; he gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly (Acts 10:1-2).

PASSAGE OF THE DAY: Acts 10:1-8

THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER: Cornelius was a gentile, but not just any gentile—he was a Roman. And Cornelius was a soldier, a centurion, the commander of an entire regiment. There was no one other than Caesar himself who the average Jew would have considered more ungodly or unclean. But Cornelius was a generous, prayerful, God-fearing man, and God wanted Cornelius and his household to know about Jesus. So God sent an angel to tell Cornelius to seek out a man named Peter.

If it feels like changes are coming too fast in your church, try to imagine how big the changes were that were about to hit Peter and the early church. Cornelius was coming! And God had sent him. In some ways, it would have been less confusing if Cornelius had sent his regiment to arrest Peter than sending servants with an invitation to dinner.

As you ponder this passage, ask yourself, what's happening with the people like Cornelius who live near your church. There always are such people—good, generous, prayerful folks who don't know

where to go. If God isn't guiding them to your church for their next steps of spiritual growth, why not? What can you and your church do to make yourselves available?

DAY 58 (SUNDAY)

TODAY'S BIG IDEA: God changes Peter's mindset. Before God does something big, He tells His people about it. That was certainly the case in the story of Cornelius and Peter. If we're constantly surprised, angry, or resistant when God does something new, we're not listening when He tells us He's about to change our mindset.

KEY VERSE: "Do not call anything impure that God has made clean" (Acts 10:15).

PASSAGE OF THE DAY: Acts 10:9–16

THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER: Peter was staying at a friend's house when he decided to go up on the roof for some prayer time. While there, he had a strange vision. Three times, a sheet came down in front of him filled with animals that every Jew knew were unclean. But each time, a voice said "Get up, Peter. Kill and eat." Surely, Peter must have thought, this is a temptation from the devil, not a command from God. So he refused the command. But the command was from God.

Like our Jewish friends, church folks have a way of functioning. And, also like them, we've been taught that keeping close to those traditions is one of the ways we honor God. But when new people come to faith in Christ, then show up at church, some of those traditions are challenged. Are we willing to accept changes when God brings them—especially when they come in the form of new believers who need our help and patience, not our judgment and stubbornness? Or are we going to keep calling things impure that God has said are pure? Consider that today. But don't worry. Making God-ordained changes doesn't lead to losing the essentials that should never change. Before our week together is done, we'll see that very clearly from Peter's story.

DAY 59

TODAY'S BIG IDEA: Peter doesn't hesitate to obey God. When Jesus walked with His disciples, Peter

was always the one who ran faster than everyone else—sometimes faster than Jesus, with really bad consequences. But what does the former hothead do in his later, wiser years when God asks him to move faster than he's ready for?

KEY VERSE: While Peter was still thinking about the vision, the Spirit said to him, “Simon, three men are looking for you. So get up and go downstairs. Do not hesitate to go with them, for I have sent them” (Acts 10:19–20).

PASSAGE OF THE DAY: Acts 10:7–23

THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER: “Do not hesitate,” God tells Peter. For a lot of folks, myself included, that may be the hardest part of God's command. Really? I don't get to think this through for a while? No. Not this time, anyway. Once Peter knew it was God's will, his only choice was to do it without delay. Most of the time, the Lord gives us a long season to reflect, consider, and ponder His will. But sometimes there's an urgency to it. Once you know, it's time to go.

Do you have anything holding you back from moving forward, either on your own or as a team? If so, what do you need to do to surrender those doubts and fears to God and take a bold step of obedience?

DAY 60

TODAY'S BIG IDEA: God's will defies our expectations. What is God going to do next? The only sure thing is that it won't be what you expect.

KEY VERSE: “God has shown me that I should not call anyone impure or unclean. So when I was sent for, I came without raising any objection” (Acts 10:28–29).

PASSAGE OF THE DAY: Acts 10:24–33

THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER: Almost everything about Cornelius' story sends up red flags. When Peter walks into his house, Cornelius bows before him like he's a god—because that's what pagans did.

Then Peter reminds him that this simple house visit goes against everything he was raised knowing, because “You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with or visit a Gentile.” But when Cornelius answers Peter’s question, “May I ask why you sent for me?” with such a miraculous story of how God spoke to him, Peter couldn’t deny it.

When God showed up to do something new, Peter’s expectations had to be set aside. How about you and your church? Are there any expectations God may be asking you to set aside? Are they new ways unlike the ways God has worked with you in the past? If so, are you willing to follow God, even if it means doing something you didn’t expect?

DAY 61

TODAY’S BIG IDEA: Peter’s mind and heart are changed. Change is hard. Especially for people like Peter (and maybe you) who have spent most or all of their lives serving God in one specific way. It can be hard to serve God in a new way, with new people. But all that matters is that we’re serving Him.

KEY VERSE: “I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right” (Acts 10:34–35).

PASSAGE OF THE DAY: Acts 10:30–43

THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER: Note what Peter did and did not change his mind on. He accepted the monumental changes God had proposed, but he recognized they were based on foundational truths that never change. In verses 36–43, Peter described the events of Jesus’ life, crucifixion, and resurrection and how they fulfilled Old Testament prophecy. This was probably the first time the Romans gathered at Cornelius’s home had heard any of this.

Changing our minds about long-held ideas doesn’t mean losing our faith. If we’re making the changes God is leading us to make, they will strengthen our faith. What might God be challenging you with? Are you willing listen to God saying something you’ve never heard before and respond in ways you never acted before? If so, God will do something He’s never done before.

DAY 62

TODAY'S BIG IDEA: God astonishes his people. God wants to show up in our lives, and He wants to do it through your church body in an astonishing way.

KEY VERSE: While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message. The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on Gentiles (Acts 10:44–45).

PASSAGE OF THE DAY: Acts 10:44–48

THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER: It turns out Peter wasn't the only visitor Cornelius had that day. Peter had some traveling companions. When they saw that the Holy Spirit was being poured out "even on Gentiles," they were "astonished."

God wants to astonish us again. Are you ready to be astonished? If not, why not? Perhaps the only thing more astonishing than the new thing God wants to do is a church that doesn't want to be astonished by God. May that never be true of us. May God astonish us again.

DAY 63 (SABBATH)

WEEKS 10-11
GET READY

DAY 64 (SATURDAY)

TODAY'S BIG IDEA: Leadership lessons from the life of Paul. The apostle Paul is one of the great figures not just in the Bible, but in world history. After having one of the most dramatic conversions stories ever known, he goes from being the leading persecutor of Christians to being the leading promoter of faith in Jesus. In addition to his faithful life and his foundational writings, Paul's life and ministry are also a great example of what we're doing during these 100 Days—leadership through a time of church transition.

This week, we're going to look at six episodes from Paul's life from the book of Acts to see how we can become better leaders in the church, just as Paul was.

KEY VERSE: "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them" (Acts 13:2).

PASSAGE OF THE DAY: Acts 13:1–13

THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER: The apostle Paul didn't start out as the apostle Paul. He began as the traveling companion of Barnabas. Barnabas was one of the greatest of the early disciples. His real name was Joseph, but the other disciples called him Barnabas, meaning "son of encouragement" (Acts 4:36). Barnabas was Saul's mentor. He was the one who convinced the other disciples to receive Saul after his conversion (Acts 9:27), and, after being sent to Antioch to determine if the revival there was legitimate, he brought Paul from Tarsus to mentor him (Acts 11–12).

What we commonly call Paul's first missionary journey was actually Barnabas' missionary journey, with Paul as his traveling companion (Acts 13:1–3). But not long after they started out, Paul's ministry became so effective that it appears Barnabas willingly stepped aside to let Paul lead instead of him. Though the Bible never states this outright, it becomes apparent by several pieces of evidence including the fact that, instead of being called "Barnabas and Saul" as they were when they started out (Acts 13:2), they were later listed as "Paul and Barnabas" (Acts 13:42) or "Paul and

his companions” (Acts 13:13). In their culture, the order of names indicates a subtle, but important shift, signifying a change in leadership.

Few people ever lay aside leadership as readily as Barnabas did. But that’s what we should be willing to do when we realize all our leadership roles are always under Christ’s authority, anyway. What does this lesson from Barnabas and Paul say to you about your role in the church? Are you willing to step into leadership, like Paul, when it’s your time? Are you willing to step aside, like Barnabas, when that’s what’s needed? If we really see Jesus as the ultimate leader, we’ll be willing to serve or lead whenever and wherever He asks.

DAY 65 (SUNDAY)

TODAY’S BIG IDEA: Paul builds on a solid foundation. Following the Lord as He does something new does not mean rejecting the foundational principles that got you where you are.

KEY VERSE: “We tell you the good news: What God promised our ancestors he has fulfilled for us, their children, by raising up Jesus” (Acts 13:32–33).

PASSAGE OF THE DAY: Acts 13:14–52

THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER: The apostle Paul was doing something so new and radical by following Jesus that most of his Jewish contemporaries couldn’t go along with it. But that didn’t surprise Paul, since he felt the same way until the resurrected Jesus knocked him to the ground and changed his mind and heart. So whenever Paul brought the message of Jesus to a new town, he started on familiar territory—in the synagogue, reading from the Hebrew scriptures. From that foundation, he showed how Jesus’ message, though revolutionary, wasn’t a shift from the scriptures but a fulfillment of them.

As you consider the current process of change, it’s easy to get your eyes on the new things and either be excited by them or angry at them. Instead of focusing on these changes, it’s essential to keep our focus on God’s will. Are we building on biblical principles? If not, it’s time to renew our commitment to God and His Word. If so, say “no” to fear and step out in faith.

DAY 66

TODAY'S BIG IDEA: The humble leader. Leaders are not dictators. Dictators are only concerned about themselves. Leaders are concerned for the people they're leading.

KEY VERSE: The crowd wanted to offer sacrifices to them. But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of this, they tore their clothes and rushed out into the crowd, shouting: "Friends, why are you doing this? We too are only human, like you" (Acts 4:13-15).

PASSAGE OF THE DAY: Acts 14:8-28

THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER: God performed such extraordinary miracles through the ministry of Paul and Barnabas that in some towns the population treated them as gods. But Paul and Barnabas put a stop to it as soon as they realized it was happening. Paul and Barnabas went back to Antioch, from where they had been commissioned to make this trip, to report to the disciples who were in authority over them.

It's an essential principle of scripture that no church leader should ever be the final authority. Not only should we not allow ourselves to be treated as gods, but we should all be under the authority of someone else. This is an essential aspect of the biblically humble leader. As you contemplate your leadership role in the church, are you willing to walk under authority as much as you're willing to be in authority?

DAY 67

TODAY'S BIG IDEA: There are no part-time ministers. Are you a full-time paid pastor? No? Your ministry is still essential.

KEY VERSE: Paul went to see them, and because he was a tentmaker as they were, he stayed and worked with them (Acts 18:2-3).

PASSAGE OF THE DAY: Acts 18:1–4

THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER: There's a common misconception that to be a "real" minister, you need to have a full-time job in the church. But most ministers throughout history have not made a living wage from ministry, including the apostle Paul. While he did receive occasional gifts, the primary way Paul earned money was not from ministry, but from making tents (Philippians 4:15–18). It's not that Paul thought it was wrong to receive compensation for ministry duties. In fact, he argued strongly that it was his right to do so (1 Corinthians 9:1–19). But he turned down that right and made his living as a tentmaker so that "in preaching the gospel I may offer it free of charge, and so not make full use of my rights as a preacher of the gospel" (1 Corinthians 9:18).

Despite the fact that the church wasn't paying him, no one would have referred to Paul as a part-time minister. The idea that any believer was a part-time minister was completely foreign to the early disciples, and it should be foreign to us. If you're a believer, your first call is to worship, serve, and minister. It's not something to do on the side. Even if you don't get to spend a lot of time in efforts you'd consider ministry-oriented, every aspect of your life should be offered in worship and ministry.

DAY 68

TODAY'S BIG IDEA: Managing your time well. Leaders know how to manage their schedules well. In today's passage, we see an example of how the apostle Paul prioritized his time.

KEY VERSE: Paul had decided to sail past Ephesus to avoid spending time in the province of Asia, for he was in a hurry to reach Jerusalem, if possible, by the day of Pentecost (Acts 20:16).

PASSAGE OF THE DAY: Acts 20:13–38

THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER: Today's passage records an episode in the life of Paul we usually rush right past, but it actually says a lot about his leadership. As Paul was heading back to Jerusalem, he had to head into port for a few days to rest and take on supplies. The most obvious port in the area was

Ephesus. It made sense for a lot of reasons, including the fact that Paul had many friends there. But today's Key Verse specifically says he "decided to sail past Ephesus." Instead, he landed in the nearby small town of Miletus. Why? The passage says, "to avoid spending time" in the province where Ephesus was located.

There are times in leadership when we have an urgent, time-sensitive task at hand. While serving God's people is central to ministry, sometimes we have to sail past places and people who will cost us too much of our limited time and energy so we can do what we're called to do. This shouldn't be our default—and it wasn't Paul's normal routine. But if there are time-sensitive tasks we need to get to, it's okay to avoid time-draining relationships for a season in order to get the task done.

As we get closer to Project Day, the sense of urgency will only increase. That urgency should never induce panic, but it will require proper time-management and prioritization. This is not unchristian. It is an essential aspect of wise leadership.

DAY 69

TODAY'S BIG IDEA: Planning to give. Giving is central to the Christian life because it is central to the character of God. In fact, giving is important enough that it's worth planning for.

KEY VERSE: On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with your income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made (1 Corinthians 16:2).

PASSAGE OF THE DAY: 1 Corinthians 16:1–4

THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER: One of the great, forgotten stories of the New Testament is something the apostle Paul called "the collection for the Lord's people." Everywhere he went, Paul told the churches to start a collection of funds to help the persecuted church in Jerusalem (1 Corinthians 16:1–4; 2 Corinthians 8:1–9:15; Romans 15:14–32). In fact, this is why Paul was in a hurry to arrive in Jerusalem by the Day of Pentecost, as mentioned in the narrative about sailing past Ephesus. Paul told the churches he worked among to collect money every week when they gathered and not

to wait until he arrived. Why? Because he knew that planned, purposeful, consistent giving will yield more benefits than a last-minute emotional appeal. This is another example of why planning is not unspiritual but one of the ways we practice good stewardship. As you and your team work toward a goal, keep this in mind. If something is worth doing, it's worth planning well.

DAY 70 (SABBATH)

DAY 71 (SATURDAY)

Today is the last Saturday without a scheduled meeting. Again, it has been left open so you can use it for Project Team meetings, if needed.

TODAY'S BIG IDEA: Built on the Rock. This coming week, as we continue to work on our team projects, we're going to explore some Bible passages that convey important biblical principles about planning, building, and preparing.

KEY VERSE: "Everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock" (Matthew 7:24).

PASSAGE OF THE DAY: Matthew 7:21–29

THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER: In this passage, Jesus contrasts two builders—a wise one who builds their house on the rock and a foolish one who builds their house on sand. But no one builds a house in the middle of the sand, right? Actually, people do, especially in the Middle East, where Jesus taught. It's the desert, so sand is everywhere! So what is Jesus talking about here? You can build a house in the middle of the sand but still anchor it to the rock.

Take a look at the culture around you. Sand is everywhere—shifting values and beliefs that change from year to year, if not from day to day. Just like any house you build in the desert will have sand all around it, any ministry you build will have sand all around it. But you don't have to anchor yourself to the sand. Churches are built within neighborhoods, communities, and cultures that are constantly shifting around us like sand. But even while we live and minister in that desert, we can stay anchored to the rock. We just have to dig a little deeper.

As you work toward building a stronger church, don't be tempted to chase after the latest fads or stay stuck in stale traditions. That's sand. Dig one level deeper to find Jesus again, and anchor everything in Him.

DAY 72 (SUNDAY)

TODAY'S BIG IDEA: God shows up in His new temple. Why are we so surprised when God shows up? Isn't that what we want and what we're praying for? But when He does, He changes everything. He sure did on the Day of Pentecost.

KEY VERSE: "We hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!" Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, "What does this mean?" (Acts 2:11-12)

PASSAGE OF THE DAY: Acts 2:1-13

THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER: This amazing event did not take place in the upper room. Acts 5:42 tells us the disciples spent their days in the temple courts. So on the Day of Pentecost, God showed up in courts of the old temple to make the believers His new temple. After all, a temple is the place where God lives. When God lives in us, we're a temple. The temple is no longer a place, it's a people. Observers on the day of Pentecost watched this happen and wondered, "What does this mean?" We might ask the same question. What does it mean when we realize we are the temple where God's Spirit dwells? How does that affect what we emphasize when we think of church? Are we treating ourselves and others the way the temple of God should be treated?

DAY 73

TODAY'S BIG IDEA: A spiritual house. Living stones—now there's an image. There's nothing more dead than a stone, so a stone come to life is truly a miracle.

KEY VERSE: You also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ (1 Peter 2:5).

PASSAGE OF THE DAY: 1 Peter 2:4–10

THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER: Peter uses the metaphor of living stones on purpose. In the Old Testament, God met his people in a single geological location, the temple—specifically in the holiest of holies, between the cherubim above the ark of the covenant. This place was so holy that only the High Priest could go into it on one day a year—Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16). So the temple was a holy place, but it was also an exclusive place. God was there, but He was separate from the people.

After the Day of Pentecost, all that changed. Now God lives in us, not in a static temple built with stones that you might travel to once a year for atonement. What does it mean to you when you consider yourselves living stones in the spiritual house Jesus is building?

DAY 74

TODAY'S BIG IDEA: Gathered as a temple. Now that God the Holy Spirit lives in every believer, we have Him with us everywhere, at all times, and that should never be treated lightly.

KEY VERSE: In Him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in Him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by His Spirit (Ephesians 2:21–22).

PASSAGE OF THE DAY: Ephesians 2:11–22

THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER: On the Day of Pentecost, God showed up at His physical temple to make us His spiritual temple. From this day forward, God's presence would no longer be restricted to a physical location—not to a single temple or even multiple church buildings. When we're alone and need to know God is there and when we're gathered in His name, He is present in and with us.

DAY 75

TODAY'S BIG IDEA: Your body, a temple. Temples are places of worship, but we don't worship the temple, we worship the God who lives there.

KEY VERSE: Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies (1 Corinthians 6:19–20).

PASSAGE OF THE DAY: 1 Corinthians 6:12–20

THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER: The information in the verse today is almost overwhelmed by the attitude of Paul as he delivers it. “Don't you know?” he asks, as if he's shocked that this isn't obvious to them. He's not informing them that they're God's temple, he's reminding them of it and reprimanding them for not acting like temples should act—that is, by honoring the God who lives there. That is the purpose of a temple after all. It exists to honor the deity who lives in it, not to serve the priests who work there.

We, as God's people, are not our own. Our bodies are not ours to do with as we please. We serve the One who lives in us, and everything we do should honor Him. In this passage, Paul indelicately says we shouldn't join those bodies with prostitutes, which was an apparent problem in Corinth. But more than just abstaining from such evil acts, we should ask ourselves every day, “Is the way I'm treating my body the way I want to treat the home where a holy God lives?”

DAY 76

TODAY'S BIG IDEA: Working together in God's field, God's building. An untended field doesn't grow crops, it grows weeds. We're called to produce crops.

KEY VERSE: The one who plants and the one who waters have one purpose, and they will each be rewarded

according to their own labor. For we are co-workers in God's service; you are God's field, God's building (1 Corinthians 3:8-9).

PASSAGE OF THE DAY: 1 Corinthians 3:6-17

THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER: Paul wrote this passage to scold the church in Corinth because groups in the church were competing on the basis of which leader they liked better (and you thought your church fought over petty things!). But Paul reminds them we're all in this together. One plants, one waters, but as any farmer knows, no one goes out into the field at night and pulls on the plants to make them grow. The growing is up to God.

In this passage, Paul uses three separate metaphors for the church in a span of twelve words. We are co-workers, we are God's field, and we are God's building. So which is it? We're all three. In other words, we have a lot to do to help the church produce a healthy harvest. And others have a role that nourishes you. Humility is the key.

DAY 77 (SABBATH)

STEP 4
IMPLEMENT THE PLAN

“His divine power has given
us everything we need.”

2 Peter 1:3

BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER

THE FOURTH AND FINAL STEP IN THE 100-DAYS PROCESS IS TO IMPLEMENT THE PLAN.

If your project is to launch a new program or different way of doing ministry, this is when you'll start. If your project involves a big event, this is when that will take place. If you're cutting back or consolidating ministries, this is when you'll make those adjustments.

Because there are so many types of projects that a church might launch, there's little I can tell you about the specific one your church has chosen. But this step is part of the 100-Day plan—not because you need detailed instructions, but to make sure your church actually follows through by accomplishing whatever thing you say you're going to do.

DAY 78

TODAY'S BIG IDEA: All we need. Only God knows what we really need, so we can trust Him to provide it.

KEY VERSE: His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness (2 Peter 1:3).

PASSAGE OF THE DAY: 2 Peter 1:1–11

THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER: “His divine power has given us everything we need.” That everything sure covers a lot of territory, doesn't it? But take a look at the rest of the verse. That power is given for a specific purpose. It's everything we need for a godly life. The idea that God is a magic genie who will empower and enrich us because we say the right words is profoundly unbiblical. God's limitless power is to be used for His purpose, not ours.

If you want to live a godly life, you'll find all the help you need by getting to know Jesus more. It's

“our knowledge of Him” that will give us all we need—in our lives and in our church.

DAY 79 (SUNDAY)

TODAY'S BIG IDEA: Jesus, the mentor. No one in history mentored people better than Jesus. This week, as we continue to work with our team projects, we're going to look at Jesus' mentoring process through the sending of the seventy-two.

KEY VERSE: “No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God” (Luke 9:62).

PASSAGE OF THE DAY: Luke 9:57–62

THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER: Before we look at the sending of the seventy-two in Luke 10, it's important to consider the context. Jesus had been ministering for about two years when He started what is called His third (and final) Galilean tour. Before the tour started, the buzz from His previous tour through the region was already attracting a lot of hangers-on. In today's passage, three different people came to Jesus claiming they wanted to follow Him, but each was given a challenge that at least two of them were unable to meet.

Jesus doesn't want fans, He wants disciples—followers who won't give up when things get hard. What kind of follower are you? This is a question all believers must ask themselves. Would we stay with Jesus if the cost became really high? Because it might. That's who Jesus wants, disciples who will stick with Him, no matter what.

DAY 80

TODAY'S BIG IDEA: Jesus, the equipper. Once we choose to follow Jesus with all our heart and life, we need to be equipped because we're going to get an assignment.

KEY VERSE: After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them two-by-two ahead of him to every town and place where he was about to go (Luke 10:1).

PASSAGE OF THE DAY: Luke 10:1–9

THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER: Jesus had more than the twelve followers who were His closest confidants. There were crowds that came and went as well. But in between the twelve and the crowds there was a group of seventy-two people (some translations say it was seventy) that followed Jesus closely enough to have been mentored by Him. They had walked with Jesus, observed His behavior, and sat under His training. Then Jesus sent them out two-by-two, as advance teams to towns where Jesus was planning to minister.

It's important to understand that as much as Jesus was entirely led by the Spirit, it didn't stop Him from planning, mentoring, delegating, and assessing the work. This is why we plan, train, and work in teams in the church. We need each other.

DAY 81

TODAY'S BIG IDEA: When things go wrong. Just because Jesus approves of our plans doesn't mean they will go perfectly. But when there is a problem, Jesus knows how to fix it.

KEY VERSE: “But when you enter a town and are not welcomed, go into its streets and say, ‘Even the dust of your town we wipe from our feet as a warning to you’” (Luke 10:10–11).

PASSAGE OF THE DAY: Luke 10:10–16

THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER: Jesus knew His life on earth would be ending soon, so He wanted to make the most of the time He had left. The seventy-two were being sent to towns so Jesus wouldn't waste His limited time in places that weren't ready to hear His message. Jesus knew some towns would fail this test of readiness, so He gave his followers instructions about what to do when things went bad. They were told to shake the dust off their feet—a symbolic way of saying, “I'm done with you.” This is a helpful practice for any endeavor. Don't dwell on your defeats. Don't wallow in your failures. Shake off the dust and keep walking.

DAY 82

TODAY'S BIG IDEA: Assessing and prioritizing. No task is completed until it has been properly assessed so we can learn from it.

KEY VERSE: “However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven” (Luke 10:20).

PASSAGE OF THE DAY: Luke 10:17–20

THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER: When the seventy-two were done with their advance tour, they came back and reported their findings to Jesus. With amazement, some of them told Jesus, “Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name.” Jesus acknowledged this was wonderful news then reminded them not to get diverted from the main task, even by such spectacular events. The Key Verse reminds them and us that a great church service, even one in which there is an obvious manifestation of spiritual battles being won, is not as important as souls being brought into the Kingdom.

Take a moment today to pause, think, and pray. Are you perhaps in danger of being so busy or so happy with what’s happening in your church that it might divert your attention from the main task—reaching people for Jesus? If so, take some time to reflect and renew your commitment to keep focused on the main thing.

DAY 83

TODAY'S BIG IDEA: Responding with gratefulness. Prayer requests are interesting. We can spend weeks, months, even years praying for something, then after the need is met, we give God a quick thank you (sometimes not even that) and go on our way. Jesus never did that. He was always grateful.

KEY VERSE: “For I tell you that many prophets and kings wanted to see what you see but did not see it, and to

hear what you hear but did not hear it” (Luke 10:24).

PASSAGE OF THE DAY: Luke 10:21–24

THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER: After the seventy-two had returned with a good report and Jesus had assessed their efforts with follow-up instructions, He paused to pray. In His prayer, He was so “full of joy through the Holy Spirit” that He was overwhelmed with thankfulness to the Father. After His prayer, He reminded His disciples that they were living in momentous times, great days that the great saints of the past would have been awestruck to see.

We live in such an age ourselves. Jesus is building His church. The Holy Spirit lives inside us. And greater times are yet to come. Are you ready for it? Are you grateful for it? Are you excited by it? I hope so. The mission deserves nothing less than that kind of passion.

DAY 84 (SABBATH)

PRACTICE AND ADAPT

DAY 85 (SATURDAY): DRESS REHEARSAL

TODAY'S BIG IDEA: No bigger barns. As we get ready to launch this project, take a moment to step back and consider what we're doing—and what we're not doing. When we're working so hard, it's easy to get caught up in the fun, the work, and the hype. That's why there's no better time than right now to remind ourselves that we need to keep Christ's plans and God's glory the center of our focus.

KEY VERSE: "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions" (Luke 12:15).

PASSAGE OF THE DAY: Luke 12:13–21

THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER: Bigger barns. When we stop and think about it, all our plans stack up as nothing more than bigger barns. As George Carlin used to joke about many years ago, it's all just "a place for my stuff." As you spend the day in rehearsal and preparation for the upcoming Launch Day, remember that the point of this event, program, or change is not to become a bigger church or to be better than another church, but to use all your resources to worship Jesus and serve others with greater effectiveness.

DAY 86 (SUNDAY)

TODAY'S BIG IDEA: A heart for God's house. When you mention King David to most Christians, what character trait most quickly comes to mind? Most believers think of David as "a man after God's own heart" (1 Samuel 13:14, Acts 13:22). In today's passage, we will see that heart for God on full display.

KEY VERSE: "Here I am, living in a house of cedar, while the ark of God remains in a tent" (2 Samuel 7:2).

PASSAGE OF THE DAY: 2 Samuel 7

THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER: David was the king of Israel, but he noticed a problem. He was living in a palace while the ark of the covenant—the place where God’s presence physically dwelt on earth—was still in a tent. This bothered David, so he told the prophet Nathan about it. Nathan agreed with David and told him to go ahead and build the temple. He even assured David, “Whatever you have in mind, go ahead and do it, for the LORD is with you” (2 Samuel 7:3). However, Nathan apparently had not checked with God first because that night God told Nathan that David would not be allowed to build the Lord a temple after all.

David’s calling was to defeat the enemies of Israel and bring peace to the land (1 Chronicles 22:8). Instead, his son Solomon would build the temple. So did David get angry and sulk because he didn’t get to do what he wanted to do? No. David thanked God that his offspring would get to accomplish this special task, and he then spent the rest of his life assembling the materials to build the temple and training those who would serve there, making Solomon’s eventual task a lot easier.

David worked to prepare for a temple he would never get to see because it was more important that the temple got built than that he got to build it himself—or even worship in it. We need David’s heart for our church today. We’re not building the church for us. If we do it well, it will outlast us and people will be blessed by our work long after we’re gone. It’s about God’s glory, not ours.

DAY 87

TODAY’S BIG IDEA: Keep the goal in mind. Marathons are long. Eternity is longer.

KEY VERSE: Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last, but we do it to get a crown that will last forever (1 Corinthians 9:25).

PASSAGE OF THE DAY: 1 Corinthians 9:24–27

THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER: It’s amazing to see someone in training for the Olympics. In fact, many scholars believe the ancient Olympics are what Paul was referring to here since the winners would

receive a laurel (leafy) crown as their prize. Yet how often do we see people putting more time, energy, and passion into earthly pursuits that will fade away, yet paying little attention where they'll spend eternity? It's the same in pursuing church health. The goal cannot be to have a bigger church, a nicer building, or a more well-known ministry. Our goals are bigger and more long-term than that. Always keep the eternal goals in mind.

DAY 88

TODAY'S BIG IDEA: Called to reconciliation. How many people does it take to make a viable church? According to this verse, two or three will do the trick. Or does it?

KEY VERSE: "For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them" (Matthew 18:20).

PASSAGE OF THE DAY: Matthew 18:15–20

THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER: The point of the passage surrounding this often-repeated verse is not about the minimum viable size for a church—although that applies. This verse is actually at the end of a passage about church discipline. It's about the importance of agreeing together when we have to call out a fellow believer on their sin. "Two or three" is a reference to Matthew 18:15 and 16, which say if a sinful believer won't listen to the one against whom they sinned, "Take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.'" That, in turn, is a reference to Deuteronomy 19:15, which says, "One witness is not enough to convict anyone accused of any crime or offense they may have committed. A matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses." The emphasis isn't on the size of the church meeting or the "gotcha" of the sin, but on the unity among those who are calling for reconciliation.

Since we are the church, the temple where God's Spirit dwells, we need to hold each other accountable. Today's passage assures us that when we hold each other accountable, God honors it. In this context of reconciliation, "If two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven" (Matthew 18:19).

DAY 89

TODAY'S BIG IDEA: Count the Cost. The cost is everything. The reward is even bigger.

KEY VERSE: “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?” (Luke 14:28)

PASSAGE OF THE DAY: Luke 14:27–35

THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER: Today’s verse is not about building a tower, completing your project, or helping your church become healthier. In the context of the entire passage, it’s about sacrifice—taking up your cross, giving up everything for the one who gave up everything for us. This life of discipleship will cost you everything. That’s the cost we must be aware of. But it’s more than worth it, because it’s giving up our everything to receive Christ’s everything.

DAY 90

TODAY'S BIG IDEA: Ending well. This is your last devotional before Launch Weekend. Let’s take it all the way home!

KEY VERSE: *I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith* (2 Timothy 4:7).

PASSAGE OF THE DAY: 2 Timothy 4:1–8

THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER: Second Timothy is the last letter we have from the apostle Paul. He wrote it while under house arrest in Rome, awaiting trial before Caesar, perhaps just a few weeks before his death. He was old, tired, and introspective when he sat down one last time to write to a young pastor named Timothy. In his letter, he gave Timothy a charge with several instructions: “Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction” (4:2) and “keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry” (4:5).

Paul's instruction, of course, is profoundly wise advice that still applies today. Paul reminds us then that he has fought the good fight, finished the race, and kept the faith. Perhaps Paul was recalling the advice of Solomon who, near the end of his life, wrote, "The end of a matter is better than its beginning, and patience is better than pride" (Ecclesiastes 7:8). Sadly, Solomon did not end his run as well as Paul ended his. May we follow Paul's example, as he encouraged us to do, "as I follow the example of Christ" (1 Corinthians 11:1).

DAY 91 (SABBATH)

DAY 92 (SATURDAY)

TODAY'S BIG IDEA: Give God your second best. Does today's Big Idea seem wrong to you? Like it might be a misprint? Give God our second best? What?!

KEY VERSE: "Now go; I will help you speak and will teach you what to say" (Exodus 4:12).

PASSAGE OF THE DAY: Exodus 4:10–17

THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER: When God called Moses to free his people, Moses must have been filled with all kinds of emotions, having been both a prince in Egypt and a Hebrew. As overwhelmed as he was, he could only see his faults. How can I persuade the most powerful man on earth to give up all his slaves when I can't even speak well? he wondered. But God told him the slaves wouldn't be freed because of Moses' oratory, but because of God's power working through Moses' obedience.

Look at the order of events in the Key Verse. In response to Moses' uncertainty, God gave him three instructions. First, go, get the ball rolling and do what I say. Second, after you go I will help you speak. Your words will be eloquent enough for the task. Third, as you go, I'll teach you what to say. You won't just speak eloquently, you'll speak wisely.

That's how God works with us. He doesn't just want us to give what we do our best, He wants everything. And He can use it all. It doesn't start with our skills and gifts. It starts with our obedience. Then God does what only He can do, so only He gets the glory.

For some churches, this weekend is exciting and inspiring. For other churches, this might be a weekend with a lot of sadness. You may be saying farewell to a ministry you've loved but that is no longer viable. For still others, it might be a time involving repentance and forgiveness, with a difficult change in direction or a correction of wrong attitudes. Some churches feel overjoyed by what they're doing, while others may feel some sadness, pain, and loss.

Whether you're looking at a weekend of joy or sorrow, hope or grief, don't just think about the task ahead; consider the source of your strength. Are you relying on your own wisdom, skill, and knowledge, or are you surrendering everything to God for His use?

Give it everything you have this weekend. Even if it feels second best, when it's surrendered to Christ, it's more than enough.

DAY 93 (SUNDAY): LAUNCH DAY

TODAY'S BIG IDEA: Perseverance. This is it! The day everything has been leading toward. If your project centers around a big event, it will happen today. If your project starts a new direction or program for your church, it will launch today. May the Lord be with you and your church as you step out on this great new, God-guided adventure of faith!

Your church is part of a long line of saints through history, people who made decisions others were afraid to make or were not called to make. This week, we'll be reflecting back on this Launch Day by looking at what many have called the Faith Hall of Fame in Hebrews 11.

KEY VERSE: "My righteous one will live by faith. And I take no pleasure in the one who shrinks back." But we do not belong to those who shrink back and are destroyed, but to those who have faith and are saved (Hebrews 10:38–39).

PASSAGE OF THE DAY: Hebrews 10:36–39

THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER: Before introducing us to the great people of the faith, the writer of Hebrews quoted from the prophet Habakkuk, who told the ancient Israelites their righteousness did not

come from how hard they worked but because of the God they have faith in. Because of this, “We do not belong to those who shrink back.” I pray that is true of you and your church. As you step out in faith today, it can be the start of a wonderful new chapter for your congregation, but it’s also a chapter in the great story of faith—in the story of those who did not shrink back.

DAY 94

TODAY'S BIG IDEA: Confident assurance. Everyone has his or her own idea of what faith is. In today's passage, we'll see the only definition that matters—the one written in scripture.

KEY VERSE: Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see (Hebrews 11:1).

PASSAGE OF THE DAY: Hebrews 11:1–5

THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER: For a lot of people, when they hear the word faith, the words confidence and assurance are among the least likely synonyms they can imagine. Many people don't consider faith to be confident and assured; it often feels more uncertain and unreal, maybe even imaginary. But biblical faith is the confident assurance that God will do what He said because He has always done what He said.

Your congregation has taken a bold step of faith. When you think about what this step means for the future of your church, does it fill you with confident assurance? That's faith. Or are you filled with fear? Certainly, some fear is appropriate. New things can be scary. But, like courage, faith is not the absence of fear, it's proceeding despite your fear. That's confident assurance.

DAY 95

TODAY'S BIG IDEA: The God who exists. Nothing happens without faith. But the object of our faith is what matters most.

KEY VERSE: And without faith it is impossible to please God because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him (Hebrews 11:6).

PASSAGE OF THE DAY: Hebrews 11:6–16

THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER: This may be one of the most foundational but overlooked truths of the Bible. If we want to have faith in God, “we must believe that he exists.” Before anything else can happen—before our faith, before the Bible, before the church—there is a God who exists.

Since God exists, we don’t get to create Him in our image. He refuses to be whoever we want Him to be. God is who He is. Or, as He told Moses, “I am who I am” (Exodus 3:14). Since God actually exists, we can’t create Him in our image. But we do get to discover who God is. That’s what faith is for—to help us discover, know, love, and serve the God who exists, just as He is.

It’s popular in some circles to ask, “Who is God to you?” That’s a secondary question at best. Instead, we need to ask, “Who does God say God is?” When we find answers to that question, we’ve found something worth having faith in. What is your faith grounded in? Anything less than the God who exists will not be enough.

DAY 96

TODAY’S BIG IDEA: The story continues. Are you one of the people who has only been reading the Key Verse in these devotionals instead of looking up the entire passage? (Gotcha! You thought you were getting away with it, didn’t you?) I know this happens because I’ve done it, too. But I ask you to slow down a little. Stop and find your Bible, look up today’s Passage of the Day and read it. You’ll be glad you did.

KEY VERSE: God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect (Hebrews 11:40).

PASSAGE OF THE DAY: Hebrews 11:17–40

THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER: If I was told I could only preach from one Bible passage for the rest of my life, it’s hard to imagine a better choice than this one. The roster of great people of faith is inspirational, what they endured for their faith is staggering, and what we can learn from them is

unfathomable. Yet after all the decisions they made, all the courage they exemplified, and all the persecution they endured, maybe the most shocking statement of the entire passage is our Verse of the Day: “God had planned something better for us.” For us! Really?!

As powerful as their testimonies are, and as much as we should honor their extraordinary sacrifices, these heroes of faith knew nothing of the life, teachings, crucifixion, and resurrection of Jesus. There were glimmers of him given by the prophets, but the reality of Jesus was far beyond anything they could have imagined. But we don’t have to imagine it. For us, the story of Jesus is not unknown, it’s history. And, more than history, we live with the presence of the Holy Spirit right now. This is why their story is only “made perfect” (complete) when it can happen “together with us.” Their story is made complete in our story, because of Jesus.

DAY 97

TODAY'S BIG IDEA: Eyes on Jesus. The author of Hebrews keeps on going past the list of heroes of faith in Hebrews 11. The story of these heroes wraps up in the most beautiful way in the first verses of chapter 12.

KEY VERSE: *Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith (Hebrews 12:1-2).*

PASSAGE OF THE DAY: Hebrews 12:1-3

THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER: Therefore is a powerful and important word in the Bible. It points back to what went before and pushes us forward to what’s next. This therefore is especially important. It reminds us that we’re still talking about the Faith Hall of Fame from Hebrews 11, and then it tells us what that list was all about. Since we have a role in the next part of this great story of faith, we have an obligation to run our leg of the race well. The only way to do that is to get rid of anything weighing us down—our sins and anything else that might hinder and entangle us. Then we keep running, keep persevering—keep our eyes on the prize. We keep building on what others have

already done. And we seek one goal—not our glory or their glory, but Christ’s glory. He’s the pioneer who started everything, and He’ll be the perfecter who completes it.

DAY 98 (SABBATH)

CELEBRATION WEEKEND!

DAY 99 (BIG SATURDAY): ALL-TEAM ASSESSMENT AND PREP

TODAY'S BIG IDEA: Finishing the work. There's nothing like finishing well.

KEY VERSE: He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus (Philippians 1:6).

PASSAGE OF THE DAY: Philippians 1:3–11

THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER: If Jesus is in it, nothing can stop it. But we're not the only ones Christ can do His work through. If we refuse, He'll use someone else. How sad it would be to miss out on what God wants to do through your church because you weren't ready to step up. But you are ready! You've done your part. Now leave it in Jesus' hands. He'll complete it. And what an end it will be!

DAY 100 (SUNDAY): ALL-CHURCH CELEBRATION AND THANKSGIVING

TODAY'S BIG IDEA: Gratefulness. On Day 17, we looked at a well-known quote from Max De Pree: "The first responsibility of a leader is to define reality. The last is to say thank you. In between the two, the leader must become a servant and a debtor." The first half of this process was about defining reality. The hard work in the second half was servanthood. Now we get to celebrate and say, "Thank You!"

KEY VERSE: You will be enriched in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God (2 Corinthians 9:11).

PASSAGE OF THE DAY: 2 Corinthians 9:6–15

THOUGHTS TO CONSIDER: This passage is not about giving. It's not about seed-faith. And it's certainly

not about getting rich. It's about generosity. Take a look at the Key Verse again. "You will be enriched in every way." Woohoo! Sounds good to me! But take note of why we're being enriched. It's not so we can keep the treasures to ourselves, but "so that you can be generous on every occasion." The goal is not to accumulate wealth or blessings, but to nurture a spirit of generosity.

The most joyous, effective, and life-giving Christians and churches ooze generosity. They're not about getting—they're about giving. That should always be the result of receiving God's blessings. We're not supposed to be the bucket where the flow of God's blessings stops. We're meant to be a pipeline through which God's blessings flow.