

less (-)
|
S =
MORE (+)

Jeanne Stevens

LESS IS MORE

©2021 by *Jeanne Stevens*

LESS IS MORE

One of my favorite old hymns is "Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus." It was written over a hundred years ago by a woman named Helen Lemmel. Helen wrote the song after hearing the story of a missionary named Lilius Trotter. Lilius was a prolific writer and artist in England. She was admired for her beautiful work. Lilius had a life-changing encounter with God, and she was never the same. She heard there were people around the world that had never heard of the love of God and decided to go to Africa to make sure people that had never heard about the love of God would experience God's love. No missionary group would accept her because they said she was just an artist and writer with no other skills. Determined and called by God, she went anyway. For 40 years, Lilius lived among different tribes in Africa, proclaiming the love of Jesus. For 40 years, the once well-known artist and writer that everyone knew became obscure and almost forgotten.

Helen Lemmel heard about Lilius Trotter and her life; she was so inspired by how she devoted her life to Jesus, she used her life as the inspiration to write the hymn "Turn your eyes upon Jesus." Two women that most of us had never heard their names before this moment - turned their eyes upon Jesus, and

LESS IS MORE

for a century, people have sung these lyrics, "Turn your eyes upon Jesus, Look full in His wonderful face. And the things of earth will grow strangely dim, In the light of his glory and grace."

How I long for that to be true in my life, yet I am reminded just how often I get the focus backward. So often, it's the things of this earth that have captured my attention, and the movement of Jesus in my life grows strangely dim. I want the opposite to be true. For my heart to desire Jesus first, and yet the truth is that I often allow other things to fill the longings of my heart.

This devotional is a pouring out of my heart in an attempt to let go of the things that have a hold on my life. To step into the truth and hope that *Less is More*.

Fasting is an opportunity to hit reset. The goal is always to draw nearer to God and realign our purpose to be centered on God. As we eliminate distractions, God renews us from the inside out. The goal is never just to eliminate something for the sake of elimination. Fasting is challenging and invites us to surrender in deeper ways as we seek God in prayer. The *Less is More Fast* is a way of eliminating the things that keep us from living at peace with God, ourselves, and others.

I want to invite you to sit with God and determine something you can commit to fast for 21 days. There are a few examples of different kinds of fasts below. Each day of the fast will highlight an area of your life to focus on.

There are many different ways to fast.

FULL FAST

In this fast, you drink only liquids, typically water with light juices and broth as an option.

SELECTIVE FAST

In this fast, you remove certain foods/liquids from your daily diet. A good example of a selective fast is the Daniel Fast, which invites you to remove meat, sweets, and bread from your diet and consume water, fruit, and vegetables for food.

LIMITED FAST

In this fast, you abstain from eating any food during certain times of the day. Example- Replacing a meal time with a time of prayer and only eating dinner each day.

SOUL FAST

In this fast, you abstain from areas of your life that are out of rhythm. This kind of fast is a great fast to refocus your attention. For example, a social media fast or television fast. This kind of fast is also suitable for anyone with health-related issues indicating it would not be wise to refrain from food.

*Note

For some, fasting food or drink may not be a helpful practice for connecting with God. If you have ever struggled with an

LESS IS MORE

eating disorder, encountered neglect or scarcity of food, or struggle to believe your physicality is in fact good and made in the image of God it might be wise to choose to fast from something other than food or drink.

The devotional is written to take no more than 15 minutes each day, but I encourage you to linger with it and allow God to speak to you as you reflect on each of the daily entries. The invitation to pray and fast comes from Jesus, and this intentional practice invites us to refocus our mind, heart, and bodies on Jesus. May you sense the presence of Jesus as you devote yourself to living *ready for less*.

“And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.”

“This, then, is how you should pray: ‘Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.’ For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do

not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins."

"When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show others they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to others that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you." Matthew 6:5 - 18

Each day of the fast has four elements.

READ

A portion of scripture to meditate on and a quote about the focus for the day.

REFLECT

A short reflection about the focus for the day.

RESPOND

A prayer response to Jesus.

RENEW

A space for you to journal your thoughts about how you plan to commit yourself to Less is More.

LESS IS MORE

WEEK ONE

Day 1	Less Fear
Day 2	Less Worry
Day 3	Less Replaying the Past
Day 4	Less Stress
Day 5	Less Self-Criticism
Day 6	Less Anxiety
Day 7	Less Overthinking

WEEK TWO

Day 8	Less Numbing
Day 9	Less Materialism
Day 10	Less Spending
Day 11	Less Noise
Day 12	Less Complaining
Day 13	Less Over Committing
Day 14	Less Distraction

WEEK THREE

Day 15	Less Pride
Day 16	Less Hatred
Day 17	Less Unforgiveness
Day 18	Less Division
Day 19	Less Comparison
Day 20	Less Self Righteousness
Day 21	Less Loneliness

DAY 1

READY FOR LESS FEAR

READ

There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.

1 JOHN 4:18

Everything we desire is on the other side of fear.

TD JAKES

LESS IS MORE

REFLECT

There is no fear in the context of God's love. While that is good news, that doesn't mean we don't experience fear in this life. Instead, you have a place to take your fear in the context of God's love. You can welcome fear without being overcome by fear. No matter how powerful fear may feel, it is not more powerful than God's love. Simply put, Fear Fears Love.

God's love diffuses our fear! God's overwhelming love overwhelms our overwhelming fears! God not only speaks truth to our fears but He always speaks Love. And when I know that I am loved, fear knows that its time is done.

For years I thought what I most needed when I felt fear was more faith! That I had to muster up more courage and bravery to overcome my fear. I thought I just needed to believe bigger than my fear! And there is some truth to that, but Faith isn't just what overcomes my Fear; faith is what comes when my fears have been overcome by God's LOVE.

This is where your faith grows up. When it is no longer contingent on circumstances that could cause fear, but when you are firmly rooted in God's Love. A mature and growing faith looks fear in the face and dares to accept that whatever I fear might actually happen.

- I might actually not find someone in the timing I hoped.
- This relationship might actually be in trouble.
- The diagnosis might actually come back bad.
- My boss might actually let me go.

- I might not actually be able to start a family the way I wanted or when I wanted.
- The people I love may get hurt.

My Fear might become my reality, but that doesn't change God's Love for Me.

I may lose all that I hold dear, but if I hold on to God's Love for me - I will be OK.

Do you believe that? Do you really believe that? If whatever you fear in your life becomes your reality, would you rather walk through it gripped by Fear, or held by Love? The goal is not a life free from fear, but a life free in fear.

RESPOND

Jesus, help me replace my compulsive fearful thoughts with reminders of your unfailing faithful love. Amen.

LESS IS MORE

RENEW

Take some time to clearly name your fears. Invite the loving presence of God to be with you in your fears.

DAY 2

READY FOR LESS WORRY

READ

Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?

MATTHEW 6:25 - 27

No one can pray and worry at the same time.

MAX LUCADO

LESS IS MORE

REFLECT

There is a drawer in our kitchen and it doesn't matter how many times I clean it out, re-organize it, or even gather our family around for a compelling and slightly condemning speech about keeping it in its organized state. It's still the junk drawer. The place that random trinkets and treasures go to find a home. For those of you that have read *The Lifechanging Magic of Tidying Up*, or maybe you've watched an episode of Marie Kondo's show, I can say with absolute clarity, this drawer does not spark joy for me. I don't know how any of the random items got in there, but they found a home. The junk drawer in our kitchen often feels like a living metaphor for all of the random thoughts and worries that float in and around my mind. I don't always know how they got there, but somehow they found a home in my mind.

Worry desperately wants to be necessary in your life, but the problem with worry is that it serves no fruitful purpose in your life. Just like the random items in the junk drawer it clouds your mind and thoughts and tries to convince you that life won't work out the way you hoped it would. Jarrett has taught many times that worry borrows future possibilities and makes them present realities. Whenever we let worry in we allow it to take potential negative things in the future and hold us, prisoner, in the present. A study done by the Huffington Post noted that 60% of Americans say worry invades their lives daily, yet statistics reveal that 85% of the things we worry about never happen. Oh, that we might start living more like the birds of the air, they trust God will take care of their needs.

While all of us would most likely be first in line to have less worry in our lives, the reality is that in this world there will be things to worry about. Worry is unavoidable but the captivity of worry is optional. We don't have to be consumed or controlled by worry. When a worrisome thought enters our mind, scripture reminds us that we can take those thoughts to Jesus. We can reveal the thought then replace the thought. Worry-filled thoughts don't need to clutter up our thinking causing our minds to resemble the junk drawer in my kitchen, they can be replaced with peace.

RESPOND

Jesus, please replace my worrisome thoughts with peaceful thoughts. My mind often feels like a junk drawer that brings clutter and confusion to my soul. Help me to fix my mind on you and free me from my worrisome thoughts. Amen.

LESS IS MORE

RENEW

Take some time to journal through some of the things that worry you. Journal them as a prayer to Jesus. After you complete your prayer to Jesus, then write a letter to yourself as though you are God and remind yourself how God is carrying every one of your worries.

DAY 3

READY FOR LESS REPLAYING THE PAST

READ

Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past.
See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do
you not perceive it? I am making a way in the
wilderness and streams in the wasteland.

ISAIAH 43:18 - 19

You can't take hold of what's new when
what was still has a hold on you.

JEANNE STEVENS

LESS IS MORE

REFLECT

Father Rohr says, "We cannot attain the presence of God because we're already in the presence of God. What's absent is awareness." I have sung songs and prayed prayers asking God to reveal his presence and what I have come to understand is that God's presence is always here, what's often missing, and perhaps more importantly who is missing is me. Over the years what I have gotten curious about was if I was missing... then where was I?

Lots of times the place where I have learned to hang out is in my past. Replaying and rehashing events and experiences that have already taken place. The past is good for analyzing, but it's never good for agonizing. Many of us struggle to live in the present moment because we are stuck in a past moment. Listen, we can learn from the past... we just can't live in the past.

We are called to live in the here and now but so often our feelings and thoughts take us back to the past. We get ourselves stuck in a loop of rewind and replay trying to go back and somehow change what has already occurred. Most of us don't realize the suffering we shovel back into our lives when we replay the past. I am certainly an advocate and have gained much learning and healing sitting on a counselors couch or in a circle of group therapy digging in the dirt of my story. I believe all of us have so much to gain when we uncover the patterns and themes from our story. But the chapters you wrote in the past are not the story you are living today.

Jesus longs to have a present relationship with us, now. The problem is that so many of us are unwilling to receive us as we are. One of the ways Jesus continues to renew and rebuild our lives is by receiving us as we are. We keep going back when Jesus wants to be with us in the now.

RESPOND

Jesus, take the things that occurred in my past and remind me that you are bigger than them. Jesus, take my regrets and remind me that you work everything together in our lives for good. Jesus, please take my mistakes and remind me that you can turn anything into a message of hope. Amen.

LESS IS MORE

RENEW

Spend some time journaling about how you are going to allow the past to remain in the past and invite God to help you live in the present.

DAY 4

READY FOR LESS STRESS

READ

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.

JOHN 14:27

Yesterday is gone, and tomorrow has not yet come.
We have only today. Let us begin.

MOTHER TERESA

LESS IS MORE

REFLECT

No one has ever gone looking for more stress, yet so many of us seem to be carrying around lots and lots of it. Stress is wanting the present moment to be something it is not. A circumstance you want to be different. A relational reality you wish would change. A future fear that you are making a present reality in your mind. One of the simplest ways to live your life with less stress is to shift your current thinking to renewed thinking. To replace your stressful thoughts with peaceful thoughts. Jesus did not invite us into a life of stress, he invited us into a life of peace, and the way we practice more peace is to shift our thoughts.

Here are a few examples:

Stressful Thought - What if my boss doesn't like the presentation I turned in.

Peaceful Thought - I am going to do my best on my presentation and I trust that whatever occurs will lead to more growth in my life.

Stressful Thought - What if I don't have the necessary resources to do what I want to do.

Peaceful Thought - I am going to trust that God is good and He will supply me with the resources I need.

Stressful Thought - What if my friends and family continue to misunderstand my heart and my intentions.

Peaceful Thought - I am going to commit myself to pray for the people in my life. I am going to be a blessing and presence of love towards people.

For many of us, we have equated peace to understanding. We tell ourselves that if we had answers to all of our questions and solutions to all of our problems, we would be less stressed. A peace that passes understanding does not come from understanding, but from accepting what you do not understand.

Resistance of what was keeps us from peace. Acceptance of what is leads to peace.

What is one thing you can let go of today that is causing you stress?

How can you replace your Stressful Thoughts with Peaceful Thoughts?

RESPOND

Jesus, would you help me to replace my stressful thoughts with peaceful thoughts. Help me to not lean on my own understanding as a means to peace. Amen.

LESS IS MORE

RENEW

Spend some time thinking about what is causing you stress. Take some time to journal those stressful thoughts and replace them with peaceful thoughts.

DAY 5

READY FOR LESS SELF-CRITICISM

READ

Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you— unless, of course, you fail the test?

2 CORINTHIANS 13:5

The Prayer of Examen is a form of personal inventory. At day's end, spend time in prayerful reflection on your day: your comings and goings, routines and disruptions, work and play, discoveries and disappointments. Think about who you met, or missed. Think about your moments of aloneness. In all, ask two questions: when was I most alive, most present, most filled, and fulfilled today? And when was I most taxed, stressed, distracted, depleted today? A simpler, and more spiritually focused, version of those questions: when did I feel closest to God, and when farthest?

MARK BUCHANAN

LESS IS MORE

The 5 steps of Examen

1. Become aware of God's presence.
2. Review the day with gratitude.
3. Pay attention to your emotions.
4. Choose one feature of the day and pray from it.
5. Look toward tomorrow.

REFLECT

Lots of people are naturally hard on themselves. Many reasons contribute to significant self-criticism, but regardless of the reasons it often leads to having low self-esteem and confidence. What if we could learn to replace self-criticism with healthy self-examination? Ruth Hayley Barton teaches, "self-examination is the practice of inviting God to help me engage in an honest, rigorous, non-neurotic inventory of the state of my heart and life." I love those keywords – honest, rigorous, and non-neurotic!

We all have a vested interest in avoiding self-examination. We don't want to look at our darker side, at our patterns of sin, at our false selves. So we erect all kinds of avoidance and defense mechanisms. But, part of self-examination is acknowledging and celebrating the good God is doing in my life. Then we move to openness about what is not right; here I am broken. The places where I was "off" – prideful, self-protecting, deceitful (even in small ways), angry, bitter, jealous, envious, selfish, unkind, or irritable. Areas where I am trying to take control and

we look at it closely and ask what was going on inside that caused that behavior?

Self-examination helps us acknowledge where we are enslaved to sin so we can move toward wholeness. It's ultimately about freedom! But we have to be willing to do the work. Dallas Willard says, "People of personal transformation rarely if ever succeed by accident, drift or imposition." We must be intentional.

Self-examination leads to confession – first to God, and then to others. The truth shall set you free. James 1:24-25 in the Message version says, "Act on what you hear! Those who hear and don't act are like those who glance in the mirror, walk away, and two minutes later have no idea who they are, what they look like." We need to act on our awareness. Transformation comes through letting go of our default setting and compulsions and becoming present to God's Spirit.

RESPOND

Precious Savior, why do I fear your scrutiny? Yours is an examen of love. Still, I am afraid ... afraid of what may surface. Even so, I invite you to search me to the depths so that I may know myself - and you - in fuller measure. Amen.

Prayer from Richard J. Foster

LESS IS MORE

RENEW

Spend time journaling through the Steps of Examen.

DAY 6

READY FOR LESS ANXIETY

READ

Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.

1 PETER 5:7

In overwhelming anxiety, it's possible to find
overwhelming peace.

MORGAN HARPER NICHOLS

Mental pain is less dramatic than physical pain, but it is more common and also more hard to bear. The frequent attempt to conceal mental pain increases the burden: It is easier to say "My tooth is aching" than to say "My heart is broken".

CS LEWIS

LESS IS MORE

REFLECT

The ADAA organization states that Anxiety disorders are the most common mental illness in the U.S., affecting 40 million adults in the United States age 18 and older, or 18.1% of the population every year. Anxiety disorders are highly treatable, yet only 36.9% of those suffering receive treatment. Anxiety disorders develop from a complex set of risk factors, including genetics, brain chemistry, personality, and life events.

With the rise of anxiety in our world, it is worth asking the question: what comes out of you when life presses in on you? This past season has been a season of pressing. We have all been pressed and I imagine to some degree we have all had varying degrees of anxiety. In many ways when we are pressed, we become more aware of all that we are still holding and it leaves us wondering is it worth the space it's taking up in our life?

When the Bible says to cast your anxiety on Jesus or do not be anxious it does not mean you won't feel anxious, it means you don't have to remain anxious. Part of learning how to deal with anxiety is learning how to create a space for peace.

The enemy's deepest desire is to keep a shock collar of anxious thoughts running through your mind and oftentimes our patterns only turn up the volume. God has nowhere to put His peace because our thoughts are too full. We have to learn to partner with God to create a space for peace.

Psalm 139:23 says, "Search me, God, and know my heart; test

me and know my anxious thoughts.” The only way we will learn to make space for peace is if we learn to invite God to search the deepest parts of our hearts. As we partner with God in the searching we begin to see where the anxious thoughts come from. Anxiety is always trying to talk to us, and many of us exhaust our energy in talking back to our anxiety. Instead of talking back to our anxiety we need to start talking to God and safe people about our anxiety.

RESPOND

God, would you begin to search my heart. I know I am anxious but I don't always know where my anxiety starts and stops. God give me the courage to search with you and trust that you can take what feels overwhelming and you can replace it with freedom. Amen.

LESS IS MORE

RENEW

Spend some time journaling through Psalm 139:23. Create an inventory of your anxious thoughts and invite Jesus to search your heart and replace the anxiety with peace.

DAY 7

READY FOR LESS OVERTHINKING

READ

Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true,
whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure,
whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable —
if anything is excellent or praiseworthy —
think about such things.

PHILIPPIANS 4:8

We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against
the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive
to obey Christ.

2 CORINTHIANS 10:5 ESV

When you objectively observe your own thinking with
the view to capturing rogue thoughts, you in effect direct
your attention to stop the negative impact and rewire
healthy new circuits into your brain.

CAROLINE LEAF

LESS IS MORE

REFLECT

There is an arcade game called Whack A Mole. The game includes a mallet that you hold and when the toy moles appear at random your job is to whack the moles back into their holes. It's a fabulous game for anyone needing some healthy anger management. While googling to see if there are any remaining whack a mole games here in the city of Chicago, I found out that there is now an inflatable human Whack a Mole game. I'm sure it is a big hit at office parties (pun intended).

So why am I talking about a Whack a Mole Game? Because experts estimate that the mind thinks between 60,000 - 80,000 thoughts a day. That's an average of 2500 - 3000 thoughts per hour. That's a lot of thinking. That's a lot of moles popping up on the dashboard of your mind.

Our thoughts often feel like a game of whack a mole with random thoughts flying around with no warning as to where they've come from. To transform your life, always begin with transforming your thoughts.

"Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind."

Romans 12:2

How we think shapes how we live. So it's crucial that we learn how to stop all our spinning thoughts and toxic thinking patterns to start receiving the renewal in our minds that God promised. While we cannot control the events and

circumstances of our lives, we can control our reactions to anything and in doing so we can change our brains and change our lives.

RESPOND

Jesus, it feels like I can't stop overthinking and overanalyzing. My thoughts feel like they have control of my life. I know you are with me and for me. I know you promised to help me take my thoughts captive. God, I invite you to help me transform my life, by transforming my thoughts. Amen.

LESS IS MORE

RENEW

Spend some time journaling the consistent invisible thoughts that continue to show up in your everyday life. Taking each invisible toxic thought, invite Jesus to replace it with a visible truthful promise.

DAY 8

READY FOR LESS NUMBING

READ

Then he said to them, “My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me.”

MATTHEW 26:38

Emotions don't need to be given answers;
they need to be given space.

JEANNE STEVENS

LESS IS MORE

REFLECT

Emotions are simply Energy in Motion. The only thing an emotion wants is to be able to do is move, and release energy, but many of us instead choose to numb our emotions. Emotional numbness is something most people will experience at some point in their life. Quite often, the feeling is temporary. However, for some, feeling emotionally numb becomes a way of life to protect them from further emotional or physical pain. When we repress or numb our emotions two things happen.

1. HARNESS THE EMOTION

When you deny energy in motion you harness what does not want to be harnessed.

You put resistance around something that isn't looking to be resisted.

2. STUFF THE EMOTION

When you push your emotions down you look to cover them up. Many people bury it beneath all kinds of other activities. The problem with stuffing emotions is that it is often like trying to push a beach ball underwater, it pops out somewhere else.

I have a friend and when he was young his grandmother told him that men don't cry and he has spent the better part of his adult life trying to figure out why he runs away from sadness and expressing himself through tears.

My friend is working hard to break the mental and emotional loop that has told him that sadness is not allowed. He does not want to numb out from sadness.

I have another friend that grew up with a mom that was emotionally overbearing and overwhelming. To self-protect they began to numb out with lots of little escapes to keep from having to feel so much. Now my friend has a very hard time accessing their emotions.

What I know to be true about repressing our emotions is that, What you resist, will always persist.

When you repress and resist an emotion, it is persistent. Your emotions aren't looking for restraints, they are looking for release..

When you resist emotion it secures itself to you and over time it stops being an emotion and it becomes a mood.

Anger becomes bitterness
Sadness become apathy
Fear becomes anxiety

Moods can last for years.

All from E-Motion that is just looking to be released.

What you resist, will always persist. Instead of numbing your emotions, how is God inviting you to release your emotions in a healthy and productive way?

LESS IS MORE

RESPOND

Jesus, I want to be able to name my feelings and feel my feelings just like you modeled it for me. Thank you for your reckless emotion-full love for me. I want to bring that same kind of love and light into this dark world. Amen.

RENEW

Spend some time journaling through your emotions from the day. Were there moments when you tried to numb what you were feeling? Invite Jesus into your emotions and ask Him to help you move the emotions in a productive way.

DAY 9

READY FOR LESS MATERIALISM

READ

Then he said to them, “Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions.”

LUKE 12:15

Live simply so that others may simply live.

RICHARD ROHR

LESS IS MORE

REFLECT

We live in a world that places an extreme emphasis on eternal signs of significance. Many of us feel lots of pressure to assure and affirm that we are worthy, valuable, and important because we subtly doubt that we are. Because of that doubt, many of us spend significant energy on “one-upping” others. Whenever we are looking to “one-up” others it is a sign that we have slowly forgotten how valuable we are to God.

Many have lost the center of who they are because they are constantly looking for someone or something to affirm them. Because we live in a world that is consumed with more vs less, we often unconsciously buy into the temptation to have “things” affirm who we are. As Richard Rohr says, “This is the paradox of materialism. The more we project our soul’s longing onto things, the more things disappoint us. Happiness is an inside job. When we expect to find happiness outside of ourselves, we are always disappointed. We then seek a “higher” or more stimulating experience as the spiral of addiction and consumption continues.”

The invitation of Jesus is to return to the place where you know that you are purely and perfectly loved. No amount of things in this world will ever translate to more happiness. Out of that abundance, a deep and profound inner enoughness emerges. You begin to realize that less truly is more. That satisfaction comes from the soul where the Holy Spirit dwells within you. That kind of peace gives you confidence and a sense of abundance to be able to share freely with others. There is no

longer a quest for worthiness through materials but a desire to bless others with all your material possessions.

RESPOND

Jesus, you told us that we could not love both you and money. I confess that I often find myself thinking about acquiring more things more than I find myself thinking about you. Forgive me, Lord. Grow my desire to have my enoughness come from you. Amen.

LESS IS MORE

RENEW

Spend time confessing the material “things” that have captured your attention. Ask Jesus how you can shift your desires to find your enoughness in Jesus.

DAY 10

READY FOR LESS COMPLICATIONS

READ

Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven. . . . For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

MATTHEW 6:19–21

Simplicity is ultimately a matter of focus.

ANN VOS KAMP

LESS IS MORE

REFLECT

Jesus is clear that we don't need the things or experiences in this world to have a fulfilling life. What we most need is to root ourselves in a vibrant life with Jesus and His Kingdom. Somehow when we keep Jesus first life becomes more simple and all the other things don't tend to matter as much.

Simplicity creates space and openness in our lives. It honors the gift of our limitations and invites us to let go of the many ways we become tangled up in a complicated life that always seems to want MORE. Life is so much easier when we have less "things" to manage. Simplicity asks us to let go of all that feels complicated and to instead treasure the simple gifts of life that cannot be taken away. Sleeping, eating, walking, giving and receiving love. . . . Simplicity invites us into these daily pleasures that can open us to God, who is present in them all.

Are there some intentional ways to invite more simplicity into your life?

- Can you clean up and clear out a space in your home where you have excess? Perhaps a garage, basement, closet, or even just a drawer.
- Can you intentionally limit some of the choices in your life? Do you need hundreds of TV channels? Do you need that many pairs of jeans or shoes? How can you intentionally limit your material possessions?

- What if someone admires something you have, are you willing to give it to them?
- What items do you own that bring more simplicity in your life, what items do you own that bring more complication? Are you willing to let go of the items that bring more complications?

RESPOND

Jesus, I long for you and your Kingdom to be my heart's desire. Forgive me for the ways I over complicate my life with "things." I long for a simple and surrendered life. Amen.

LESS IS MORE

RENEW

Make a list of the “things” that feel complicated in your life. Spend some time journaling about what you can start to get rid of or let go of to increase more simplicity in your life.

DAY 11

READY FOR LESS NOISE

READ

Be still, and know that I am God...

PSALM 46:10

Because what you give your attention to is the person you become. Put another way: the mind is the portal to the soul, and what you fill your mind with will shape the trajectory of your character. In the end, your life is no more than the sum of what you gave your attention to. That bodes well for those apprentices of Jesus who give the bulk of their attention to him and to all that is good, beautiful, and true in his world. But not for those who give their attention to the 24-7 news cycle of outrage and anxiety and emotion-charged drama or the nonstop feed of celebrity gossip, titillation, and cultural drivel. (As if we “give” it in the first place; much of it is stolen by a clever algorithm out to monetize our precious attention.) But again: we become what we give our attention to, for better or worse.

JOHN MARK COMER

LESS IS MORE

REFLECT

A recent study found that the average human attention span has fallen from 12 seconds in 2000 to eight seconds today (2021). We live in a very noisy world that is looking to grab our attention at all times. Living in a fast world with constant digital distractions at our fingertips is hijacking our ability to live present to God, ourselves, and others.

Andrew Sullivan, in his manifesto for silence in an age of noise, wrote this: "There are books to be read; landscapes to be walked; friends to be with; life to be fully lived.... This new epidemic of distraction is our civilization's specific weakness. And its threat is not so much to our minds, even as they shape-shift under the pressure. The threat is to our souls. At this rate, if the noise does not relent, we might even forget we have any."

To live a life deeply connected to Jesus will require us to learn how to focus our attention longer than eight seconds. Being able to pray, meditate on scripture, listen deeply to God, and one another will require that we learn how to eliminate the noise in our lives. We must learn to practice silence and solitude more regularly.

We must learn to turn down the volume on the things that so easily distract and turn up the volume of God's voice. Psalm 46: 10 invites us into a deep knowing that can only come from silence and solitude instead of through words and noise. The Hebrew word translated Be still literally means Let go of your grip. So many of us have a tight grip on the oversaturation of

noise in our lives. So many of us feel like we are lost and confused simply because we cannot hear. We have become more consumed with the mesmerizing belief that striving is what will bring good into our lives. We have abandoned the gift that silence and solitude are two of the greatest gifts to return us to a life of surrender.

RESPOND

Jesus, thank you for facing a loud and noisy world and modeling a different way to be present with you. Have mercy on my distracted mind and lead me to the same quiet place. Amen.

LESS IS MORE

RENEW

Spend some time confessing the places where you have allowed noise to overwhelm your life. After journaling, commit to sitting in silence for 10 minutes with Jesus. May the gift of silence start to declutter your crowded mind.

DAY 12

READY FOR LESS DISTRACTIONS

READ

I have a lot more to say about this, but it is hard to get it across to you since you've picked up this bad habit of not listening. By this time you ought to be teachers yourselves, yet here I find you need someone to sit down with you and go over the basics on God again, starting from square one—baby's milk, when you should have been on solid food long ago! Milk is for beginners, inexperienced in God's ways; solid food is for the mature, who have some practice in telling right from wrong.

HEBREWS 5:11 - 14 (MSG)

What the enemy can't destroy, he distracts.

JEANNE STEVENS

LESS IS MORE

REFLECT

No one has ever defeated distractions with one simple move. Instead, a life of learning how to defeat distractions takes place with many small, ongoing, daily practices. We need to expect that every day will contain some kind of fight for your attention, and learning how to defeat distractions is critical to a life of being focused on Jesus.

While none of us like being distracted when we are trying to remain focused, distractions reveal where we have placed our attention. Distractions have a way of telling us what we most love and what we most fear. As humans, we always gravitate towards our desires and pull away from our fears. Our distractions reveal where we are seeking comfort and where we are seeking escape. Distractions also have a way of revealing habits that need to be transformed.

What might your distractions be telling you? You will never be able to fight your distractions until you understand what is fueling them. Different distractions require different strategies to form new habits. God isn't just concerned with freeing us from our distractions, God longs to mature us and see good fruit developed in our lives. Becoming free from distractions is all about growing in a transforming relationship with Jesus. Year over year we should continue to become more mature in Christ. Defeating distractions is all about maturing in a relationship with Jesus.

RESPOND

Jesus, I confess that there are so many things that distract me and keep me from a life wholly devoted to you. I long to grow in maturity. I desire to keep transforming. Forgive the ways I return to comfort and grow in me more courage as I establish new habits in my relationship with you. Amen.

LESS IS MORE

RENEW

Spend time journaling through your most consistent distractions. What do you notice about the distractions? What is fueling your distractions? Write out how you plan to commit to shift one of your distractions this week.

DAY 13

READY FOR LESS OVERCOMITTING

READ

Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, “Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.”

MARK 6:31

Hustling for love always leads to overcommitment.
Humbled by love always leads to peace.

JEANNE STEVENS

LESS IS MORE

REFLECT

One of the reasons why life feels fast and full is because many of us only live our lives at one speed - Full Steam Ahead. Moving from one activity to another with very little time to pause, reflect, and rest. Even in a season like the one we just walked through where we stayed at home and shifted our normal activities, for many life still feels like an endless merry-go-round that never stops leaving our inner lives feeling chaotic and out of control.

When we live a life always pushing forward without taking the necessary time for replenishment and rest, our way of life might look full and powerful on the outside, but the interior rhythms of the soul become ineffective and shallow. A fast and overcommitted life is one of the quickest ways to end up feeling disconnected from God, ourselves, and one another. Leaving us spiritually lethargic and unable to hear the whispers of the Holy Spirit.

When we are dry and depleted we start to become more dependent on our own voice and the voices of others to tell us what to do. We become reactionary to others behavior before we look at what might be going on beneath the surface. But when we learn how to honor our God-given limits and practice a life with healthy rhythms and boundaries we begin to experience a spirit of peace in the commitments we make. We begin to know the difference between a wholehearted Yes and a clear and confident No. We begin to bring steadfast and grounded discernment to our decisions.

Have you been living with a sense of FOMO (Fear of Missing Out) ? Perhaps it's time to turn that FOMO into JOMO (Joy of Missing out). Jesus regularly pulled away from the crowds. He disappointed others in not meeting their hopes and expectations. He found his strength not from being all things to all people, but from being devoted to one thing so that He could be present with people - He was wholly devoted to God.

RESPOND

Jesus, apart from you I can do nothing. I humbly ask for your grace to heal the part of my heart that is overcommitted in an attempt to do more, be more, and have more. Grow my trust in you as I seek to evaluate my commitments. Amen.

LESS IS MORE

RENEW

Take some time to journal your current commitments and ask God to help you evaluate where you may be overcommitted. Invite Holy Spirit to help you eliminate the “unnecessary more” in your life so that you can return to a rhythm of peace with God, yourself, and others.

DAY 14

READY FOR LESS COMPLAINING

READ

Do everything readily and cheerfully—
no bickering, no second-guessing allowed! Go out into the
world uncorrupted, a breath of fresh air in this squalid and
polluted society. Provide people with a glimpse of good living
and of the living God. Carry the light-giving Message into the
night so I'll have good cause to be proud of you on the day that
Christ returns. You'll be living proof that I didn't go
to all this work for nothing.

PHILIPPIANS 2:14 - 16 (MSG)

If you don't like something, change it.
If you can't change it, change your attitude.
Don't complain.

MAYA ANGELOU

LESS IS MORE

REFLECT

We live in a world that is skilled at complaining. When we don't like the weather we complain about it. When our favorite sports team is defeated, we complain about it. When we don't like a movie or a song, we complain about it. When we are stuck in traffic, we complain about it. If humans are consistently good at one thing - complaining would be close to the top of the list.

As Christians, even though we are invited to do everything readily and cheerfully - followers of Jesus often end up looking like everyone else. We are just as good at complaining as the rest of the world. Often it is easier to connect over a shared dislike than a shared like. While most of us know that complaining rarely solves anything, we continue to do it.

Jesus said to us, "Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works..." Matthew 5:15. What if the very best way to offer light to a dark world is to stop complaining. What if one of the best ways to communicate the goodness of God is to limit our grumbling and complaints?

Would you be willing to exchange your words of complaining for words of celebration?

Would you be willing to exchange your words of grumbling for words of gratitude?

The Bible says

Kind words heal and help; cutting words wound and maim. Proverbs 15:4 MSG

Gracious speech is like clover honey— good taste to the soul, quick energy for the body. Proverbs 16:24

So much of the pain in this world comes from hurtful words. And so often the first place where people learn to use words as a weapon is through complaining.

Some great steps to stop complaining. Ask yourself why you feel the need to complain? Can you try to communicate your feelings about something without complaining?

Example

Complaint - Traffic is so terrible in Chicago. I hate my commute.

Non-Complaint - I try to use my commute to catch up with people I don't talk with regularly..

Being around a person that chooses gracious words over grumbling words is so much more enjoyable.

LESS IS MORE

RESPOND

Jesus, I am more familiar than I want to be with complaining. I confess that I can find so many things to complain about. I long to shift my complaints into celebrations and my grumbling into gratitude. Lord, help me see that my words have weight in this world to bring light and hope.
Amen.

RENEW

Make a list of things that you tend to complain about and a list of people you tend to complain with. Spend some time journaling about how you want to shift one of these areas and relationships.

DAY 15

READY FOR LESS PRIDE

READ

Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.

PHILIPPIANS 2:1 - 4

Humility is not thinking less of yourself,
it's thinking of yourself less.

CS LEWIS

LESS IS MORE

REFLECT

While no one goes looking to become prideful, the sin of pride plagues many people and sadly pride often derails our lives before we even realize it's a struggle. Proverbs 16:18 (msg), says "First pride, then the crash— the bigger the ego, the harder the fall." An honest and sobering reminder that Pride always leads to destruction.

Whenever pride worms its way into our hearts we struggle to be people of love. Pride is fundamentally in opposition to love, and Jesus said the spiritual life can be boiled down to loving God and loving people. Pride reduces relationships and people as a means to an end and prideful people only value others as long as they are useful.

When pride takes control of our lives, we create a superior view of ourselves. Although we tend to easily recognize pride in other people, we must also learn to search our hearts to see if we have allowed pride to take up space in our lives. When pride is unchecked and unconfessed, we will find that our self-centered ways begin to impact every area of our lives.

Pride leads to being more consumed with our image, unwilling to take ownership and responsibility when we make a mistake, and it almost always leads to a lack of compassion and care for others. Pride often gets tangled up with comparison and a lack of contentment. Pride leads us away from God trusting our own thoughts and desires over the voice of God in our lives. Perhaps the most painful outcome from pride is that it always destroys relationships.

Jesus invited us into a life of humility, and choosing the path of humility always requires intentionally inviting Jesus to transform our lives. How might God be inviting you to release some areas of pride in your life?

RESPOND

Jesus, forgive me for the ways I have allowed pride to corrode parts of my life. Break me open Lord and replace my pride with your humility. Amen.

LESS IS MORE

RENEW

Take some time to contemplate how pride is showing up in your life and relationships. Where can you start to replace pride with humility?

DAY 16

READY FOR LESS HATRED

READ

Hatred stirs up conflict, but love
covers over all wrongs.

PROVERBS 10:12

It's one of the greatest gifts you can give
yourself, to forgive. Forgive everybody.

MAYA ANGELOU

LESS IS MORE

REFLECT

In the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5 - 7), Jesus invites us all to look at our inner lives as the source for all of our issues with one another. He gets quite specific when it comes to the behavior that stems from the hatred found lurking within. Jesus says we need to dig out our judgment and the invitation is challenging. Because not only does he say we must not kill, but that we must not even harbor hateful anger. The concern of Jesus is always for the purity of our hearts. He knows the majority will not actually commit murder but most of us are walking around with deep hatred and anger marinating in our hearts. But, for so many of us, we pay more attention to the outward behavior while the inward thoughts slowly eat away at the soul.

Jesus knows that if we walk around with hatred, we start to kill our souls. We can't live harboring hatred without it slowly deteriorating our lives. Yet, so many followers of Jesus live as though it is OK to harbor bitterness, negativity, anger and hatred toward others.

Jesus says if we call people names in our hearts, or we carry a judgment about people being worthless or evil, we live out the ways of death instead of life. Jesus knows that if we become disconnected from the love of God, we will start to live disconnected from ourselves and one another.

In Matthew 5:44, Jesus implores us to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us. Even though Jesus had not yet gone to the cross he modeled this kind of reckless love

in his teaching. I am convinced if Jesus followers shifted this one area of their lives, the world would take notice of just how different our love really is. It is a powerful witness to be able stand against hate without becoming hate and opposing evil while not becoming evil. Truly it is better to live forgiving than hating.

RESPOND

Jesus, I confess that I am quick to look at the brokenness in others before I look at my own. When I gaze with judgment I can feel hatred growing in my heart. Forgive me for the ways I judge and hate. Replace my judgment with love. Amen.

LESS IS MORE

RENEW

Spend some time journaling about the areas where you are quick to judge others. Ask Jesus to forgive your judgment. Journal a letter to one person that you have judged. You don't have to give the letter to the person, but in the letter practice asking for forgiveness.

DAY 17

READY FOR LESS UNFORGIVENESS

READ

Bear with each other and forgive one another
if any of you has a grievance against someone.
Forgive as the Lord forgave you.

COLOSSIANS 3:13

To forgive is to set a prisoner free and
discover that the prisoner was you.

LEWIS B. SMEDES

LESS IS MORE

REFLECT

When I first started intentionally following Jesus, grace overwhelmed my soul. I was deeply aware that grace was not something I could ever do for myself. And after decades of following Jesus, God's loving mercy and grace continue to undo me in the very best ways. I am grateful to be a Christian, and over the years I have found that Christians are often some of the most sincere, kind, and loving people. But, when an offense requiring grace and forgiveness finds itself on their doorstep, often their (of which I am included) behavior doesn't look much different from the non-believer. Instead, the faith of the believer can resemble an imitation version of the gospel rather than a person whose life is flowing with grace and forgiveness. There are so many caveats and challenging circumstances when it comes to forgiveness, but I have found that no matter the situation the longer you hold a grudge the longer the grudge has a hold on you.

When unforgiveness has a hold on your life, you will not have freedom in your life. I don't know anyone that does not want more freedom in their life, but it comes down to your willingness to forgive. I love the words of Nelson Mandela who spent years in prison after being wrongly accused. As his sentence was dropped and he finally walked out, he said, "As I walked out the door toward the gate that would lead to my freedom, I knew if I didn't leave my bitterness and hatred behind, I'd still be in prison."

The more unforgiveness you hold the less likely you are to experience the everyday moments of grace and mercy in your

life. Are there any areas of your life where you are holding onto unforgiveness? How is Jesus calling you to let go of unforgiveness? How might he be calling you to have less judgment, resentment, gossip, vengeance, and hard-heartedness in your life and relationships?

RESPOND

Jesus, I long to live a life of freedom, but I confess unforgiveness has had a chain around my heart. I acknowledge the grace and mercy you have shown me. Give me the courage to move forward with showing the same grace and mercy to others. I confess that I am afraid to forgive at times. I am afraid that it will somehow condone the hurt and pain in my life. Help me trust you and courageously walk towards forgiveness. Amen.

LESS IS MORE

RENEW

Spend some time journaling through the following questions.
How is Jesus calling you to let go of unforgiveness?
How might he be calling you to have less judgment, resentment, gossip, vengeance, and hard-heartedness in your life and relationships?

DAY 18

READY FOR LESS DIVISION

If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when completeness comes, what is in part disappears. When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me. For now, we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. And now these three remain: faith, hope and love.

But the greatest of these is love.

1 CORINTHIANS 13:1 - 13

Don't stand on issues, walk with people.

CARLOS WHITTAKER

LESS IS MORE

REFLECT

The political and cultural issues of our day are complex, to say the least. But it's important to remember that Christians have been disagreeing about important issues since before they were called Christians. The Bible is overflowing with stories of the earliest followers of the Way disagreeing and then parting ways. The same is true of us today. Jesus was not nearly as concerned about the content of our disagreements as much as he was concerned about the state of our hearts. It's almost as if Jesus knew we would disagree, so he decided to make sure that when we do we root our behavior towards one another in the foundation of love.

Disagreeing is normal and helpful to our developmental growth and learning, it's when our disagreements become divisive and hateful that they stunt the flow of love in our lives. Jesus knew that we would have trouble and therefore we would disagree. "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world, you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."
John 16:33

Jesus is essentially saying battles will rage, division will occur, but the war is already won. Peace has already been purchased and made available to you by the death and resurrection of Jesus! That peace not only comes at a price, but it also comes as part of a process. You come into a world overcome by Jesus so how you engage in disagreements should come from the rooted place of peace.

Brenda Salter McNeil in her brilliant book, *Roadmap To Reconciliation* says, "There is no sustained peace without justice and no sustained relationship without forgiveness."

One of the greatest ways to heal our division is to live out the sustained peace of Jesus through our acts of healthy justice and radical forgiveness.

RESPOND

Jesus, I confess that I can often lose my footing in my strong opinions and firm convictions on different issues. Please forgive me for caring more about being right than offering your peace and love in this world. Help me to start walking with people more than I stand on issues. Amen.

LESS IS MORE

RENEW

Spend some time journaling about some of the most important social issues you think about. Spend some time journaling about what it would be like for you to befriend someone that views the issue from a different lens. Can you begin to pray for those that think differently than you do about the issues that are most important to you?

DAY 19

READY FOR LESS COMPARISON

READ

Make a careful exploration of who you are and the work you have been given, and then sink yourself into that. Don't be impressed with yourself. Don't compare yourself with others. Each of you must take responsibility for doing the creative best you can with your own life.

GALATIANS 6:4-5 (MSG)

We won't be distracted by comparison if we are captivated with purpose.

BOB GOFF

LESS IS MORE

REFLECT

I have never met a person who carried an actual comparison measuring stick around with them, but I think most of us might as well. So many of us are lugging around invisible measuring sticks that persuade us into a subconscious overanalysis of ourselves and one another. So many of us are comparing our insides to everyone else's outsides. We measure ourselves and others with disguised and discriminating devices that pull us down a destructive rabbit hole of comparison that leaves us wondering ...

Am I better?

Am I smarter?

Am I kinder?

Am I more successful?

Am I humbler? Yup, Christians can measure anything.

I have had one of these invisible measuring sticks tucked away in my life for as long as I can remember. I have compared myself against people I know and people I don't know. I've even measured myself against myself. When I have found myself in seasons of increased comparison, it is usually due to an inner angst of feeling out of control somewhere in my life. Instead of taking the angst to God, I succumb to the decoy of detachment through comparison. Every moment of comparison in the past, present, or future is a moment that robs us of joy.

Theodore Roosevelt said, "Comparison is the thief of joy." But, comparison is more than just a thief. For many of us, it has become a full-fledged enemy and weapon keeping us from true contentment. Comparison holds us captive and kills

our capacity for contentment. God longs for us to experience pure peace and contentment that keeps us from the clutches of comparison. But it requires that we learn to recognize when comparison is present and then seek out the truthful light of Christ to keep us from the coaxing coma that lulls us back into the clutches of comparison.

“Watch what Jesus does, and then you do it. (Ephesians 5:1,MSG version)” Jesus is not only the author of contentment and joy he is the one that frees us from the clutches of comparison. He is the one to fix our attention on. Not only does it free us from comparison, but it also captivates our lives with purpose.

RESPOND

Jesus, I confess my mind is often cluttered with comparison. Forgive me for the ways that comparison keeps me from a deeper connection with you. Help me turn my jealousy into celebration and my insecurity into confidence. Fill my heart with gratitude and help me to celebrate that I am fearfully and wonderfully made by You. Amen.

LESS IS MORE

RENEW

Spend some time reflecting on the areas where you get lost in comparison. Invite Jesus to help you shift your attention. If there are specific people that you are comparing yourself to spend time praying for their lives to shift your jealousy into a blessing.

DAY 20

READY FOR SELF RIGHTEOUSNESS

READ

My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one - I in them and you in me — so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

JOHN 17:20-23

The time is always right to do what is right.

MARTIN LUTHER KING JR.

LESS IS MORE

REFLECT

In recent years studies about the content in the comment section online, estimated that around 1/3 of comments contain hateful content or personal attacks. While the number of Christian Trolls isn't quite as high as other groups, sadly it's rising! It seems that the desire to be right is eclipsing the desire to be loving in our world. But we must understand something, Being RIGHT without being LOVING is WRONG.

Jesus never said, "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples...if you bash one another online. If you put one another on blast. If you judge and yell and type in all caps to prove that you are right." No! He never said that. He said that we are to LOVE one another. And it is precisely our love for each other that will show this world that there is another way. A better way. God's way.

But somehow along the way Christians became obsessed with being right. And we traded God's Righteousness for our rightness. And it is a big part of the mess we find ourselves in today. Romans 3:10 says it clearly, "There is no one righteous, not even one."

Our righteousness comes from the righteousness of Jesus and it always leads us to do what is right.

RESPOND

Jesus, forgive me for the self-righteous and judgmental ways I keep myself separated from you and others. Replace my judgmental spirit with a humble heart. Amen.

RENEW

Spend some time journaling through the consistent areas where you find yourself wanting to be right. What does it feel like to you to be right? Do you feel satisfied? Closer to others when you are right? How might the need to be right be causing division in your relationships?

DAY 21

READY FOR LESS LONELINESS

READ

Two are better than one because they have a good
return for their labor: if either of them falls
down, one can help the other up.

ECCLESIASTES 4:9-10A

Rejection steals the best of who I am by reinforcing
the worst of what's been said to me.

LYSA TERKEURST

REFLECT

So what is loneliness? Well, let's start by looking at what it's not. Loneliness is not the same as being alone. Feeling Lonely and Being Alone are very different. Loneliness never starts as its own emotion. It draws its strength from other emotions. It's the freeloader of all emotions. Loneliness is like that guy who shows up at your house without being invited, eats all your food, watches TV with the volume maxed out, makes a mess without cleaning up, runs up your phone bill, ticks off your landlord, and starts dating your girlfriend! How does he get in? Well, he almost always walks in with someone else. Loneliness is similar. Sometimes loneliness walks in with the feeling of rejection. Other times loneliness comes in through fear, sadness, or stress. And before you know it, Loneliness overpowers your other feelings and begins to tell you that you'll never be accepted or loved again. And oftentimes we believe it.

Loneliness works like a parasite that feeds off of our other emotions, drawing energy from them, overtaking them, and before long, overtaking us. And loneliness can go deep. Down to the deepest places of our soul and once it's there, it can only be cured by something bigger and deeper than the pain it caused. Nothing we can do will ever truly make it go away. It doesn't matter how much you try and ignore it or medicate through

- Overworking
- Staying busy
- Turning on the radio, TV, or playing video games for hours
- Getting into unhealthy relationships
- Excessive drinking or overeating or numbing out

LESS IS MORE

None of that will make it go away. And maybe you've tried. Spending all your energy to make it go away, but it doesn't. It can't on its own. There's really only one place you can turn. Instead of trying to make it go away, what would it look like for you to invite God into it? To invite him in, right into the middle of your loneliness.

The amazing thing about God is that he actually wants to be with you in your loneliness. Even when you feel like the biggest loser in the world, God still wants to be with you. If you would just let him know when you feel lonely and invite him in, you would see that His love is real and His promises are true. God made a promise to the Old Testament leader Joshua after his leader and friend Moses died that's just as true then and as it is today. It's the promise that you are never alone.

God says:

I will not fail you or abandon you. Do not be afraid or discouraged. For the Lord, your God is with you wherever you go.

Joshua 1:5b, 9

While Loneliness whispers that everyone has failed you and everyone has left you, God shouts, "Not True! Not for anyone who will trust me! I will never leave you, my love will never disappoint, I will be with you wherever you go. But you have to let me."

RESPOND

Jesus, please remind me that you are faithful and will never fail or abandon me. Help me to be present with my emotions and invite you to be present with me. Amen.

RENEW

Take some time to journal through the areas of your life where you tend to feel lonely. What emotions precede your loneliness? Invite Jesus into those emotions.