



SOUL CARE

THE *Vine* ATX

LETTER FROM MARK

There is something so exciting about the changing of seasons. Summer emerges and people flock to Barton Springs or their neighborhood pool. The scorching heat of the summer gives way to crisp autumn air. In winter, the days get shorter, air turns colder, a new wardrobe takes over our closet, and fireplaces light up again. The changing of the seasons are always exciting, but there is something unique about springtime. In this season, that which looked dormant or even dead bursts back to life.

Though we don't typically follow the liturgical calendar, there are two seasons The Vine uses in our shared life together: Advent (the time of preparation for Christ's coming) and Lent (the time between Ash Wednesday and Easter Sunday). Lent is an old word that means *springtime*. This season reminds us that Christ can make all things new in our lives as well. Lent is also a time for honesty, introspection, and returning to God once again.

This year, we are going to enact the season of Lent to do some Soul Care. Though we spend most of our days living on the surface, in this series we are going to go deeper. Many of us walk through life depleted, hurried, and half-awake. In the hustle of modern living, we commonly neglect the very core of our personhood: our soul. In this series, we will explore what it means to be soul-filled people. Through daily scripture readings, tools for reflection, VineGroup gatherings, sermons, and spiritual formation practices, we will become more aware of how Christ wants to form our souls. The intent of this series is not just individualistic self-care. As we are more deeply formed in Christ, we can then move into this world prepared to share in word and deed the good news of God's renewing power.

I hope you give yourself to this season of soul care. There are few things I believe God wants for us more than a faith-filled imagination that Christ can renew us - from the inside out. I pray that you would experience that reality in this season.

Following Christ together,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mark Charbonneau". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Mark Charbonneau
Pastor of The Vine

For additional resources including links to tools, weekly sermons, and small group opportunities, go to thevineaustin.org/soulcare



CONTENTS



Week 1: Befriending the soul.....	1
Week 2: Slowed-down spirituality for a frantic world.....	9
Week 3: Embodied spirituality.....	22
Week 4: Interior examination for a world living on the surface...31	
Week 5: Communal presence for a distracted connection.....	40
Week 6: Selfless compassion.....	50
Final words.....	58



WEEK 1



Befriending the soul

Though it can be easy to move through our days without ever considering it, our soul is the very core of our personhood. It drives our decisions, it fuels our health, and it is the primary place where we encounter God.

This week we will explore what it means to be a soul-filled person. By meditating on Scripture, discussing this in community, and prayer practices, we will seek to deepen our awareness of and relationship with our souls.

WEEKLY PRACTICE

Prayer is a gift from God where we not only encounter God but we also befriend our own soul. This week we will practice stillness, silence, and meditation upon Scripture as we seek to draw closer to our soul and meet with Christ.

SERMON NOTES:

MONDAY

Prompt: Read Psalm 42. This psalm describes something paradoxical. It shares someone's soulful longing to meet with God and the struggle to know of God's presence. Which is more familiar to you? Can you sense a soulful thirst for God? When was the last time you remember experiencing that?

Prayer: *This space is for your own prayer and reflection.*

Practice: As author and activist Parker Palmer once said, the soul is like a wild animal. To befriend it, one cannot barge into the forest screaming for it to come near. They must return to the wild again and again with stillness and calm until the wild beast slowly appears. If one does this over time, the beast might one day actually become a companion. For us to deepen our relationship with the soul, we need to learn the practice of stillness and quiet.

Re-read Psalm 42:1 a few times; read out loud if that is helpful. Then, sit in quietness with the Spirit. If needed, set a timer on your phone and just rest in the moment with the Spirit's nearness.

TUESDAY

Prompt: Read Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23. This parable talks about the different conditions of one's heart and soul. Write out the different soils that are mentioned, and make any observations you notice about them. Reflect on the state of your own soul: which soil do you believe depicts your soul today?

Prayer: *This space is for your own prayer and reflection.*

Practice: Spend time asking for Christ to reveal to you the state of your soul. Regardless of where you find yourself today, the work of the Spirit is to make you open to receive what Christ wants to sow in you.

WEDNESDAY

Prompt: Read Matthew 22:34-40. Religious rule-keeping can be an exhausting endeavor. Sadly, many of us have been taught that religion is about keeping lists and observing empty rules. The Jewish leaders and especially the Pharisees used rules to create a pecking order of value, a means of justification, and a way to control others. When Jesus was asked which was the greatest law, he spoke of the law of love – the love of God and neighbor. To our Savior, all of the laws hang on these two things.

What parts of ourselves does Jesus mention we are to love with? In other accounts of this moment, Jesus also includes strength. Consider each of these faculties of your being. What would it look like to love God with these parts of your personhood – especially your soul?

Prayer: *This space is for your own prayer and reflection.*

Practice: One of the ways we give and receive love in relationships is by quality time and affirming words. Today, spend some time with God. After a couple minutes sitting with God, share some words declaring who God has been in your life and your love in response to God's goodness.

THURSDAY

Prompt: Read Psalm 103. This psalmist is imploring their soul (their inmost being) to praise God. But what is getting in the way? Sin, regret, and brokenness.

Confession is a gift from God where we bring our true self to God so that we can be reminded of who we are and (more importantly) who God is. Reread this psalm slowly. Notice what this psalm is seeking to do in your life today. Where is it directing your attention? Where is the focus?

Prayer: *This space is for your own prayer and reflection.*

Practice: Spend a moment in your own prayer of confession. Release your regrets and sin to God so that your soul can be redirected to God's ever-present mercy. You may also use the phrases and lines from this psalm to form your prayer to God.

FRIDAY

Prompt: Read Psalm 19. Your soul has been created to be with God, to know God intimately, and to remain connected to Christ. It is in this abiding relationship we become a soul-filled person. To help you in your journey, God has provided instructions. This is the intent of God's laws. They don't exist to withhold anything from you, or to be some hollow rule book. God gives instructions so we can find life again. As Psalm 19 says, "The law of the Lord is perfect, refreshing the soul. The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy, making wise the simple." How would your relationship with God's commands look different if they were viewed as ways to care for your own soul?

Is there an instruction from the teachings of Christ or from Scripture you are having a hard time trusting? Is there something God has provided for you that you have neglected?

Prayer: *This space is for your own prayer and reflection.*

Practice: With open hands, ask for strength to trust in God's words. Ask the Spirit to help you walk out these kind instructions that lead to life. Lastly, spend time considering and praying the final words from this psalm. *"May these words of my mouth and this meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer."*

SATURDAY

Prompt: Read Psalm 23. As we conclude this week, we pray that you learned to befriend your soul. Living with a greater awareness and understanding of the soul is a life-long endeavor – one full of mystery and joy.

Finish this week by reading this psalm a couple times slowly. Visualize the different scenes from this psalm with the soul in mind. See how God wants to fill you in each setting.

Prayer: *This space is for your own prayer and reflection.*

Practice: Today, simply rest in God. No words. No petitions. Just spend time enjoying God's presence like two friends who need no words to feel at home with another. Allow your soul rest with Christ.



WEEK 2



Slowed-down spirituality for a frantic world

What is the speed of life? The speed of your soul? The speed of God? It's been said that the speed of thought, love, and maybe even our souls is three miles per hour. This is the average pace of a person walking. Yet compare that to the speed at which we actually live. We can retrieve vast quantities of information and answer almost any question in seconds thanks to our thumbs flying across a tiny glowing screen. The fastest road in America speeds right past Austin en route to San Antonio at 85 mph. Commercial airliners send us to various destinations at speeds of over 500 mph. How can our souls possibly keep up? Were they meant to? Our pace of life and living deeply shape who we are.

Might these frantic speeds actually be doing violence to our very souls? When we read the pages of Scripture, we see a call to very counter-cultural rhythms of rest, retreat, and sabbath as integral parts of the lives of those who have followed God for millennia. Simply put, to practice the sabbath is to cease, stop, and rest. This week we will explore a slowed-down spirituality that will actually help fill our souls.

WEEKLY PRACTICE

This week, we will experiment with living at a significantly slower pace, culminating in practicing a sabbath. To sabbath is not only to cease labor but also to embrace the joy, rest, and restoration we have in God. When we practice the sabbath, we sit in the knowledge that we are not just what we can produce or accomplish. We are souls with purpose - and yes, that purpose includes various forms of labor over the course of our lives - but we're also souls that are meant to commune with God and one another, trusting God with the time we spend at rest.

Ideally, the sabbath practice is a full 24-hour period, but as with any new endeavor, start where you are and where you can. Sabbath will never happen on its own, and some preparation is needed. Each day's reading will have a mini-practice to build towards a full day of the sabbath. This practice is about showing up. Not achieving perfection on your first attempt. If it takes this whole series to build up to a full 24-hour period of the sabbath, that's okay. Try to focus this week on starting a new daily rhythm of slowing down with an uninterrupted time for the daily reading and mini-practice.

The practice of the sabbath should look different for each person and the season of life they are in. To help you think through some of the basics of what practicing a sabbath entails, you can find an overview of sabbath planning guidance at the end of this week's section. Take a look at it today and see which day might work best for you this week.

SERMON NOTES:

MONDAY

Prompt: Read Genesis 2:1-2. At its simplest the word *sabbath* means to stop. God created and worked and produced for six days, and then on the seventh day, God stopped. God didn't stop forever, we know that. There was still plenty more to be done, yet the very God of the universe rested. And in the very first use of the word "holy" in the scriptures, we see God bless this day and call it holy. What does it say to you that God rested? What does it mean to you that God would lead by example in this way? What else does this passage bring to your mind?

Prayer: *This space is for your own prayer and reflection.*

Practice: Today, we will reflect on what the idea of sabbath – a full day of resting from our labor – brings up in us. Maybe start a new rhythm by making sure your devices are out of reach and silenced. Use this time to process the questions below in uninterrupted silence.

Take some time to think, pray, and journal through the following questions:

1. When you think about taking a day of rest, what comes to mind? When you imagine a day where you turn off the desire to produce or accomplish, what emotions emerge? Does it seem impossible or simple? Why?
2. Have you considered that to sabbath for a full day is an act of trusting God to provide for your needs even when you're not working?
3. Have you considered that to practice the sabbath is to recognize your own limitations and trust God with ultimate control over your work and efforts? What is your response to that?
4. How do you think God might be asking you to reconsider your view of work and rest?

TUESDAY

Prompt: Read Luke 5:15-16 & 6:12. We know that Jesus was obedient to the laws of the Torah to remember the sabbath day and keep it holy (Exodus 20:8-11). But even more than strict obedience to the letter of the law, we see in Jesus his own deep need to withdraw from the frenzy of life around him, the pressing needs of real people, and the expectations others might have for his schedule to act counter-culturally. Jesus seemed to have a keen sense of when it was time to step back from the crowds and be with God on his own. To practice sabbath is to act counter-culturally to a world that says rest is for the weak, the undisciplined. Jesus, fully man and fully God, desperately needed to be with the Father, to withdraw from the chaos, to cease "doing" and to be with God.

Prayer: *This space is for your own prayer and reflection.*

Practice: Think about the life of Jesus as one marked by regular intervals of withdrawal and rest alongside the many conversations, travels, disciples, miracles, and teachings. What new ideas about his life on earth come to mind? If a deeply formed follower of Jesus is one who lives as he lived, what does this bring to your mind about your rhythms of withdrawing and rest? What could you imagine a regular interval or withdrawal look like? Maybe take a look at some of the activities listed on the sabbath planning resource at the end of this week's section and think about which sounds restful and could be incorporated into your sabbath practice.

WEDNESDAY

Prompt: Read Luke 6:1-11. Tucked between the two passages we read yesterday are two stories about Jesus and how his observance of the sabbath disrupted the status quo of the religious leaders of his day. The Jewish community of Jesus' day had not only believed in strict adherence to the laws on the sabbath as expressed in the Hebrew scriptures but also additional restrictions created from particular teachers. How do you see Jesus challenge those belief systems in these stories? What does he seem to be saying about what sabbath is and isn't?

Prayer: *This space is for your own prayer and reflection.*

Practice: All spiritual practices are about formation, drawing nearer to God, and becoming more like Jesus in the process. They are not a set of rigid tasks and to-dos we plug into a spiritual equation so we receive a guaranteed result. They are new rhythms we practice, and practice takes trial, error, and continued attempts. But as we continue these practices, we slowly move in a new direction and develop new habits and beliefs. Do you have any history with perfectionism or legalism that might make a balanced approach to practicing the sabbath difficult for you? What might God be saying to you about this right now in light of what you've been learning this week?

THURSDAY

Prompt: Read Psalm 46:10–11. For many of us, if we have any familiarity with the verse we just read, it probably ends at the first sentence. But look closely at what else God seems to be inviting us into as part of the experience of being still and knowing him. What does God say next? To exalt is to hold (someone or something) in very high regard, to think or speak very highly of. Maybe the idea is that in pondering God, we will then exalt God. There is a beautiful connection between taking time to see God for who God is and the resulting praise/adoration/speaking highly of what we discover.

Prayer: *This space is for your own prayer and reflection.*

Practice: Praise and worship and recognition of all that is great about God is meant to be a regular part of the lives of those who follow God. But to do so as a natural overflow of life with God requires some form of slowing down long enough to ponder and savor God. Take some time now (and during your sabbath) to exalt God. You can do so through song, through prayer, journaling, art, or maybe by meditating on this specific passage of scripture and seeing what the Holy Spirit brings to mind about God. We've created a playlist of songs that you can access by scanning the QR code here.



**If you picked a day over the weekend to practice the sabbath for any length of time, take a look at the "Preparation Day" portion of the sabbath planning guidance (at the end of this week's section) to begin to prepare for your day of rest.*

FRIDAY

Prompt: Read 1 Timothy 6:6-10. In addition to ceasing our work and professionally-related labor as a part of our sabbath practice, a rhythm of practicing the sabbath is also an invitation to practice contentment. How much energy do we expend thinking about what we need, want, buy, shop for, etc. It's a much harder part of our life to quantify than the hours we spend at the office or in school. Consumerism is an American way of life. What is challenging to you in this passage? What has contentment looked like in your life? What is the connection between contentment and finances for you?

Prayer: *This space is for your own prayer and reflection.*

Practice: Set aside a day this week (or include this as a part of your designated practice of the sabbath) to refrain from shopping, window shopping, and online browsing. You can also add an exercise of gratitude or thankfulness to replace the habit of consumerism. Think about what small gifts, beauty, or ordinary things that God has blessed you with today. If something comes to your mind that you would like to purchase, resist the urge for now, pause, and call to mind 1 Timothy 6:6-7. Maybe take stock of this experiment at the end of the day and write down what you noticed.

SATURDAY

Prompt: Read I Kings 19:8-18. Fierce wind, shattering rocks, quaking earth, fire. Is this our expectation (maybe even hope) of how God works in the world? That God works in such a way we couldn't possibly ignore? Or is God more likely to meet us in such a way that if we're not really present, not attending to God's presence, we could miss God entirely? How does this interaction confirm or contradict your expectation of how God engages God's people? Does it bring you comfort or confusion?

Prayer: *This space is for your own prayer and reflection.*

Practice: While most of us don't have 40 days to commit to a mountain trek to hear the whisper of God, we can consider how to slow down and quiet ourselves enough to hear the gentle voice of God. Consider the quote below and plan a walk with a vision to move at the speed of God and experience God on the journey.

"God walks 'slowly' because he is love. If he is not love he would have gone much faster. Love has its speed. It is an inner speed. It is a spiritual speed. It is a different kind of speed from the technological speed to which we are accustomed. It is 'slow' yet it is lord over all other speeds since it is the speed of love." Kosuke Koyama, *Three Mile an Hour God*

SABBATH PLANNING GUIDANCE

All of the content in this guidance is from *How to Un-hurry*, the companion to John Mark Comer's book *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry*.

THE BASICS OF PRACTICING SABBATH

1. Mark out a 24-hour time period (or as close as you can) to rest and worship.

There are three common variations of this Practice:

- The traditional Sabbath: from sundown Friday night to the same time Saturday late afternoon. This works well for people who are especially busy on Sundays with church activities or other events.
- The Lord's Day Sabbath: from waking on Sunday morning (or ideally upon going to bed Saturday night) through Sunday evening. This works best for most people, as Sunday is the calmest day in most cities, and it's likely you already set aside time to worship with your community, so it's less invasive and builds on a practice you already have in your weekly routine.
- The midweek Sabbath: any day during the week. This works best for people with odd or sporadic work schedules and have a midweek day off.

I recommend you begin in the evening—with dinner or just before bed, but there's no "right way." But a celebratory meal can really start your Sabbath off with the right intention. You can also invite friends or family to join you, or cook the same meal each week, to transition your mind from work to rest.

If at all possible, establish a regular rhythm of Sabbath on the same day each week.

2. Pick a ritual to clearly begin and end your Sabbath.

Much of the Sabbath is about rhythms and rituals that set aside the day as "holy." Beginning and ending with a marked moment will help you settle into rest, and help you reenter the week with a restful spirit.

Here are a few ideas of how to begin the Sabbath from both ancient tradition and modern practice:

- Light two candles (symbolic for the two commands in Exodus and Deuteronomy to “remember” and “observe” the Sabbath). Invite the Spirit of Jesus to come and give your home light, joy, love, peace, and rest.
- Pour a glass of wine (or grape juice for the kids or the straight edge). Pray a blessing over the drink and give thanks.
- If you have a family, this is where, traditionally, the father speaks a blessing over the children and the mother. If you’re with roommates or friends, this can be a wonderful time to bless each other, with prayers like: May you be happy and full of joy. May the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace. May you find rest for your soul.
- Read a Psalm, sing a song, quote a poem, or pray a liturgy to center on God.
- Pray: ask the Holy Spirit to bring a spirit of rest over your life and lead and guide you through the next 24 hours.
- If you begin at night, share a meal with your family or friends.
- If you begin in the morning, go to church and worship.

Here are a few ideas to end your Sabbath:

- Take a slow, leisurely prayer walk around your neighborhood, nearby park, or nature reserve.
- Read a psalm.
- Share a meal with family and friends.
- Spend some time alone or with your family and friends in prayers of gratitude.
- Traditionally, the Sabbath ends by sitting on the floor, lighting a special Havdalah candle, and sharing 1) the best part of your Sabbath, and 2) what you are looking forward to in the week ahead, passing around sweet-smelling spices to savor the day, and ending with prayers of gratitude.

3. Spend an entire day in the four aspects of Sabbath: stopping, resting, delighting, and worshiping.

Traditionally there are twelve activities that mark Sabbath practice:

- Lighting the candles.
- Blessing the children.
- Eating a meal.
- Singing.
- Worshiping with your Community.
- Walking.
- Napping.
- Making love to your spouse.
- Reading.
- Spending time alone with God.
- Spending time with family and friends.
- Gratitude.

This is not a “to do” list: there are no “to do’s” on Sabbath! No ought’s or should’s. This is just a list of activities many people find restful and restorative.

Again, there is no “right way.” Adapt your Sabbath practice to your personality, preferences, stage of life, and however it is you connect with God: time in nature, walking your dog to the park, playing frisbee golf with your kids, getting lost in a good novel, etc. Just take the day to pamper your soul in God’s presence.

If “how” to do this is unclear to you, don’t feel bad, you’re not alone. Spend a few minutes thinking and praying over these simple questions:

- What about my regular routine would I need to stop to experience the Sabbath?
- What is restful for me?
- What brings me an easy delight?
- What is a worshipful way I connect to God?

PREPARATION DAY

What could be helpful to spend time doing the day or so before your Sabbath? Here are some ideas to get you started:

- Go grocery shopping/ stock your kitchen
- Pre-make your dinner (soup, casserole, etc)
- Clean or pick up your house/apartment
- Answer/return all phone/text messages
- Plan out a rough schedule for your Sabbath. (This could even include setting up when and where you want to meet up with your friend for coffee/walk.) Remember, of course, to take it slow and give yourself plenty of space.
- Think of something you can do to make the day stand apart: a special dessert, a picnic at the park, a spiritual book you love, a friend with whom you want to have coffee, etc.
- Consider turning off your phone and computer for the Sabbath (or, at least, limiting your time on these devices). There are so many benefits to this, the least of which is that you are actually able to stay present to yourself and God when you aren't tethered to a device. The Sabbath was instilled by God for the people of Israel as a way to remind them that they are no longer slaves. Some people turn off their phones and laptops to remind themselves that they are not slave to their devices. In reality, it can be easier said than done; we don't realize how tethered to devices we really are until we try to put them away for a bit. Here are some helpful ideas for how to make this happen:
 - Actually put your phone and computer away in a box or closet after turning them off
 - If 24 hours is just too much, or you aren't able to do it for some reason, try turning your phone on "Do Not Disturb" mode and only checking it every four hours

Note: For those of you who think this is legalistic or way too hardcore, we simply encourage you to try it for a few weeks (ideally 3-4, as it takes a while to get over the cravings of digital addiction)! If you don't feel a marked increase in peace and joy in your emotional health and spiritual life, then go back to normal.

WEEK 3

Embodied spirituality: Learning to honor our bodies

To live caring for our souls does not mean that we neglect the body. Despite our tendency to split the soul and body, the two are intertwined.

Many of us might have been led to think of the soul as the center of faith and to reject the body as impure and unholy. But Scripture tells us that we are created in the image of God for God's glory, and we will be bodily resurrected on the last day. Our bodies - in all their limitations - glorify and make visible the invisible presence of God manifested in love for one another. The body is worthy of respect, and integrating our body with our soul allows us to live most fully.

"The body, and it alone, is capable of making visible what is invisible, the spiritual and divine. It was created to transfer into the visible reality of the world, the invisible mystery hidden in God from time immemorial, and thus to be a sign of it." --Pope John Paul (Feb 20, 1980)

"I am not one of those who neglect the body in order to make of it a sacrificial offering for the soul, since my soul would thoroughly dislike being served in such a fashion."
--Rainer Maria Rilke

WEEKLY PRACTICE

This week we will practice bringing a greater awareness to our bodies. Through various relaxation, mindfulness, and breathing practices, we will seek to better integrate our bodies and souls as we draw near to Jesus.

SERMON NOTES:

MONDAY

Prompt: Read Psalm 139, focusing on verses 13–18. God knows your deepest thoughts and God created your innermost parts. God knit together your muscles and tissue, your brain, heart, and liver, your bowels and spine, your fingers and toes.

How does God's deeply intimate knowledge of you make you feel? How does God's tender creation of your body shape how you view your body? What resistance do you notice within yourself – whether thoughts or feelings – that might keep you from acknowledging that your body is one of God's most wonderful works?

Prayer: *This space is for your own prayer and reflection.*

Practice: Dieula Previlon is the founder and CEO of Elevate Her, a ministry to empower women to heal from trauma and become instruments of healing, peace, and hope. The following practice (on the next page) is adapted from one taught to Dieula by women in the DR Congo. It's an exercise to help regulate your emotions and bring focus to your body while enjoying the goodness of God.

Step 1: Find somewhere quiet to sit. Get comfortable. Bring attention to your breath. Just listen. Take a moment before moving to each new step.

Step 2: Take some deep breaths from your nose and exhale out your mouth. Nice and slow.

Step 3: Feel your feet firmly on the ground. Continue sitting quietly and breathing slowly.

Step 4: Bring attention to your hands. Again, just feel them while sitting still and breathing slowly.

Step 5: Notice the bottom half of your body; your pelvis and legs. Continue to take deep, slow breaths.

Step 6: Notice the top half of your body, your chest, shoulders, arms, neck and head.

Step 7: Bring your attention back to your breath and breathe in slowly through your nose and out through your mouth three more times.

How do you feel? What new awareness do you have in your body? Try to carry this bodily awareness throughout your day.

TUESDAY

Prompt: Read 1 Corinthians 6:19-20. To the original audience, the reference to the temple would have brought to mind the grandeur and holiness of the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem, where God's presence resided. For most of us, there is a sharp contrast between the grandeur of a holy place of worship and the frail and flawed physicality of our bodies. What does the reality that your body is the Holy of Holies, on par with the majesty and holiness of the Temple, evoke in you? Consider for a moment the price God paid for you. What is a specific way you can honor God with your body today?

Prayer: *This space is for your own prayer and reflection.*

Practice: In today's practice, we will focus on the dignity and holiness of our body.

Sit for a moment and try to quiet your thoughts.

Focus on your breath.

Relax the parts of your body that are holding tension.

After a few moments of stillness, consider the following:

- What are five things your body does or provides that you appreciate?
- What are several impressive things that your body has done/can do?
- In what ways does your body bring honor to God?

WEDNESDAY

Prompt: Read Romans 12:1. Yesterday we read that our bodies are temples of God. Today we are encouraged to offer our bodies as sacrifices to God. Which understanding of your body is easiest for you to relate to – temple or sacrifice? What comes to mind when you think of a living sacrifice? How does the idea of your body as holy and pleasing to God sit with you? What are tangible ways you offer your body as a sacrifice to God?

Prayer: *This space is for your own prayer and reflection.*

Practice: Often we assess our bodies based on how they look from the outside – when they are designed for us to live in and through. Make a list of what you have to do today. Reflect on how your body will enable you to do these things. As you go through your day, try to notice the million tiny ways your body frees you to show up.

THURSDAY

Prompt: Read Mark 12:30-31. This is a different account of the story you read last week. Jesus' greatest commandment requires a total integration of body and soul encompassing your heart, soul, mind, and strength. In what ways is your body essential for you to love God? In what ways is your body required to love another person? Consider for a moment the importance of having those you love physically present with you and of being physically present with them.

Prayer: *This space is for your own prayer and reflection.*

Practice: Pray for an opportunity to use your body to love God and neighbor today. It can be as simple as being present with people or making eye contact with someone at the grocery store, or hugging a friend - anything where your body and physical presence are involved.

FRIDAY

Prompt: Read 1 Kings 19:1-18. There are times when a life of faith is profoundly exhausting and incredibly discouraging and – although it may seem strange – sometimes what our souls need to keep going is care for our bodies. In what ways does God care for the physical body of Elijah in this passage? Allowing ourselves to rest, eat, sleep – these are ways to care for our souls by caring for our bodies. How can you care for your soul by caring for your body today?

Prayer: *This space is for your own prayer and reflection.*

Practice: In *The Body Keeps Score*, author Bessel Van Der Kolk explains how the body responds powerfully to trauma and stress. Van Der Kolk begins his work with his patients by helping them to “notice and then describe the feelings in their bodies—not emotions such as anger or anxiety or fear but the physical sensations beneath the emotions: pressure, heat, muscular tension, tingling, caving in, feeling hollow, and so on.” Van Der Kolk also helps patients identify “the sensations associated with relaxation or pleasure.”

Today’s practice is to take an inventory of your physical sensations, both those that are tied to anxiety and tension and those that are associated with pleasure and relaxation. Find a quiet place where you can lie down for 10 minutes. Follow the QR code below to a video that will walk you step-by-step through a full body scan. Hopefully this will help you to become more aware of what is happening in your body so that you may better care for your physical needs.



SATURDAY

Prompt: Read John 1:14 and Matthew 26:26. Jesus offers us an embodied God. When he broke bread and offered it as his body, he made a spiritual metaphor linking his body and a spirit-filled life of faith. There was no separation of body and soul in Jesus. How does it make you feel to consider Jesus in a real, regular human body? How did this body enable him to live a fully spiritual life and help him fulfill his purpose? What is one way you can live with your body and soul fully integrated today?

Prayer: *This space is for your own prayer and reflection.*

Practice: Find a comfortable place to sit, perhaps with a view of the outdoors. Sit for a moment and try to quiet your thoughts and focus on your breath. Relax parts of your body that are holding tension.

Ask God what God wants to tell you about your body and your soul and listen for God's response.

WEEK 4

Interior examination for a world living on the surface

Examining what happens under the surface of our souls is an essential part of caring for them, but too often we are afraid to face the thoughts or feelings that might provide essential clues to places we are in need of healing or comfort from God. We tend to label our thoughts or feelings as good (faithful) or bad (sinful), when the reality is – often these thoughts and feelings are just giving us information about how our souls are experiencing the world and where they need care from us and from God.

Often, if we listen to our seemingly unhelpful thoughts, feelings, or behaviors, they can give us clues into our soul wounds that may not have fully healed. Some may feel that it isn't helpful to reflect on the past and how it's shaped us, but it is important for a few reasons. First, we have a tremendous capacity to heal and grow. When we neglect tending to our soul wounds, we also neglect the growth that is available to us. Second, when we don't process what we've been through, we run the risk of operating out of our woundedness without even realizing it. We develop ways to survive, but sometimes they sabotage our ability to show up in intimacy and love – with others and ourselves and God.

“In your life, God's ‘way’ is about loving him and loving your neighbor with all the parts of you. And this is hard work, especially for those parts of your ‘heart, soul, and mind’ that have not had much practice doing that—the wounded parts, the weak parts, or the functions, such as memory or emotion, that you may not pay much attention to.”

— Curt Thompson, *Anatomy of the Soul*

WEEKLY PRACTICE

Internal family systems (IFS) is a therapeutic model that helps us navigate different thoughts/feelings we may have by personifying them. It is based on the idea that the human mind is composed of various "parts" that interact with one another to influence thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. The goal of IFS is to help individuals identify and understand their parts and to work towards integrating them in a way that leads to greater inner harmony and healing. This is achieved through a process of self-exploration in which individuals learn to listen to their parts and respond to them with empathy and understanding. This week, our practice will involve exploring our inner world and beginning the process of bringing our internal parts to Jesus so that we can learn from him how to care for our souls.

SERMON NOTES:

MONDAY

Prompt: One obstacle for many of us to internal examination is a sense of shame. We are scared we are going to find something within ourselves that makes us “bad.” No need to dive into your soul yet, and face all the things. Just reflect – are there thoughts and feelings that you are scared to face? What feels dangerous about looking inside and observing what is happening in your soul?

Prayer: *This space is for your own prayer and reflection.*

Practice: Let’s begin this week with a self-compassion exercise. Find a comfortable seated position and close your eyes. Imagine a warm, comforting light throughout your body. There are parts of you that might frighten you or that you might be ashamed of – just practice speaking over them: there is compassion and acceptance for them. Imagine Jesus setting a table for all your parts, and being equally welcoming to each one of them. He is excited to sit near and speak with any part of you.

TUESDAY

Prompt: Our emotions exist to give us information about what our soul is experiencing. Often we grow up in families or have experiences that make some emotions acceptable and others off limits. Today, consider some basic emotions: sadness, happiness, fear, anger, disappointment, loneliness, guilt, anxiety. What narratives do you have around these emotions (e.g. “anger is dangerous”, “fear means I don’t trust God”, “people who are anxious are weak”)? Now, consider Jesus – which of these emotions do you think he experienced in his life?

Prayer: *This space is for your own prayer and reflection.*

Practice: Consider a circumstance you are facing. Spend some time prayerfully reflecting – what emotions do you have around this circumstance. You might have lots and they might seem in conflict! Try to encourage every part of you that has thoughts or feelings about the circumstance to come forward. Try to resist judging those parts – just practice welcoming them around the table with Jesus. Envision Jesus leaning in and asking them to share more.

WEDNESDAY

Prompt: Read Romans 8:14-16. What are the two spirits mentioned in verse 15? Have you ever felt a slavery to fear? What has that felt like in your heart? What if the alternative was not a lack of fear, but a Father whom you can cry out to with your fears? What fears do you have today? What would it look like to live in slavery to these fears? What might it look like to bring these fears to God?

Prayer: *This space is for your own prayer and reflection.*

Practice: For the rest of this week, we'll focus on a few parts that are often utilized in "Inner Child" work: an "inner child" part, a "teenage" part, and a "true self." Our "inner child" is a term that psychologists use to refer to the part of you that holds your needs - no agenda or ideas on how to meet that need - just pure need. Look through your list of fears you listed above. Can you see any core needs beneath these fears? See if you can notice those core needs that belong to your inner child. Don't try to teach or train that part of you, just sit with them in their need. Imagine Jesus holding them as they share their needs and fears.

THURSDAY

Prompt: When we were children, none of us had our fears PERFECTLY attended to. As a result, we developed ways to help us navigate our fears. The only problem is - this part developed when we were little, and their plan for how to keep us safe may not always be the best. (For example, maybe your deepest inner child was afraid of being abandoned, this other part may have taught them to feel safe by avoiding intimacy). Think of one of the fears you listed yesterday. What patterns of behavior have emerged as an attempt to handle those fears?

Prayer: *This space is for your own prayer and reflection.*

Practice: The part that represents this unhelpful coping mechanism can be called our “outer child” or “teenage self” - it talks like an adult, it thinks it’s an adult, but it formed when we were children as a way to keep us safe.

Spend some time with this part today. Visualize Jesus inviting this part to the table and approaching with curiosity and care. What has been this part’s experience of the world? If this part was off the hook for keeping your inner child safe and meeting their needs, what would they be like? This part of you is not bad or foolish, they’ve just been given tasks above their paygrade. What would it feel like to free this part up to be a child or a teenager - not concerned with adult matters?

FRIDAY

Prompt: Sometimes our unhealthy coping mechanisms play out in choices that harm ourselves or others. Could this be what the Bible means when it describes slavery to fear? Sin? Today, think of a few behaviors or things you have done that you consider wrong or sinful. How might these behaviors have been your teenage parts attempting to meet your needs or care for yourself?

Prayer: *This space is for your own prayer and reflection.*

Practice: When we notice the part of ourselves that leads us into behaviors that harm ourselves or others, we can become frustrated, belittling, or even hateful and shaming with that part of ourselves. Today, try to reframe how you view that teenage self that has led you into behaviors you consider sinful. Practice visualizing Jesus engaging with your teenage self around a particular choice you've made that you regret. Imagine Jesus speaking with care and curiosity and compassion. Which of these things does that part need to hear from Jesus?

- *I understand why you did that thing.*
- *You were trying to provide for your inner child.*
- *Your coping mechanisms helped you survive hard situations.*
- *I'm sorry no one helped you learn to meet your needs in a different way.*
- *I believe you: that you were trying to provide for your inner child.*
- *I am sorry you didn't have what you needed earlier.*
- *I came for YOU (this part specifically). I died so that you would be able to sit at this table with me - because I want you here.*
- *I am not ashamed of you. I understand you.*

SATURDAY

Prompt: In IFS there is a part we identify that is an adult part – able and wise. We call this your true self or core self. This part is marked by 8 “C”s: compassion, curiosity, clarity, creativity, calm, confidence, courage, and connectedness. As Christians we believe that we are well made, image-bearers of God. How do these 8 Cs reflect the Spirit of God that lives in you?

Prayer: This space is for your own prayer and reflection.

Practice: Today we will practice getting in touch with the part of us that is our core, true self. You have Jesus with you to guide you, and you are also empowered by the Spirit of God. God has partnered with you, creating in you a new creation: a true self that is also empowered with God’s own Spirit. Search your heart for the part of you that holds those 8 Cs. Imagine that part of you being strengthened with the Spirit of God and being filled with the fullness of God. What does your inner child need from this part of you today?

WEEK 5

Communal presence for a distracted connection

It is interesting – in fact, it can be life-changing – to realize that most of the New Testament is written with plural “you’s.” Everything after Acts, then all the way to Revelation, the “you’s” are plural and most verbs are plural. The Bible is a document for the *people* of God, and it is meant to be embraced and lived out *together*.

The central metaphor in the Bible is “one body,” – i.e., we are, together, one organism (1 Cor. 12, Rom. 12). But many of us may not feel like we experience this togetherness. Often, either by circumstance or by choices, we experience the *individualist* path. Even our faith journey tends to be “me and Jesus.” A private spirituality. Whether we know it or not, what we too often experience is isolation.

This week we’re going to look at scriptures and practices that contribute to a connected life. It is what we need. It is what our soul needs.

WEEKLY PRACTICE

Our weekly practice is a combination of reflection and conversation. Sounds simple, right? Caring for our souls means we open doors within ourselves that perhaps we haven’t thought about before. This practice requires determination, especially when we feel stumped (reflecting is hard work sometimes). Reflection can also be difficult when we are uncomfortable with the door being opened. And conversation with others is simple – when it stays on the surface. We are shooting for something different this week. Our loving God is present with us. The Spirit of God encourages and empowers us.

SERMON NOTES:

MONDAY

Prompt: Read Philippians 1:27-28. Every time you see you/your note that it is plural. Our "oneness" is a sign to others that God is real. Read the passage a few times, trying to get the gist of Paul's plural message. Now, picture yourself sitting with five people you share your life with. Imagine they are teammates, and visualize Paul as the mentor, the coach. He is sharing this message with all of you together. What insights come to you when experiencing the passage in this way? Throughout your time as a Christian, where and how have you experienced being a part of an intimate team with others?

Prayer: *This space is for your own prayer and reflection.*

Practice: Today's practice is perhaps the hardest of the week. Find a conversation partner. The idea is to share with that person what we are doing and experiencing in our explorations this week. The partner does not have to be a member of The Vine. They don't have to be doing the Soul Care journal themselves. Honestly, the partner does not have to be a practicing Christian, just a trustworthy friend. It might sound something like this:

We're doing something called Soul Care at our church. It's a Lent thing. There are a few questions I am answering each day. I am asked to find someone - just this week - and share my responses and maybe you ask me a few questions back. That's all you have to do. I really want to do this. Would you be that person for me?

Is the Spirit nudging you that, yes, this is a good thing and I ought to do it? Describe what you are thinking and experiencing as you now consider finding a conversation partner. By God's grace and by God's power, find your conversation partner by the end of today.

TUESDAY

Prompt: Read Hebrews 10:24–25. What does it look like, to “spur one another on”? Consider those with whom you might have experienced this kind of shared life. In prayer, briefly thank God, and the other person(s), for the honor of being in this kind of relationship together.

The Greek word for “one another” is *allélōn*. It appears throughout the New Testament. Taken together, the “one anothers” describe a pattern of life. Here is a representative list of that pattern:

15 "One Anothers"		
love (lōx)	accept	have humility with
encourage / build up	stimulate / spur on	be subject to
serve	care for / do good to	confess sins to
forbear with	be kind to	pray for
same mind with	regard as important	greet with kiss

From the list above, select a few of the One Anothers. Ask yourself these two questions:

With whom am I experiencing _____ from? [e.g., With whom am I experiencing *acceptance* from?]

With whom am I expressing _____ to?

Prayer: *This space is for your own prayer and reflection.*

Practice: Share the One Anothers list with your conversation partner. Explain that this (the list) is a picture of what the Christian life is supposed to look like. Discuss together: which of the 15 One Anothers have you experienced with others in your time as a Christian? Which are much less familiar? Which do you need more of in this season of your life?.

WEDNESDAY

Prompt: It is very possible that in our time as a Christian, whether brief or long, what we have most experienced is isolation, or a general sense of being alone. We may go to church. We may even serve on a “team” or participate in a small group. Still, we may carry the gnawing sense that no one really knows *me* ... and nor do I really know anyone else. Our souls are dry and we wish things were different.

To what extent does aloneness or isolation describe your current experience? What factors, internal or external, may be contributing to an experience of aloneness?

Prayer: *This space is for your own prayer and reflection.*

Practice: It’s funny how sometimes a simple question with a friend or even an acquaintance can lead to a more meaningful conversation. Check out the following page for a list of questions to consider. Some of them are “opener” questions. Others fit for a group that already knows one another. As you look over these, write a few more of your own. Can you also think of some follow-up questions?

Conversation questions:

- Sometimes I try to guess where people grew up by listening to their accent. I'm curious, where did you grow up as a kid?
- If someone who's not from __X__ wanted to understand __X__, what are 3 things you think they need to know?
- I've been listening to a few podcasts lately. Always looking for what's next. Do you do podcasts? What have you been listening to?
- What was the first car that was "yours"? What was the first car you bought with your own funds?
- What is a highpoint in your life over the last week? What was a low-point? [nod to Roger Berry for the "highpoint / low-point" conversation. It never fails.]
- Describe a moment in your life where you experienced true danger, whether you knew it or not at the time.
- [When someone has an interest or a hobby] What is it about __X_ that connects with you?
- When was a time you remember feeling intense joy or satisfaction in life? What was going on at the time?
- When was a time you remember feeling disconnected or out-of-step with others and you didn't like it. What was going on at the time?
- When it came to holidays like Christmas or Thanksgiving, what was food like for your family? [or, what were the traditions for your family]
- You are in your 50s. I am in my 30s. What is something you wish your 50yr old self could say to your 30yr old self?
- When it comes to living life well, whatcha working on right now?

Our practice today (and each remaining day this week) is to use a question with someone to have a deeper conversation, if only for a moment, than we would have had otherwise.

THURSDAY

Prompt: Read James 5:16. What thoughts and feelings do you experience as you contemplate personal prayer with others in a private, intimate setting? What would you want to be true about the kind of people you would feel comfortable experiencing this kind of prayer with?

Prayer: *This space is for your own prayer and reflection.*

Practice: There is an acronym we can use as a pattern of prayer: A-C-T-S. It stands for Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication. Refer to the following page for more information on each of these types of prayer.

Practice #1: Write out three statements each of Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication. It is okay if this takes some time. After writing, voice these statements yourself in prayer to God.

Practice #2: If applicable, ask your conversation partner to have this experience with you. Meet together and pray, following the A-C-T-S pattern.

ADORATION. Begin with expressions of praise and recognition to God for who God is. For example:

- Lord, we recognize your presence with us. You are a loving God.
- You are the God who hears. You are the God who saves. You are the God who provides.
- Your mercy is everlasting.
- Nothing happens without your knowing. Nothing happens without your concern.

CONFESSION. Recognizing to God and agreeing with God about specific sins, need, failures, etc.

- Lord, I confess my distraction this week. I've been putting you aside.
- I've been driven by my fears. Help me trust in you.
- I treated _X_ poorly this week. My response was wrong. The situation needed patience and understanding. I gave neither.

THANKSGIVING. Thanking God, specifically, for God's goodness, actions, provision, etc.

- I thank you, Lord, for your provision in the situation with _____.
- Thank you for your forgiveness. Thank you for helping me accept my responsibility.
- Thank you for helping me take the risk to ask someone to be my conversation partner. Thank you that they said yes.

SUPPLICATION. Asking for things or actions from God, for example:

- It's a big meeting with _____ this week. Lord, help me prepare. I look to you for peace. I look to you for confidence.
- The bills are coming due and I'm going to need help. Help me, Lord, I ask you.
- Open my eyes to the power of your Word. Help me understand, and help us to live it.

A-C-T-S is merely a pattern - a way to learn how to pray together with others. You'll notice the same four themes in many worship songs. We also see the same themes in Scripture like the Lord's Prayer.

FRIDAY

Prompt: Read Ephesians 4:32-5:2. Recognize that the Spirit of God is with you and the Spirit is in you, right now, as you read the Ephesians passage. Read slowly. Voice the words out loud. Ask the Spirit to quicken to your heart the words, phrases, and ideas the Spirit wants you to pay attention to.

Prayer: *This space is for your own prayer and reflection.*

Practice: For our practice today, we will focus on this phrase: *Follow God's example and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.*

Today and through the end of the week (including this Sunday at church), we want to be aware and intentional about "walking in the way of love" in specific settings. Practice this in each of the settings below, and then write beside each how you walked in the way of Jesus:

- at the grocery store or any retail location
- in a setting with strangers, with time spent waiting
- with significant others (friend, partner, parent, child, coworker, small group)
- in a place of contention
- at The Vine on Sunday.

SATURDAY

Prompt: Read 1 Peter 4:7-11. There are elements of urgency and importance in this communication. How does the author create urgency and importance in the passage? Prayerfully and thoughtfully, answer the question. What is the big deal?

Prayer: *This space is for your own prayer and reflection.*

Practice: Think of these three phrases within today's reading:

- maintain constant love for one another
- be hospitable to one another
- serve one another with whatever gift(s) you have received.

Here is our nudge today. Maintaining love, being hospitable, and serving all require one prior condition. One has to be connected with others for love, being hospitable, and service to have any meaning.

How are you connected with others in your community of faith? What is one step you could take to connect further? Check out The Vine's small groups, interest groups, and serve teams at thevineaustin.org/groups and thevineaustin.org/teams to see where you can deepen your relationships with others at The Vine.



WEEK 6



Selfless compassion

Caring for our souls is not just about navel-gazing or sacred self-care. Souls that are awake and alive to God abandon self-centered striving for selfless compassion. We get to take our befriended, slowed down, examined souls into compassion that is centered upon others. As we live this way, we will realize that this doesn't have to drain our soul's reserves, but in fact our soul is strengthened in caring for God's people.

This week we will explore the concept of selfless compassion. By meditating on Scripture, discussing this in community, and trying different practices, we will seek to deepen our awareness and relationship with our souls through the care of others.

WEEKLY PRACTICE

Theologian and author Richard Foster shares, "You see, it is through simple, daily acts of service that the grace of humility will slip in on us unawares. The risen Christ beckons us to the ministry of service." This week, we will let the love of God flow out of the inner recesses of our soul into the ministry of selfless service.

SERMON NOTES:

MONDAY

Prompt: Read John 13:1-20. This is the well-known story where Jesus washes his disciples feet. He is redefining the meaning of greatness as he models other-centered service to his disciples. What stirs in your soul as you think about Jesus choosing to wash his disciples feet in some of his final moments on earth?

Prayer: *This space is for your own prayer and reflection.*

Practice: Service as a Christian spiritual discipline is difficult to capture in words. We learn a lot about service as we watch it over time and as we take steps ourselves, no matter how challenging or clunky it may seem. Amidst what could've been the most self-protective time of his life, Jesus chose to slow down, consider those around him, and move towards them in selfless compassion.

Take a few minutes to pray today, asking the Lord to stir up love for someone. Ask God to give you a truth or word of encouragement for that person that would fill their soul. Take a minute to text that person now.

TUESDAY

Prompt: Read Galatians 5:1, 13–26. Paul redefines and reframes freedom for the Galatians in his letter in these verses. How does this redefine and reframe freedom for you personally?

Prayer: *This space is for your own prayer and reflection.*

Practice: Freedom does not mean we act how we desire without constraints (which is actually enslavement to our urges). Instead freedom is a life filled with good constraints given to us through surrender to Jesus. And service is the direction our free and cared-for souls crave. “Let us not become conceited,” but instead through love serve one another (5:26).

Spend time in prayer surrendering your ideas of freedom to Christ. Ask for a renewed definition of freedom that’s rooted in service to God and others. Ask Christ to open up at least one opportunity today for selfless service. Maybe this is a text or phone call to family or friends. Maybe this is a surprise Venmo to someone. Maybe something else. Take a few minutes to sit silently and let God lead you towards a person and action.

WEDNESDAY

Prompt: Read 1 Peter 4:7-11. Read through this passage once. Now, read again asking yourself, “What gifts have I received from God? What ways do I find myself naturally trying to serve others?”

Prayer: *This space is for your own prayer and reflection.*

Practice: Verse 10 states: “As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace.” Our souls come alive when we serve in ways that connect our gifts and passions. We aren’t selfish as we consider God’s gifting and wiring of us. We’re practicing stewardship, and stewardship leads us into selfless service of others.

Ask God to reveal a gift or gifts given to you. This can be connected to your wiring as a person, something you’ve acquired through life, or something we see spoken of in Scripture. What is one way you can take one of these gifts and bless someone this week?

THURSDAY

Prompt: Read different translations of Proverbs 11:25 below:

- Whoever brings blessing will be enriched, and one who waters will himself be watered. (ESV)
- A generous person will prosper; whoever refreshes others will be refreshed. (NIV)
- A generous person will be prosperous, And one who gives others plenty of water will himself be given plenty. (NASB)
- The one who blesses others is abundantly blessed; those who help others are helped. (MSG)

We are challenged by an abundant God to move from withholding towards abundant service. Proverbs 11:24 frames this well: "One gives freely, yet grows all the richer; another withholds what he should give, and only suffers want." The soul feasts on the release and not the storehouses.

Prayer: *This space is for your own prayer and reflection.*

Practice: Spend time thanking God for God's abundant mercies for you. Then invite God to awaken your soul to abundance rather than scarcity. Now, ask God where you can live into this greater abundance. What could abundant serving look like this month?

FRIDAY

Prompt: Read 2 Samuel 9 and listen to the song “Carbon Ribs” by John Mark McMillan by scanning the QR code below:



Mephibosheth is the son of Jonathan, who’s the son of Saul and best friend to David. David was king and wanted to bless any family remaining from Jonathan to honor him. They find his son with physical disabilities and give him a seat at the table, “like one of the king’s sons.”

David had authority, responsibility, and influence over all the kingdom. He could do almost whatever he wanted. Yet he took this moment to focus on how he could honor an old friend. His soul carried a need for other-centered kindness and service.

Prayer: *This space is for your own prayer and reflection.*

Practice: With open hands, ask for wisdom to use your influence for God’s glory and others’ good. Ask the Spirit to help you surrender all your influence to Jesus. What does showing kindness look like today? How can I show kindness to those around me in a fresh way today?

SATURDAY

Prompt: Read Psalm 95. This psalm tells us “not to harden our hearts.” In Ephesians, Paul teaches us to live by the Spirit we must be “tenderhearted.” As we conclude this week of selfless service, we come back to our servant King. The greatest way we serve is by first being awake and aware of how God serves us.

Prayer: This space is for your own prayer and reflection.

Practice: Today, find ways to enjoy God. No special words or petitions or actions. Just spend time enjoying God’s presence through all the gifts God has given you. Let God’s love for you soften your soul to God and God’s people. And rejoice for all the ways God has served others through you this week.



FINAL WORDS



from Mark

I hope this Soul Care resource has been a meaningful tool to use during this season of Lent. My prayer is not only that you found significance in these writings and practices, but that you discovered your souls expanding for God. As we have seen, it's from our souls that we primarily live, move, and meet with God. As the psalmist wrote in the 42nd psalm, "As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, my God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God."

I continue to believe that there are few things Christ wants more in this world than for his followers to be soul-filled. This is not something we master in a season or a sermon series. This is a life-long journey we have with Jesus.

I want to share a special word of appreciation to a handful of people who helped put this journal together. Fellow contributors were Debbie Dunn, Ron Ragsdale, Frank Vasquez, Heather Moga, Fabienne Harford, and Gabe McKinney. Thanks to Katie Fike for editing. And thanks to The Vine community for being a church where our souls can flourish.

May we spend the rest of our lives exploring the depths of our soul, and may God's transforming power renew us from the inside out into this world.



www.thevineaustin.org
@thevineaustin