

# The Common Rule

habits of purpose for an age of distraction

[www.thecommonrule.org](http://www.thecommonrule.org)



## A LETTER ON THE FALL RESET:

Dear Reader,

We were made to live in time. This is why seasons matter. There is a common grace to the calendar's rhythms. Often the turn of late summer to early fall is an opportunity to experience the newness of time by introducing new habits and rhythms.

This is not just an opportunity for our own renewal. The fall is a time where we are reintroduced to communities and neighbors. Whether it's going back to school, getting back to the office after summer vacation, or preparing for a fall party or cookout; there is a real way that the early fall joins us to our neighbors. These are the ones that God has given us to love, so we should pay attention to these opportunities and embrace them.

Often, however, we are too stuck in our own busyness, our own exhaustion, or our own addiction to screens to turn our heads up and love these people around us. This is what The Common Rule *Fall Reset* is designed to help with.

The Common Rule is a set of daily and weekly habits designed to form us in the love of God and neighbor. The *Fall Reset* is an adapted version of The Common Rule habits, tailored to a two week beginning of fall program. There are some daily and weekly habits explained here, and a two-week reading plan of daily scripture readings and prayers here. As always, there is much more in the book, so ideally you should read that along side the Fall Reset.

If you are hungry for a new routine, or if you need a habit reset for the change of seasons, then get together with others in your house, with a friend group or with a small group and practice these habits below for two weeks together.

If you have a small group or a community group that is rejoining together for the fall, consider using this as a two week resource to kick off the season and begin new rhythms together. I hope it brings your community to a place where you find the presence of God and neighbor in a bright and new way.

With love and hope,

  
Justin Whitmel Earley

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## How to try The Common Rule:

### #1 - GET SOME FRIENDS

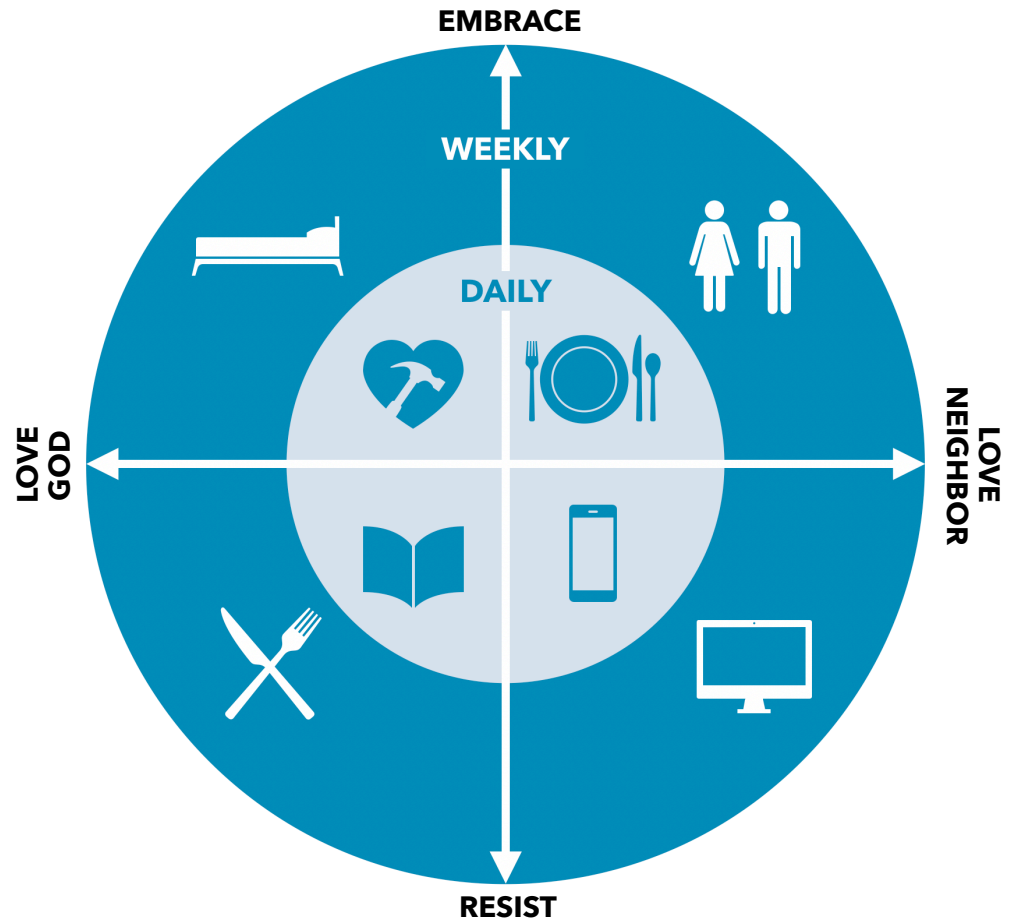
Communal habits are formational habits. The Common Rule is not meant to be practiced alone, but in a community. Maybe this is a small group, a family, a congregation or some friends.

### #2 - GET A COPY OF THE BOOK

You can read about the 4 daily & 4 weekly habits on the following pages, but there is MUCH more in the book. Get that to find out how these habits are all meant to be small shifts in your daily & weekly routine, largely aimed at the unceasing busyness of work & technology.

### #3- GET COMFORTABLE WITH FAILURE

The Common Rule is not meant to be something you perform, it is something you practice. These habits are directional, they are supposed to turn you towards the love of God & neighbor in meaningful daily ways. Realizing how hard that is is part of, not an interruption to, that formation.



**WHAT IS THE COMMON RULE?** A modern set of daily & weekly habits designed to help ordinary people live missional lives of love for God & neighbor. You can read more about the four daily & the four weekly habits on the website & the following pages.

**WHY PRACTICE THE COMMON RULE?** Because if we are going to live lives shaped by the love of God and neighbor, we need to think about our habits. The vast majority of our lives are governed by habit. We are not formed simply by our deepest beliefs & greatest aspirations, but also the most ordinary of habits that guide our everyday lives. We usually don't think about these habits - & *that's why they matter so much.*

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## an overview

**RULE OF LIFE:** noun. An ancient monastic practice of setting out intentional habits & rhythms to guide a community's spiritual formation in love.

## 5 BASICS OF THE COMMON RULE

**1) THE 4 DAILY HABITS** On the inner circle of The Common Rule are the 4 daily habits. They are kneeling prayer, one meal with others, one hour of phone off, & scripture before phone. Each is intended to be a "microhabit" or "keystone habit." The idea is simple, tiny habits that have big consequences. Easy to check off, but they rework your whole day.

**2) THE 4 WEEKLY HABITS** On the outer circle of The Common Rule are the 4 weekly habits. They are a day of sabbath, an hour of intentional conversation, a 4 hour limit to streamed video, & one day of fasting from something. These habits are intended to frame the week in rhythms of intentionality - rest, friendship, restraint & curation. Like The Common Rule generally, these move between resistance & embrace

**3) HABIT → VIRTUE** Each of the specific habits of The Common Rule is aimed at a classic virtue or discipline. Kneeling prayer intertwines with vocation & work. Conversation with friendship. Limits on streamed media (which forces curation) point at beauty & justice. Fasting encourages discipline, & sabbath aims at rest. As such the habits of the rule orient the direction of a day, then a week, then a life towards rhythms of love & meaning instead of busyness & chaos.

**4) EMBRACE & RESIST** The upper half of The Common Rule focuses on patterns of embrace, the lower half focuses on patterns of resistance. Habits of embrace & resistance try to acknowledge that the world we live in is not neutral. It is a formational world that is hammering us into certain kinds of people every moment of every day. We thus need counter-formational habits to resist the grooves of busyness, consumerism, vanity & injustice that we will otherwise move in should we choose to do nothing. Some of these are positive movements towards the good. Some of these are resistance of evil. We resist letting our work, our technologies, our networks, & our culture's narratives become the center of gravity in our lives.

**5) GOD & NEIGHBOR** The left side of The Common Rule pushes towards the love of God, the right side towards the love of neighbor. In this way the rule tries to orient our days & weeks around the great commandment - to love God & neighbor. That said, the habits bend back towards each other. Sabbath rest before God makes us better workers for our neighbors, curating screen time so that we are attentive to our neighbor is an act of love for God too. The habits are synergistic, not separate.

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## DAILY HABITS

### PRAY & WORK

#### Kneeling prayer at waking, at work, & at bed

*Ora et labora*, or “work & pray,” is the motto of the Benedictine monks. Regular, carefully placed prayer throughout the workday is one of the keystone habits of spiritual formation. Below is a **Prayer & Reading Plan** that includes a waking, midday & bedtime prayer.

### READ

#### Scripture before phone

Waiting to check our phones until after we read a passage of scripture means that we refuse the question “*What do I need to do today?*” & ask a different one: “*Who am I, & who am I becoming?*” In the word of God we will find that we are a child of God, we are becoming more & more like our Father. This day will be more defined by who God is than what we do. Try printing out the **Prayer and Reading Plan** below and keep it beside your bed or couch.

### REST

#### Sabbath for 24 hours

The weekly practice of sabbath reminds us that God sustains the world & we don't. In order to make a counter-cultural embrace of our limitations, & in order to create a different sense of time where we can meet God in a distinct way, we stop our usual work for a day of rest.

### FAST

#### Fast from something for 24 hours each week

Fasting from something not only reminds us that we need Jesus like we need food, it also sets us into a physical & mental state of unique longing where our prayers become more earnest, more desperate, more desirous, & thus *more true*. To fast is to be in solidarity with those who suffer. Pick something (all food or just meat or something else) & refrain for one day a week.

### EAT

#### One meal with others every day

A constant succession of meals alone or on-the-go not only overlooks the beauty of what it means to be people who eat, but we also miss generous moments with those we love. One meal a day eaten together emphasizes that we need the lives of others to live, & it gives us those moments to begin doing so.

### PRESENCE

#### Daily hour with phone off

This habit is one that actively resists the nagging worry that someone, somewhere might want our attention in order that we might look up & see that someone here in the room actually needs our attention, even our gaze. We cannot love well without presence, & our presence is one of the greatest gifts we give to those we love, or are trying to learn to love.

### FRIENDSHIP

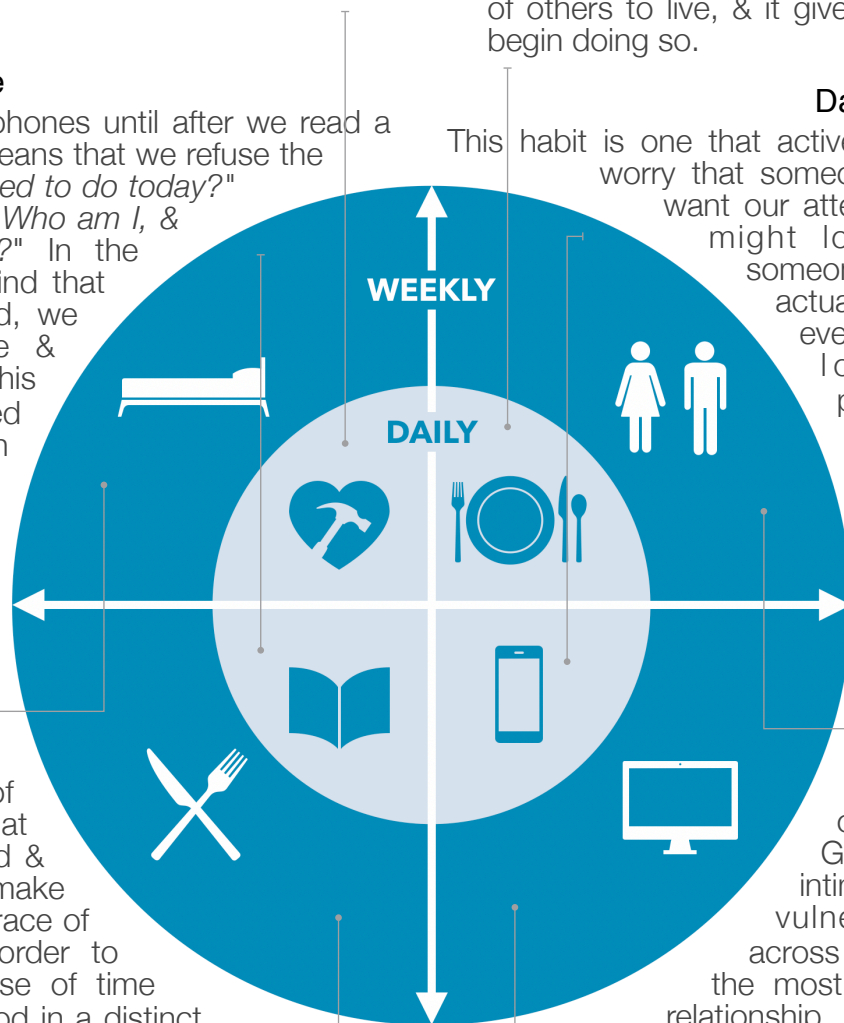
#### Hour of conversation with a friend

We were made for each other, & we cannot become lovers of God & neighbor without intimate relationships where vulnerability is sustained across time. Words are one of the most important mediums of relationship. God created the world with words, & our words create life in each other.

### CURATE MEDIA

#### Curate weekly screen entertainment to 4 hours

Stories matter. So much that we must handle them with reverence. Mediums matter too, as much as messages. Resisting submission to the constant stream of addictive media means that we must curate what we do watch & then turn our eyes to other forms of art, & our hearts to the vulnerable that are so easily ignored in a world distracted by white noise of unending media.



## WEEKLY HABITS

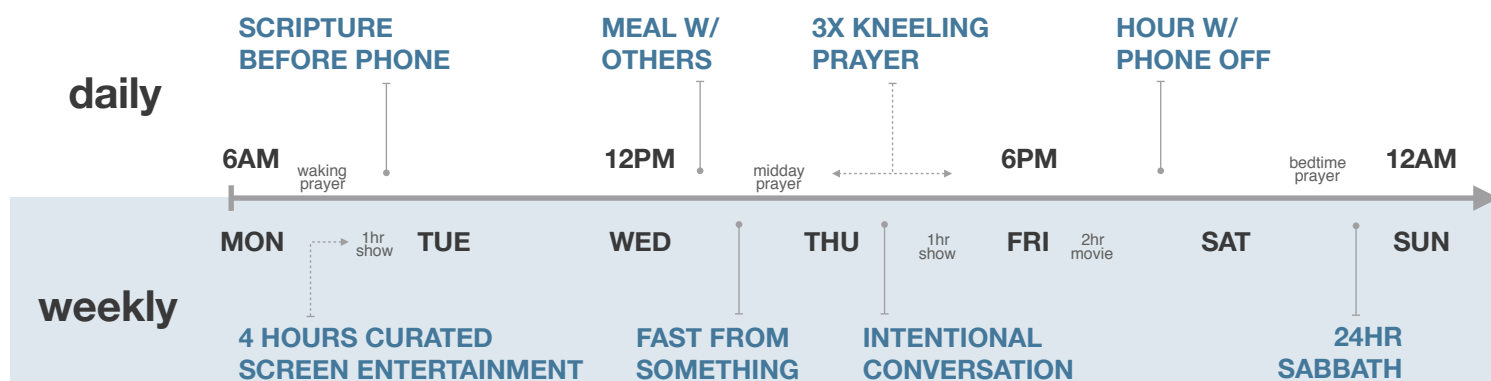
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**TO LIVE IN THE WORLD IS TO BE FORMED.** If we are not attentive to our formation, then someone else will do it for us. The Common Rule rhythms of embrace & resistance are rooted in the belief that the place we live in is always forming us, & we need counter-formational habits of grace to resist the grooves of busyness, consumerism, vanity & injustice *that we will otherwise be formed in should we choose to do nothing.* Some encourage embrace of the good, some require the resistance of evil, all of them are ways of grace. **Below is an example of how The Common Rule might unfold over a day & a week, though you may arrange yours differently.**

## EXAMPLE DAILY RHYTHM



## EXAMPLE WEEKLY RHYTHM

**RULES** before **LOVE**  
equals **LEGALISM**  
**LOVE** before **RULES**  
equals **G O S P E L**  
**FORMATION**

**WE LABOR NOT TO EARN LOVE, BUT BECAUSE WE ARE LOVED.** The starting place of The Common Rule is not to earn love, but to acknowledge that love has come to us, & we want to be formed in that love so that we can love God & neighbor better. While at first glance it could seem complicated, **look again** - *these habits are meant to actually free us from the unseen habits that are enslaving us.* We find our freedom within the constraints of love. Even more, we find it as we are constrained together. In a common way of approaching the world we find accountability, vulnerability & community in those who go along with us.

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## Prayer & Reading Plan



### SCRIPTURE BEFORE PHONE READINGS



#### WEEK ONE

Sunday Job 38:1-7  
Monday Romans 9:20  
Tuesday Job 12:7-10  
Wednesday Isaiah 2:12-13; 17-19  
Thursday Philippians 2:6-8  
Friday Titus 3:4-7  
Saturday Colossians 1:15-20

#### WEEK TWO

Sunday Romans 7:21-25  
Monday Psalm 8  
Tuesday Ephesians 2:13 & Leviticus 26:13  
Wednesday John 14:18 & Galatians 4:6-7  
Thursday Zephaniah 3:17-20  
Friday John 13:34-35  
Saturday Revelation 21:9-11 / Eph. 2:18-22



### DAILY KNEELING PRAYERS ↑

**MORNING:** *Spirit, I was made for your presence. May this day be one I spend with you in all that I do. Amen.*

**NOON:** *Jesus, I was made to join your work in the world. Please order the rest of this day in love for the people you have given me to serve. Amen.*

**BEDTIME:** *Father, I was made to rest in your love. May my body rest in sleep, and may my mind rest in your love. Amen.*

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**SCRIPTURE BEFORE PHONE  
FALL RESET READING GUIDE**

## Week 1 ON GOD BEING GOD

***WE DO NOT UNDERSTAND WHO WE ARE**, until we understand who God is. We do not get how broken - or how beautiful - we are, until we understand how boundless and how beautiful God is. This first week's readings focus on God being God. Reminding ourselves of the (at times frightening) grandeur of God serves both to put us in our place, and to surprise us again with the reminder that God has come down to our place.*

**Sunday | Job 38:1-7** Then the Lord spoke to Job out of the storm. He said: "Who is this that obscures my plans with words without knowledge? Brace yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer me. "Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation? Tell me, if you understand. Who marked off its dimensions? Surely you know! Who stretched a measuring line across it? On what were its footings set, or who laid its cornerstone—while the morning stars sang together and all the angels shouted for joy? ... Have you journeyed to the springs of the sea or walked in the recesses of the deep? Have the gates of death been shown to you? Have you seen the gates of the deepest darkness? Have you comprehended the vast expanses of the earth? Tell me, if you know all this."

*Admitting that we do not understand who God is, is as important as trying to understand who God is. Consider all that you do not know about his vastness. Consider the last time you sat in awe about the expanse of who God is.*

**Monday | Romans 9:20** But who are you, a human being, to talk back to God? Shall what is formed say to the one who formed it, "Why did you make me like this?"

*We usually come to God with much to say. There is nothing wrong with this, he wants to hear us. But we also need times to come to God with silence so we have space to hear what he might say to us. Consider not talking back for a moment, but listening in silence. Consider what it might be like to continue through your day in a posture of silence and listening towards God.*

**Tuesday | Job 12:7-10** But ask the animals, and they will teach you, or the birds in the sky, and they will tell you; or speak to the earth, and it will teach you, or let the fish in the sea inform you. Which of all these does not know that the hand of the Lord has done this? In his hand is the life of every creature and the breath of all mankind.

*Part of reality in the modern world is the silencing of nature. We see less stars, we hear less birds. We stare in awe less often. Yet nature is part of the way God discloses his majesty to us. Nature often knows something we need to know. Consider what it might mean today to learn who God is from the natural world.*

**Wednesday | Isaiah 2:12-13; 17-19** For the Lord of hosts has a day against all that is proud and lofty, against all that is lifted up—and it shall be brought low; against all the cedars of Lebanon, lofty and lifted up ... And the haughtiness of man shall be humbled, and the lofty pride of men shall be brought low, and the Lord alone will be exalted in that day. And the idols shall utterly pass away. And people shall enter the caves of the rocks and the holes of the ground, from before the terror of the Lord, and from the splendor of his majesty, when he rises to terrify the earth.

*When was the last time you felt fear of God? When was the last time you felt small because he was big? Consider how this might be comforting. There are evils and terrors in the world that do not love you. Injustice*

*and darkness are real. Yet God will conquer them. He is strong enough to conquer them. He will destroy all this for our sake, because this mighty God loves us like a strong Father. Consider the peace waiting for you within the fear of God.*

**Thursday | [Philippians 2:6-8](#)** [Jesus], being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!

*How is it that God will conquer darkness in the world? Not by becoming mighty, but by becoming small. By becoming like us. Think about the humility of a God who comes down to us! Who voluntarily suffered for us. You are likely suffering from something today - consider that he has suffered just like you, and all for you.*

**Friday | [Titus 3:4-7](#)** But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.

We usually spend a lot of time thinking about how to be good enough. How to justify our existence by what we can do, or who we are. But the most fundamental thing in life has been given to us - God loves us, no matter what. The same mighty, majestic, boundless God who can conquer the earth loves us regardless of what we've done.

**Saturday | [Colossians 1:15-20](#)** He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

*The majesty of God is revealed in Jesus. That's who God is, all the power and all the love in one person who walked amongst us, spoke to us, calmed storms, touched the sick and healed the blind. The picture of the power and the love of God is all present in the face of Jesus.*

## Week 2

### ON HUMANS BEING HUMAN

***MOST DAYS WE LIVE OUT LIFE as something far less than human. Becoming human means not only seeing that we are made in the image of God, but seeing that we are being remade in the image of Jesus. To become like Jesus, is to become fully human. This week's readings take a look at becoming more like who we were made to be, which is one way of saying becoming more like Christ.***

**Sunday | [Romans 7:21-25](#)** So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!

*Part of being human is being terminally unsatisfied with who you are and what you can do. At least it's helpful to realize we all carry this deep wrestling - that at the heart of who we are is a dissatisfaction with who we are. This is why we try to cultivate a habit of looking to God, not to ourselves, for our hope.*

**Monday | [Psalm 8](#)** O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory above the heavens. Out of the mouth of babies and infants, you have established strength because of your foes, to still the enemy and the avenger. When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him? Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor. You have given him dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under his feet, all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field, the birds of the heavens, and the fish of the sea, whatever passes along the paths of the seas. O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!

*Yesterday we reflected on how broken we are. But it is equally important to see what glorious beings God has made us. Out of all the things in the world, humans alone are made in his image. We are given a remarkable*



*power and place in this world. We are given astonishing dignity. Look around at the people you meet today. No one is boring. Everyone bears the incredible mark of God. Try to see it in them.*

**Tuesday | Ephesians 2:13 & Leviticus 26:13** But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. / I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt so you would no longer be their slaves. I broke the yoke of slavery from your neck so you can walk with your heads held high.

*Before God comes to us, the core of who we are is a slave. We are slaves to all kinds of things: our self-image, our depression, our job, our addictions, the people we so desperately try to please. We are under a rough yoke. We are something less than human. Like an animal. When God comes to us, he frees us from that. The blood of Christ means we can walk with our heads held high again.*

**Wednesday | John 14:18 & Galatians 4:6-7** I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. / And because you are sons, God sent out the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying out, "Abba! (Father!)," so that you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, also an heir through God.

*We belong to someone. We are part of the family. We are not alone. God is the God of mighty grandeur, yes, but also tender as a father. Today will tempt you with a lot of identities. Today will ask you over and over: "Who do you want to be?" Consider what it means that you are a child of the King.*

**Thursday | Zephaniah 3:17-20** "The LORD your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love; he will exult over you with loud singing. I will gather those of you who mourn for the festival, so that you will no longer suffer reproach. Behold, at that time I will deal with all your oppressors. And I will save the lame and gather the outcast, and I will change their shame into praise and renown in all the earth. At that time I will bring you in, at the time when I gather you together; for I will make you renowned and praised among all the peoples of the earth, when I restore your fortunes before your eyes," says the LORD.

*Last week, we considered what it might mean to be silent before God to hear who God is and what he might say. We now consider being silent again, but this time to hear something else - the sound of his song. We hear a lot of voices everyday: the voices of ourselves or others, telling us we are not good enough. But let us silence those voices. Let us listen closely. Do you hear it? It is the sound of a God who loves you, who is singing over you, who is making you new. Who is making all things new.*

**Friday | John 13:34-35** A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.

*There is not a lot to do today. There is only one thing to do today: love. Love is the new command. It is the law of the gospel. God loves us, that is the most important fact of the universe. God loves you, that is the unique fact of the universe. We are to love others, that is what it means to believe and respond to the gospel. This law is not easy, but it is simple. It's the only law that sets us free. You are about to get up and go encounter someone - think of what it will mean to love them.*

**Saturday | Revelation 21:9-11 / Ephesians 2:18-22** One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and said to me, "Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb." And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. It shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal. / Because through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. Consequently, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but you are fellow citizens of the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole building, joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are built up together into a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.

*Here is a vision of the future: We are the dwelling place of God. In a happily-ever-after fairy tale, humans and God are back together again, married, and enjoying the beauty of a world without tears, death or pain. The kingdom is coming, live today in the peace of that. And know that the kingdom, in a real sense, has already begun. God's spirit is amongst us, building the body of his church right now into that temple, the dwelling place of God. He is with you. Actually with you. Go in the peace of that.*