

Back to Basics.

A 21-day personal devotional companion to the audiobook by Francis Chan.

Listen. Be still. Pray. Do.

Before You Begin

What this is

This is not a study guide. It's not for a classroom or a small group. It's a companion for you, alone with God, as you listen your way through the seven chapters of the *Back to Basics* audiobook by Francis Chan: Fear God, Follow Jesus, Holy Spirit, Fellowship, Teaching, Prayer, and Communion.

The rhythm is simple. Listen to a chapter all the way through once, without doing anything else. Then do the three short devotions for that chapter over the next few days. One sitting each. Fifteen or twenty unhurried minutes. Seven chapters, three days each. Twenty-one quiet meetings with God.

How to sit with the devotionals

Come with a Bible and a pen. Each day starts with a moment to be still, because the point of this devotional isn't to get through material. It's to actually meet with God. Read the Scripture slowly, out loud if you can. The reflection is short on purpose. What matters is not reading more words about God, but connecting deeply with Him.

The journal questions are for your eyes only. Write the true answer, not the acceptable one. The prayers are starters, not scripts. Pray them as far as they're honest, then keep going in your own words. Every day ends with one small, concrete thing to do before you sleep. We want to practice tangible obedience—being doers and not just hearers.

A simple rhythm for each devotional

1. **Be still.** Put your phone in another room. Sit quietly until you remember who it is you are about to address.
2. **Read.** Read the day's Scripture slowly, out loud if possible. Don't rush past it.
3. **Reflect.** Read the short reflection, then write honestly in the space provided.
4. **Pray.** Use the written prayer to begin, then continue in your own words. Leave silence for God to answer.
5. **Do.** Carry out the one thing under "Today" before you sleep.

Finally, be sensitive to the Holy Spirit. If a day is ministering to you or convicting you in a special way, don't feel any pressure to move on tomorrow. Stay there. The guide will wait. Go at the pace that allows you to best absorb and apply the material.

Chapter 1 — Fear God

Before Day 1, listen to Chapter 1 of the audiobook all the way through. In it, Francis begins where Scripture begins: “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom.” And with his own story of being held under a wave, sure he was about to die.

Day 1 · Chapter 1: Fear God · Devotion 1 of 3

The God People Actually Met

BE STILL

Sit still for two full minutes before you read anything. You’re not opening a book. You’re coming into a Presence. Let the hurry drain out of you.

READ SLOWLY — OUT LOUD IF YOU CAN

“Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!” (Isaiah 6:5)

“When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead.” (Revelation 1:17)

REFLECT & JOURNAL

In the audiobook, Francis remembers being sucked under a wave. Tumbling. Freezing. Out of breath. Praying, “I’m gonna die, I’m gonna die.” He says that kind of helpless terror is closer to what he reads in Scripture than the tame “respect” most of us settle for. Isaiah didn’t muster up reverence. He said, “I am dead.” John, the disciple Jesus loved, didn’t shake Jesus’ hand. He collapsed like a corpse.

The God those men met is the same God you prayed to this morning, if you prayed at all. If Isaiah, John, and even the highest angels all respond the same way in His presence, you don’t get to walk casually.

Be honest with yourself on paper. When you picture standing before God, what do you actually feel? And where did that picture of Him come from?

PRAY

Lord, I’ve read the word *fear* in the Bible and quietly translated it into something smaller. I’ve made You small in my mind because a small God asks less of me.

Show me who You actually are. Let me feel the weight of it.

Now stay in silence for a while. Don’t fill it. Let the magnitude of who you are addressing settle on you, and then keep praying in your own words.

TODAY

Once today, before you ask God for anything, stop and say out loud: “You are the King, the LORD of hosts. And I am not.” Then bring your requests to Him.

CARRY THIS WITH YOU

“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom.” — Psalm 111:10

Day 2 · Chapter 1: Fear God · Devotion 2 of 3

A Smaller God Than the Real One

BE STILL

Before you begin, name silently, honestly, one thing you've been wanting to argue with God about. Hold it in your mind as you read.

READ SLOWLY — OUT LOUD IF YOU CAN

"Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel and his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts: 'I am the first and I am the last; besides me there is no god. Who is like me? Let him proclaim it.'" (Isaiah 44:6–7)

Francis points out how strangely arrogant we've become. We talk as if we're going to be the first person to stand before God, ask a question, and watch Him say, "Wow. I never thought of that before." Read Isaiah 44. God takes the opposite posture. If anyone thinks they can match Me, let him speak up. Tell Me the future. I knew the day you would be born, and I know your last day on this earth.

We want a God we can challenge, explain things to, argue with. A God who fits inside our sense of fairness. The God who actually speaks in Scripture is not embarrassed by His own power, even when His church is. And here is the strange mercy of it. Two verses after declaring that no one is like Him, God says, "Fear not, nor be afraid." To Isaiah's "I am dead," He sends a coal and forgiveness. To John's collapse, Jesus lays His right hand on him: "Fear not." The comfort is real. But it doesn't come before the fear. It comes after.

REFLECT & JOURNAL

Where, specifically, have you been trying to keep God small? A doctrine you avoid. A command you argue with. A part of your life you haven't let Him speak into.

PRAY

God, You are the first and the last, and besides You there is no god. I confess how arrogant I've been with You, as though You answer to me.

Take the thing I named before I started reading. I lay aside my argument. You are God and I am not. Give me the humility to submit joyfully to your authority.

Continue in your own words. Let some of those words be simply telling Him who He is.

TODAY

Find the place in your life where you've been arguing with a clear command of God. Take one step of plain obedience today. Not because you feel like it, but because of who He is.

CARRY THIS WITH YOU

"I am the first and I am the last; besides me there is no god." — Isaiah 44:6

Day 3 · Chapter 1: Fear God · Devotion 3 of 3

The Fear That Leads to Life

BE STILL

Breathe slowly. Remember that the God you're about to meet with calls you His child. Sit with that until it sinks in.

READ SLOWLY — OUT LOUD IF YOU CAN

"The fear of the LORD leads to life, and whoever has it rests satisfied." (Proverbs 19:23)

Here's where the chapter lands, and it might be the opposite of what you expected. The fear of the LORD is not the thing that ruins your life. It's the thing that leads to it. Francis puts it simply. Once you've seen how big God is, two things happen. You stop flippantly disobeying Him. And you realize there's nothing else left to fear.

Then look at what He calls you. This terrifying God calls you His child. Francis, a flawed earthly father, says of course he'd throw himself in front of danger for his kids. God calls you His friend. He calls His church His bride, and no husband worth anything watches his wife get attacked and says, "Fend for yourself." The security you've been trying to build out of savings and approval and control is sitting right there. You already belong to the strongest Being there is. "If God is for us, who can be against us?" (Rom. 8:31) You don't get to that security by skipping the fear. You get there by walking through it.

REFLECT & JOURNAL

What are you actually afraid of these days? Write the real list. Then next to each one, write what changes if the God of Isaiah 6 is your Father.

PRAY

Father. Let me start there, because it's amazing that I get to start there. The God before whom Isaiah said, "I am dead," calls me His child.

I bring You the fears I just wrote down, one at a time. As I name each one, I say back to You: if You are for me, who can be against me?

Teach me to fear You and nothing else. *Keep praying until the list is finished.*

TODAY

Take the fear at the top of your list. Do the thing it has been stopping you from doing, today if you can, as a child of the God no one can challenge.

CARRY THIS WITH YOU

"If God is for us, who can be against us?" — Romans 8:31

Chapter 2 — Follow Jesus

Before Day 4, listen to Chapter 2. The church is not a building or a service. It's the followers of Jesus. This chapter asks the blunt question: are you actually following Him, or just convinced in your heart that you are?

Day 4 · Chapter 2: Follow Jesus · Devotion 1 of 3

Flapping Your Wings in Your Heart

BE STILL

Sit quietly. Let Jesus' first words to His disciples be His words to you this morning. "Follow me." Not "admire me." Not "agree with me." Follow.

READ SLOWLY — OUT LOUD IF YOU CAN

"Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do what I tell you?" (Luke 6:46)

Francis describes a kid playing follow-the-leader from a lounge chair, saying, "I'm flapping my wings in my heart." It's ridiculous. It's also how millions of us follow Jesus. Or picture Francis' daughter, told to clean her room, coming back to say she memorized the command, can recite it in Greek, and has started a weekly study on what a clean room might look like. No father would be impressed by that. Yet somehow we think this works with Jesus.

Following Jesus' commands is not complicated. He says feed the poor, you feed the poor. Love your enemies, you love your enemies. The hard part is not understanding what is required of you. The hard part is doing it. And the easiest place to hide from doing it is inside religious activity *about* it.

REFLECT & JOURNAL

Where are you currently studying, discussing, or admiring a command of Jesus instead of obeying it? Write down the command in His plain words.

PRAY

Jesus, You have every right to ask me: why do I call You "Lord" and not do what You say? I confess the specific thing I just wrote down. I've dressed up my delay as devotion. More study, more thought, more prayer about it, when You've already spoken.

Give me the will to just obey. *Tell Him, in your own words, when and how you will.*

TODAY

Do the command you wrote down, or take the first real step of it. Before the day is over.

CARRY THIS WITH YOU

"Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men." — Matthew 4:19

Day 5 · Chapter 2: Follow Jesus · Devotion 2 of 3

Jesus Was Honest About the Cost

BE STILL

Before reading, ask yourself quietly. When I signed up to follow Jesus, what did I think I was signing up for?

READ SLOWLY — OUT LOUD IF YOU CAN

“Then the kings of the earth and the great ones... hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks... calling to the mountains and rocks, ‘Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb.’” (Revelation 6:15–16)

Jesus never recruited with fine print. He told people up front: “I don’t know where I’ll sleep tonight. People will hate you. Your own family may turn on you. The road is narrow and hard, and few find it.” We tend to leave those parts out of our evangelism. We advertise forgiveness, heaven, and intimacy with God, (all true and very important), but skip the part where Jesus said it would cost everything.

So why follow? Francis is honest about his own answer. Because Jesus is coming back as Judge. Revelation 6 shows the most powerful people on earth begging rocks to crush them rather than face “the wrath of the Lamb.” It’s a phrase we never hear, because we prefer the gentle Jesus petting sheep. He is gentle. He’s also the One whose wrath kings flee in terror. Both are true. And you want to be on His side.

REFLECT & JOURNAL

Which Jesus do you picture when you pray? And what has your softened picture of Him let you get away with?

PRAY

Jesus, You are the Lamb who was slain for me. You are also the Lion I do not want to face as an enemy. I’ve preferred half of You.

Thank You for being honest with me about the cost. I don’t want to follow a Jesus I invented; I want to follow You.

Name for Him one cost of following that you’ve been resenting or avoiding, and ask Him to make you willing.

TODAY

Tell one person the truth about following Jesus. Including something it has actually cost you. Not just the comfortable parts.

CARRY THIS WITH YOU

“The gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life.” — Matthew 7:14

Day 6 · Chapter 2: Follow Jesus · Devotion 3 of 3

Where Else Would I Go?

BE STILL

Picture the scene before you read. Thousands walking away from Jesus. Twelve men still standing there. He turns to them, to you, and asks, “Do you want to go away as well?”

READ SLOWLY — OUT LOUD IF YOU CAN

“Simon Peter answered him, ‘Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.’” (John 6:68)

Peter’s answer wasn’t triumphant. It was almost helpless. And it was enough. Jesus, your message is hard. But where else would we go?

Here is what you discover on that hard, narrow road. The things Jesus tells you to release were going to destroy you anyway. “Whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.” He isn’t stealing from you. He’s prying your fingers off of what is killing you.

When Peter blurted out, “We gave up everything for You,” Jesus stopped him. Everything you gave up will be repaid a hundred times over. Think about who this is. The Creator. Who needs nothing from you. Who bends down to wash feet. Who dies on a cross. Who listens when you pray. Surrendering to Him is not losing. It never was.

REFLECT & JOURNAL

What is Jesus currently asking you to let go of? Write it down. Then write, honestly, what that thing has actually been doing to you.

PRAY

Lord, to whom shall I go? You have the words of eternal life. I’ve tasted enough of the other roads to know where they end.

I open my hands. You see what I’ve been gripping. I wrote it down and You knew it long before.

I trust that You take nothing from me except what was destroying me.

Stay with your hands open — literally, if it helps — and finish this conversation honestly.

TODAY

Take one concrete step to release the thing you wrote down. Delete it. Cancel it. Confess it. Give it away. Or tell someone who will hold you to it.

CARRY THIS WITH YOU

“Whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.” — Matthew 16:25

Chapter 3 — Holy Spirit

Before Day 7, listen to Chapter 3. The whole chapter is built on one question. If the Holy Spirit was supposed to change everything, why does so little about our lives, and our churches, require a supernatural explanation?

Day 7 · Chapter 3: Holy Spirit · Devotion 1 of 3

Better Than Jesus Beside You

BE STILL

Sit still and consider slowly. If you're in Christ, the Spirit of God is in the room right now. Closer than the room. Inside of you.

READ SLOWLY — OUT LOUD IF YOU CAN

"Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you." (John 16:7)

Put yourself in the disciples' place. You've watched this man raise the dead and give sight to the blind. You've walked hand in hand with the Creator. And He tells you that His leaving is to your advantage. That what comes next is better than having the Son of God next to you. Either Jesus overstated it, or almost all of us are living way beneath what we've been given.

Be honest. Do you actually live like the Holy Spirit in you is better than Jesus next to you? Most of us treat the Spirit as a doctrine we affirm, not a Person we depend on. Then we wonder why our Christianity feels like self-effort with religious vocabulary.

REFLECT & JOURNAL

When did you last experience something in your walk with God that you can only explain as the Holy Spirit? If nothing comes to mind, what does that tell you about how you've been living?

PRAY

Holy Spirit, forgive me. I've talked *about* You in third person my whole life and rarely *to* You.

Jesus said having You is to my advantage. I confess I haven't lived like I believe that.

I welcome You now. Not as an idea. As God, present, in me. Speak, and give me the courage to listen. *Wait in silence before you say anything else.*

TODAY

Go through this one day refusing to treat the Spirit as a doctrine. Before each significant thing you do, pause three seconds and ask Him to lead it.

CARRY THIS WITH YOU

"It is to your advantage that I go away." — John 16:7

Day 8 · Chapter 3: Holy Spirit · Devotion 2 of 3

Neither Super Nor Natural

BE STILL

Before you read, picture the last church gathering you attended, moment by moment. Hold that picture next to the word *Pentecost*.

READ SLOWLY — OUT LOUD IF YOU CAN

“You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses... to the end of the earth.” (Acts 1:8)

At Pentecost there was a sound like a hurricane. Fire resting on heads. The gospel pouring out in languages nobody had learned. A crippled man walking. A love between believers that no one could explain. Crowds were drawn in asking, “What is going on here?” Two thousand years later: a bulletin, a few songs, a polished message, home in an hour. Francis quotes a line that stings because it’s fair. The church today, he says, is “neither super nor natural.”

He talks about a couple in his church. The husband bench-presses over a thousand pounds.

The wife over four hundred. Now imagine their kids being scrawny and weak. Something would be obviously wrong in that house. The Almighty God has put His own Spirit of power in you.

Weak, defeated, and insecure is not your family resemblance. It comes from looking at yourself instead of at Him.

REFLECT & JOURNAL

Where has your walk with God become entirely predictable? Nothing attempted that would fail unless the Spirit showed up. Write down what predictable has cost you.

PRAY

Father, You haven’t changed. The Spirit who fell at Pentecost is the Spirit You’ve given me. And I don’t want to live a scrawny, predictable life. I don’t want a faith that can be fully explained by my personality and my planning.

Ask Him, specifically, for one thing only He can do — in you, or through you. And write the date next to it in your journal.

TODAY

Attempt one thing today that simply will not work unless God is real. A conversation. An act of love. A prayer for someone. Something beyond your natural reach.

CARRY THIS WITH YOU

“Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the LORD of hosts.” — Zechariah 4:6

Day 9 · Chapter 3: Holy Spirit · Devotion 3 of 3

You Don't Make the Wave

BE STILL

Sit and honestly locate the anxiety you carry about the people you wish would change. Family. Friends. This generation. Bring that weight with you into this reading.

READ SLOWLY — OUT LOUD IF YOU CAN

“And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment.” (John 16:8)

Even Francis admits it. I look at the world, at how anti-God everything feels, and I think, how am I supposed to change the minds of all these people? And that, he says, is exactly the point. You can't. You were never asked to. Convicting the world of sin is the Holy Spirit's job description, not yours. Jesus said, “I will build my church, and the gates of hell will not stop it.” *I will*, not *you must*.

A surfer doesn't make the wave. You can't schedule one, manufacture one, or steer one. You watch for it. When it comes, you ride a power that isn't yours. That's the book of Acts. A wave of God's power, and ordinary people jumping on. The question the chapter leaves you with is not whether you're strong enough. It's whether you believe this power is still available today. And whether you'll stop trying to control what only He can do.

REFLECT & JOURNAL

Who or what have you been trying to change by your own effort? And what has carrying God's job done to you?

PRAY

Holy Spirit, I resign from Your job. I cannot convict a single heart of sin. Not my neighbor's. Not my child's. Not even my own.

I hand You each person I've been white-knuckling. *Name them now, one by one, slowly.*

Do in them what only You can do. And make me the kind of person who's ready when Your wave comes.

TODAY

For each person you named, replace today's worrying with asking. Every time they cross your mind, pray for them instead of rehearsing how to fix them.

CARRY THIS WITH YOU

“I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” — Matthew 16:18

Chapter 4 — Fellowship

Before Day 10, listen to Chapter 4. Once you fear God, follow Jesus, and carry His Spirit, you discover you were never meant to do any of it alone. And what the Bible calls fellowship is far more than what we've made of it.

Day 10 · Chapter 4: Fellowship · Devotion 1 of 3

So Much More Than a Potluck

BE STILL

As you settle, ask God to bring to mind the faces of the believers in your life. Not an institution. Faces.

READ SLOWLY — OUT LOUD IF YOU CAN

“Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common... There was not a needy person among them.” (Acts 4:32, 34)

For most of his life, Francis says, “fellowship” meant the fellowship hall. A potluck after service. A church softball night. Then you read Acts 4. One heart, one soul, no one claiming his possessions as his own, not a needy person among them. It’s embarrassing to set those side by side. In the Bible, fellowship is a shared life and a shared mission. It’s not an event on a calendar.

He tells about a former gang member who got baptized and then drifted away. Asked why, the guy said that when he was jumped into his gang, everyone had his back 24/7, like family. So he assumed baptism meant the same thing. “I didn’t know it was just Sunday mornings and Wednesday nights. I got it wrong.” This answer is tragic and cutting. “No. You got it right. We got it wrong.”

REFLECT & JOURNAL

If Jesus pointed to your actual, lived-in church family — the people who share your life, not just your Sundays — whose faces would He point to? Is anyone there at all?

PRAY

Father, You designed me for a family, and I’ve settled for an audience. People I sit near, sing near, and drive home from.

Forgive me for the ways I’ve kept it that way because shallow is convenient.

Bring me the family You want me in. And make me the kind of brother or sister a gang member would recognize as the real thing. *Name to Him the people you sense Him pointing to.*

TODAY

Reach out to one believer today with something beyond logistics or small talk. Tell them one true thing about how you actually are. And ask how they actually are.

CARRY THIS WITH YOU

“They were of one heart and soul.” — Acts 4:32

Day 11 · Chapter 4: Fellowship · Devotion 2 of 3

A Collective Witness

BE STILL

Sit quietly with this question before reading. Who has something against me? And who do I still have something against?

READ SLOWLY — OUT LOUD IF YOU CAN

“That they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you... so that the world may believe that you have sent me.” (John 17:21)

You can tell the world “Jesus forgives” alone. But you can’t demonstrate that by yourself.

Forgiveness gets demonstrated when there are brothers and sisters who offend each other and keep on forgiving, in a world where everyone else ditches each other. When the world watches that, something clicks. “I’ve never seen that before.” They’re seeing Jesus in the flesh.

That’s why Jesus, on the night before He died, prayed that His people would be brought to complete unity, “so that the world may believe that you have sent me.” Our unity displays Christ to the world. Which means your grudge isn’t a private matter. It’s a hole in what the world can see of Jesus.

REFLECT & JOURNAL

Whose name came to mind when you sat down? Write it. What would forgiveness — asked for or extended — require of you?

PRAY

Jesus, on Your last night You prayed for my unity with the people I find hard. I’ve treated that prayer casually.

I bring You the name I wrote down. You know the whole story. The real one. Not just my version of it.

Soften me first. Then show me the steps I can take, and give me the humility to take them. *Keep praying for that person by name until you can pray for them earnestly from the heart.*

TODAY

Take one visible step toward the person you named. A message. A call. An apology. Or a genuine prayer of release if contact isn’t possible or wise.

CARRY THIS WITH YOU

“By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” — John 13:35

Day 12 · Chapter 4: Fellowship · Devotion 3 of 3

The Comfortable Lie of Isolation

BE STILL

Settle in. Let God search you as you ask: have I been protecting my solitude and calling it my “personal relationship with God”?

READ SLOWLY — OUT LOUD IF YOU CAN

“And I tell you... I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.”
(Matthew 16:18)

Francis is honest about it. Doing this alone is more comfortable. No clashing personalities. No arguments. Nobody’s mess but your own. “Let me just have my own relationship with God.” But “I love Jesus, I just hate the church” runs headlong into everything Jesus asked of us. You weren’t designed for isolation. And the mission we’ve been entrusted with, showing Jesus to the world, is impossible solo.

Here’s the relief hidden in the command. You don’t have to manufacture this. Jesus said, “I will build my church.” The supernatural unity, the family, the one heart and soul is His project. It’s already underway across the world. The only question He leaves you with is the one this chapter ends on. Do you want to be part of it? Or do you want to keep living in isolation?

REFLECT & JOURNAL

What has isolation cost you, honestly, over the years? And what is the real reason you’ve stayed there?

PRAY

Lord, I confess that some of my independence is just selfishness with a spiritual coat on. You’re building Your church whether I join in or not. But You invite me in. As a brother. As a sister. As family.

I say yes. Show me what yes costs this month, and hold me to it. *Tell Him specifically what stepping out of isolation would look like for you.*

TODAY

Do one thing today that trades comfort for family. Accept an invitation. Extend one. Join the table you’ve been avoiding. Or ask a believer for help with something real.

CARRY THIS WITH YOU

“God settles the solitary in a home.” — Psalm 68:6

Chapter 5 — Teaching

Before Day 13, listen to Chapter 5. The early believers devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching. Not out of discipline alone. Out of hunger. This chapter asks what it would take for the Word to become that to you.

Day 13 · Chapter 5: Teaching · Devotion 1 of 3

Craving, Not Just Discipline

BE STILL

Before you open your Bible today, tell God the truth about how you've felt opening it lately. He can handle it.

READ SLOWLY — OUT LOUD IF YOU CAN

"Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation." (1 Peter 2:2)

Francis is grateful someone told him to discipline himself to read the Bible every morning. That discipline gave him a base he still stands on. But he noticed the early church had something he didn't. They craved it. Peter compares it to a newborn and milk. And Francis remembers his first daughter's birth. The moment she was born, she wanted milk. Nobody disciplined her into it. It was need. And it was natural.

The craving made sense for the early believers. Jesus had said, "Teach them to obey everything I commanded." And most believers had never met Him. So they ran to Peter and John. "What did He teach? Tell me everything." They had people to disciple and no other source. If your Bible reading has no mission attached, no one you're passing it on to, it's no wonder it feels like homework.

REFLECT & JOURNAL

Is your time in the Word closer to craving or chore right now? What do you think turned it into whichever it is?

PRAY

Father, I don't want to fake hunger, and I can't manufacture it. But You can give it.

Do what only You can do. Make me crave Your words the way a newborn craves milk. Out of real need, not guilt.

And give me someone to feed, because hunger grows where the food is being used. *Ask Him plainly: give me the appetite I don't have.*

TODAY

Read one chapter of a Gospel today. Not to finish it, but to find one thing to obey. Note in your journal what you found.

CARRY THIS WITH YOU

"Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God." — Matthew 4:4

Day 14 · Chapter 5: Teaching · Devotion 2 of 3

The Voice From the Cloud

BE STILL

Hold your closed Bible in your hands for a moment. Consider what you're actually holding. Then ask God to let you hear it as His voice today.

READ SLOWLY — OUT LOUD IF YOU CAN

"He was still speaking when, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, 'This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him.'" (Matthew 17:5)

Peter never got over what he experienced on the mountain. Jesus' face shining like the sun. The glory cloud the Israelites once followed rolling in. And then the voice of God. "This is my Son. Listen to him." Decades later Peter writes: we didn't follow cleverly devised myths. We were eyewitnesses. We heard that voice. Francis admits that for years he read the Bible "almost for information. Just to know more stuff." Not as the words of that God, from that cloud, worth trembling at.

That's why opinions can't be the church's diet. What does this podcast say? What does that teacher think? Forget it. Look at the Bible. Paul goes as far as any words can go. If anyone, even an angel from heaven, teaches contrary to what is written, let him be accursed. The Bible is the standard. Everything and everyone gets weighed against it. Including your favorite voices. Including your own feelings.

REFLECT & JOURNAL

Whose voice shapes your thinking the most right now? And when did you last weigh that voice against Scripture itself?

PRAY

God, You spoke from the cloud. And the same voice speaks from these pages. Forgive me for reading the Scriptures like a textbook and scrolling through teachers like a menu.

Give me back the trembling. When I open this book, let me come the way I would come to the mountain. To listen to Your Son.

Open to today's passage and read it aloud, slowly, as words spoken to you. Then respond to what you heard.

TODAY

Take one belief you've absorbed from a teacher, feed, or friend. Actually check it against Scripture today. Keep what survives. Drop what doesn't.

CARRY THIS WITH YOU

"This is my beloved Son... listen to him." — Matthew 17:5

Day 15 · Chapter 5: Teaching · Devotion 3 of 3

Becoming, Not Just Knowing

BE STILL

Bring to mind the person whose life — not words, life — has shown you the most of Jesus. Thank God for them by name before you read.

READ SLOWLY — OUT LOUD IF YOU CAN

“Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers.” (1 Timothy 4:16)

Francis tells about two different speakers at his church, weeks apart. A Bible translator who spent twenty years in Papua New Guinea, and an advocate for starving children. Each one traced their whole life’s direction back to the same youth pastor. A man named Vaughn. Then one of Francis’ friends told him about a time he walked the dumps of Tijuana with Vaughn, watching desperate kids run to him because he always came back, always clothed them, always loved them. The friend said, “The day I spent with Vaughn is the closest thing I’ve experienced on this earth to walking with Jesus.”

That’s what teaching is for. Not knowing the words of Jesus but becoming like Him. Which is why Paul told Timothy to watch his life and his doctrine, in that order. And this instruction is not just for professionals. Jesus never said, “Bring people to a gathering and let the pastor disciple them.” You learn the Scriptures. You live the Scriptures. You teach the Scriptures. Whatever you read and obeyed yesterday, someone in your life needs you to pass it on.

REFLECT & JOURNAL

Could anyone say of you what Dan said of Vaughn? Even faintly. Even someday. And who are you currently teaching, in any form, from the Word? If no one, who could it be?

PRAY

Jesus, I don’t want to be a person who knows Your words. I want to be a person others meet and come away having felt something of You.

Watch my life and my doctrine with me. Show me where the two have come apart.

And give me one person to teach. A child. A friend. A newer believer. *Ask Him for the name, and wait for it.*

TODAY

Share one thing God has taught you from Scripture with one specific person today. In conversation. Not a broadcast or social media post.

CARRY THIS WITH YOU

“Be doers of the word, and not hearers only.” — James 1:22

Chapter 6 — Prayer

Before Day 16, listen to Chapter 6. The early church devoted themselves to prayer because they'd been handed an impossible mission. This chapter will probably take apart how you were taught to pray. And give you back something better.

Day 16 · Chapter 6: Prayer · Devotion 1 of 3

Draw Near to Listen

BE STILL

Today, reverse your habit. Don't say anything to God yet. Sit for three minutes in silence, listening, before you read a word.

READ SLOWLY — OUT LOUD IF YOU CAN

"Guard your steps when you go to the house of God. To draw near to listen is better than to offer the sacrifice of fools... Be not rash with your mouth, nor let your heart be hasty to utter a word before God, for God is in heaven and you are on earth. Therefore let your words be few." (Ecclesiastes 5:1–2)

"Just start talking. Say whatever comes to mind." That's how most of us were taught to pray. There's some truth in it. But nobody read us Ecclesiastes 5. Guard your steps. Draw near to listen first. Don't be hasty. Let your words be few. God is in heaven and you are on earth. Nobody warned us about empty promises made in prayer. Or told us what James says plainly: Sometimes you ask and don't receive because you're asking to spend it on your own passions. God is not a genie. And prayer is not a wish list read aloud. It's an audience with the King you met on Day 1. That's why the posture comes before the requests. Come slowly. Come carefully. Listen first.

REFLECT & JOURNAL

Think back on what you've prayed for this month, and list it as honestly as you can. How much of it is about your comfort? How much of it lines up with what Jesus cares about?

PRAY

God, You are in heaven and I am on earth. I've rushed into Your presence talking, a thousand times, without ever guarding my steps.

Today let my words be few.

Sit in silence again, longer than is comfortable for you. Then speak only what has survived the silence.

TODAY

Every time you pray today, begin with thirty seconds of deliberate silence before your first word.

CARRY THIS WITH YOU

"Let your words be few." — Ecclesiastes 5:2

Day 17 · Chapter 6: Prayer · Devotion 2 of 3

Words You've Said Without Meaning

BE STILL

You're about to pray the most familiar prayer in the world as if for the first time. Ask God to make the familiar words strange enough to hear again.

READ SLOWLY — OUT LOUD IF YOU CAN

"Pray then like this: 'Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day 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 evil.'" (Matthew 6:9–13)

Francis memorized the Lord's Prayer as a boy in a little Chinese church. Fast. Competitive. Without understanding a word. Years later he learned it in English and realized he still didn't know what he was saying. Walk through it slowly and it starts to read *you*. "Our Father." *Our*, not *my*. This prayer assumes you don't pray alone. "Hallowed be your name." It is an honor that you get to address Him at all. "Daily bread." Just today's provision. When everything in you wants to be set up for thirty years.

Then the two that should stop you cold. "Forgive us as we forgive." Francis admits he's prayed that while angry, while unforgiving. Effectively asking God to forgive him exactly that much. And "Your kingdom come." Which from our lips so often means *my* kingdom come. *My* will be done. Even "in Jesus' name" gets tacked onto the end of selfish prayers, when it was meant to mean: I am asking for what Jesus wants.

REFLECT & JOURNAL

Which phrase of the Lord's Prayer have you been saying without meaning? Write out, in your own words, what it would cost you to mean it.

PRAY

Pray the Lord's Prayer now — out loud, one phrase at a time — and stop after each phrase to say it back to God in your own words.

Don't move past "forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors" until you have either meant it or confessed that you can't yet.

End where Jesus ended His own hardest prayer. Not my will, but Yours be done.

TODAY

Pray the Lord's Prayer this slowly once more before you sleep. And keep doing it daily through the rest of this guide.

CARRY THIS WITH YOU

"Your kingdom come, your will be done." — Matthew 6:10

Day 18 · Chapter 6: Prayer · Devotion 3 of 3

He Is Looking For Someone To Answer

BE STILL

Sit with this single image before reading. The eyes of the LORD, right now, running back and forth across the whole earth. Looking for someone.

READ SLOWLY — OUT LOUD IF YOU CAN

“For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to give strong support to those whose heart is blameless toward him.” (2 Chronicles 16:9)

Have you ever prayed and gotten an answer so specific, so impossible to write off, that you knew Someone heard you? Francis says once you taste that, there’s nothing like it. You finally understand why the early church devoted themselves to prayer. They’d been handed a mission that was flatly impossible. A handful of people. The ends of the earth. Two thousand years ago. They looked at each other and figured, God is going to have to do this. So they prayed like it. Here is the truth that should change the temperature of your praying. God is not reluctant. His eyes are searching the earth for hearts that are fully His, because He wants to strengthen them. He is longing to answer prayers for the things He cares about. If you’ve seen little, it may not be because He’s stingy. It may be because you’ve been asking for the wrong kingdom. Imagine prayer that isn’t a ritual, a transition, a way to bless a meal. But the thing you live for.

REFLECT & JOURNAL

If you started praying for the things God actually longs to do, what would you ask for first? Write the prayer out in full. Date it.

PRAY

Father, Your eyes are running through the earth looking for a heart that is fully Yours. I want to be one You find.

I bring You the prayer I just wrote. A kingdom prayer. Not a comfort prayer. You said You are longing to answer prayers like this. I’m going to keep bringing it to You until You do, or until You change what I’m asking.

Strengthen my heart the way You promised.

TODAY

Put the written, dated prayer somewhere you’ll see it daily. Pray it again tonight. Watch, expectantly, for what God does with it.

CARRY THIS WITH YOU

“Call to me and I will answer you.” — Jeremiah 33:3

Chapter 7 — Communion

Before Day 19, listen to Chapter 7. The final chapter. It begins with Francis's own restlessness with church as he knew it. And ends with the question the whole series has been building toward.

Day 19 · Chapter 7: Communion · Devotion 1 of 3

Better Not to Gather?

BE STILL

As you settle, ask God for the courage this day requires. The courage to evaluate honestly. Without defensiveness. Without despair.

READ SLOWLY — OUT LOUD IF YOU CAN

"But in the following instructions I do not commend you, because when you come together it is not for the better but for the worse." (1 Corinthians 11:17)

Two weeks after his wedding in 1994, Francis told his wife he was tired of church. The fighting. The money questions. A professionalism that felt more like a concert than worship. He said he longed to just gather people in a living room to pray and study and be real. He pursued it. It grew into buildings and multiple services. And years later, evaluating honestly, he found that even while doing so much right, he had neglected things like "love one another." Only the second greatest command in all of Scripture. This time there was no one else to blame.

We console ourselves that something is better than nothing. Paul disagrees. He told the Corinthians their version of the Lord's Supper was so far from Jesus' intent that their gatherings did more harm than good. That's a sobering thing to sit with. It's also freeing. The honest evaluation isn't meant to paralyze you. We can change, repent, grow and reform. Keep finding what's unbiblical. Keep moving toward what He actually asked for.

REFLECT & JOURNAL

Do the evaluation for yourself, not for your church. Where has your own walk with God drifted? What are you doing that He never asked for? And what did He ask for that you've neglected?

PRAY

Lord, search me. I would rather You show me the truth about my religion than let me keep polishing something You never asked for.

Thank You that You don't show me everything at once. That would crush me. Show me the next thing.

Sit quietly and let Him. Write down whatever He puts His finger on.

TODAY

Take the one thing God put His finger on. Make one honest move on it today. Stop the empty form. Or start obeying the neglected command.

CARRY THIS WITH YOU

"Search me, O God, and know my heart." — Psalm 139:23

Day 20 · Chapter 7: Communion · Devotion 2 of 3

I Have Earnestly Desired This

BE STILL

Before reading, picture that upper room. Jesus, hours from crucifixion, looking around a table at the faces of His friends. And glad to be there.

READ SLOWLY — OUT LOUD IF YOU CAN

“And he took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, ‘This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.’” (Luke 22:19)

The night before the cross, Jesus didn’t retreat into Himself. He gathered His friends and said, “I have earnestly desired to eat this meal with you.” I have longed for this moment. Then He handed them bread and a cup and attached Himself to them forever. My body, broken for you. My blood, poured out for you. This is where forgiveness comes from. Do this in remembrance of me. Greater love has no one than this. He was saying: whatever you do, don’t forget this. The early church didn’t. They devoted themselves to the breaking of bread. Remembering Him again and again with the people they knew and trusted and loved. Now think about your own experience of communion. A tray passed down a row. A wafer. A thimble. Thirty distracted seconds. The problem isn’t the room. The problem is how little of your heart has been present at the table where Jesus longed to have you.

REFLECT & JOURNAL

When you last took communion, where was your heart, honestly? What would it mean for you to come to the table the way He came to it? Earnestly desiring it?

PRAY

Jesus, You longed to share that meal. With friends who were hours from abandoning You. You knew. And You wanted them at the table anyway. You want me at the table anyway.

Your body, broken for me. Your blood, poured out for me. I’ve let the most amazing thing anyone has ever done for me become routine.

Thank Him — slowly, specifically — the way you would thank someone who actually died for you.

TODAY

Before the next time you take communion, prepare like Paul urged. Examine your heart. Make peace where you need to. Come ready to actually remember Him. Put it in your calendar if that’s what it takes.

CARRY THIS WITH YOU

“Do this in remembrance of me.” — Luke 22:19

Day 21 · Chapter 7: Communion · Devotion 3 of 3

Stop Attending

BE STILL

This is the last day. Sit still and let the whole journey pass before you. Fear God. Follow Jesus. Holy Spirit. Fellowship. Teaching. Prayer. Communion. Ask God to gather it into one question.

READ SLOWLY — OUT LOUD IF YOU CAN

“I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” (Matthew 16:18)

In the old way of doing church, you could hide. Attend a service. Help in the nursery. Sing in the choir. And spend the rest of the week building your own kingdom. What these seven chapters describe can't be attended. It's 24/7. A people who fear God. Who actually follow Jesus. Who keep in step with His Spirit. Who share everything. Who center on His Word. Who pray united for His kingdom. Who break bread in sacred remembrance. It's simpler than what we've built. It also costs everything.

And here's the beautiful thing. The thing that makes this possible instead of crushing. It's not your project. Jesus said, “I will build my church.” The desire you've felt growing as you listened, is put there by the Spirit. So the series ends with one question. And it's yours alone to answer. Do you want to be part of it? To stop attending, and really be the church?

REFLECT & JOURNAL

Write your answer as a letter to God. Not “the church should...” but “I will...” Be specific. What changes, starting now? Then sign and date it.

PRAY

Lord Jesus, You are building Your church, and the gates of hell will not stop You. I don't want to watch from a seat.

Here is my answer. *Read Him the letter you just wrote.*

I fear You. I will follow You. Fill me with Your Spirit. Put me in the family, in Your Word, in prayer, and at Your table. For the rest of my life. Amen.

TODAY

Tell one person what you committed to in your letter, today, and ask them to hold you to it. A commitment no one knows about is one you can quietly abandon.

CARRY THIS WITH YOU

“Stop attending. And really be the church.”

Day 22 and Every Day After

Twenty-one days is long enough to hear everything. Nowhere near long enough to live it. These devotions were never the point. They were training wheels for a life. Before you put this down, choose the pieces that will outlive it.

Rhythms to keep

1. **Keep meeting with God daily.** The stillness, the Scripture, the unhurried prayer. Don't let that seat go empty now that the guide is finished.
2. **Obey one thing at a time.** Following Jesus is not complicated, it's a simple habit of obedience. Keep asking each day: what is the one thing to obey today?
3. **Ask the Spirit before you act.** Keep the three-second pause. His power, not your effort. You don't make the wave.
4. **Stay out of isolation.** Keep moving toward the family of God. Real faces. Real honesty. Real forgiveness. Even when alone is easier.
5. **Stay in the Bible.** Craving grows with use. Keep reading to obey. Keep passing on what you're given. Someone needs what you learned yesterday.
6. **Pray slowly, and pray His kingdom.** Silence first. Few words. The Lord's Prayer phrase by phrase. And your dated kingdom prayer until He answers it.
7. **Come to the table with your whole heart.** Never again let His body and blood pass by as routine. Examine, make peace, remember.

A closing word

The first church devoted itself to these things not as a program but as a way of life. Because they had seen who God is, and nothing smaller made sense afterward. That same God has been meeting with you these twenty-one days. Jesus said, "I will build my church." He is doing it now, and He has invited you in. Not to watch. To belong, to participate, to live and die for.
"Stop attending. And really be the church."