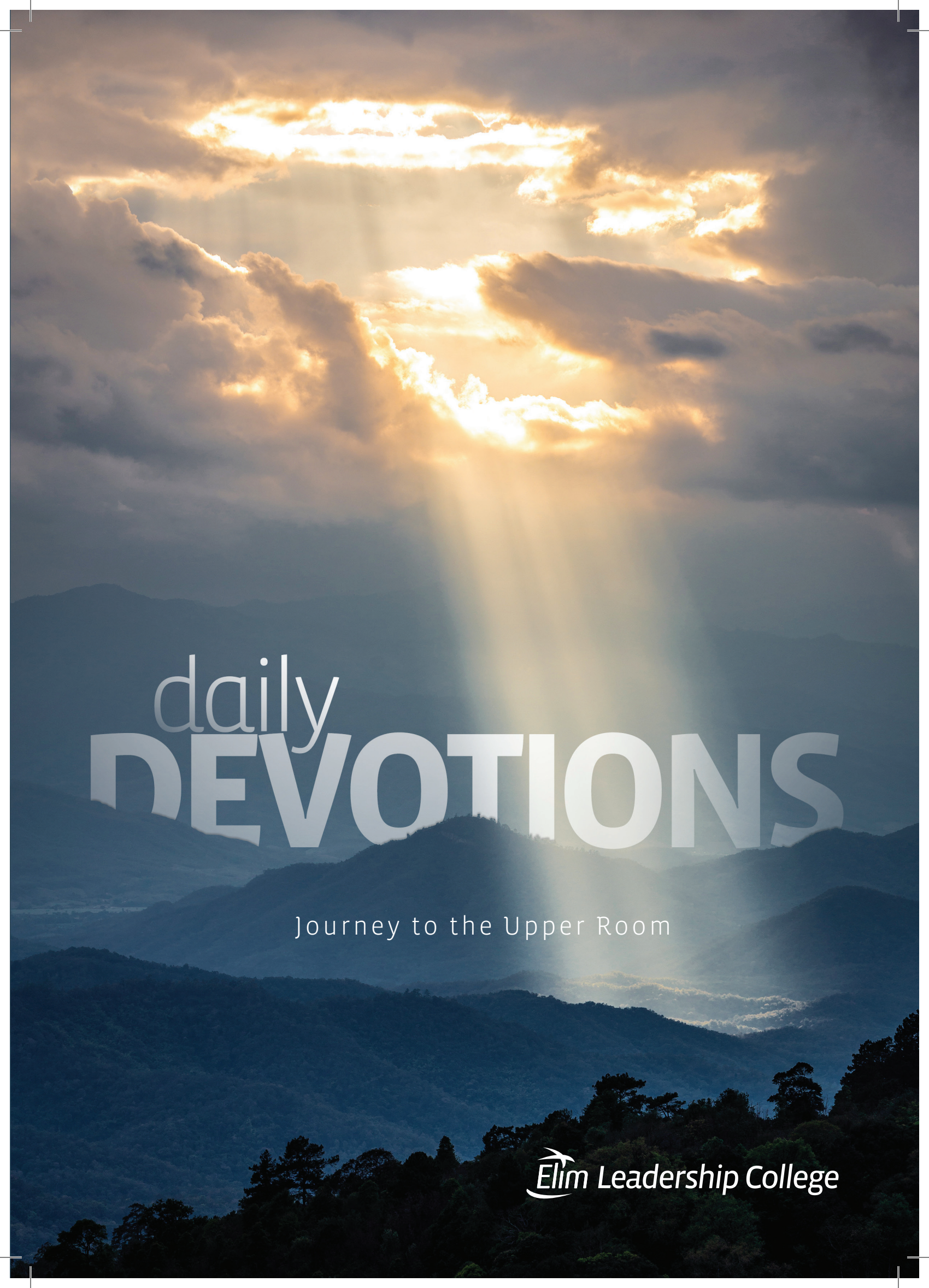


The background of the entire page is a photograph of a mountain range. In the foreground, there are dark, silhouetted trees. Behind them are several layers of mountain ridges, some covered in green forest and others appearing as blue-grey shapes due to atmospheric haze. The sky is filled with large, dark, textured clouds. A bright sunburst is breaking through a gap in the clouds in the upper center, with rays of light streaming down towards the mountains. The overall mood is serene and majestic.

daily DEVOTIONS

Journey to the Upper Room

 *Elim Leadership College*



HELLO FRIEND!

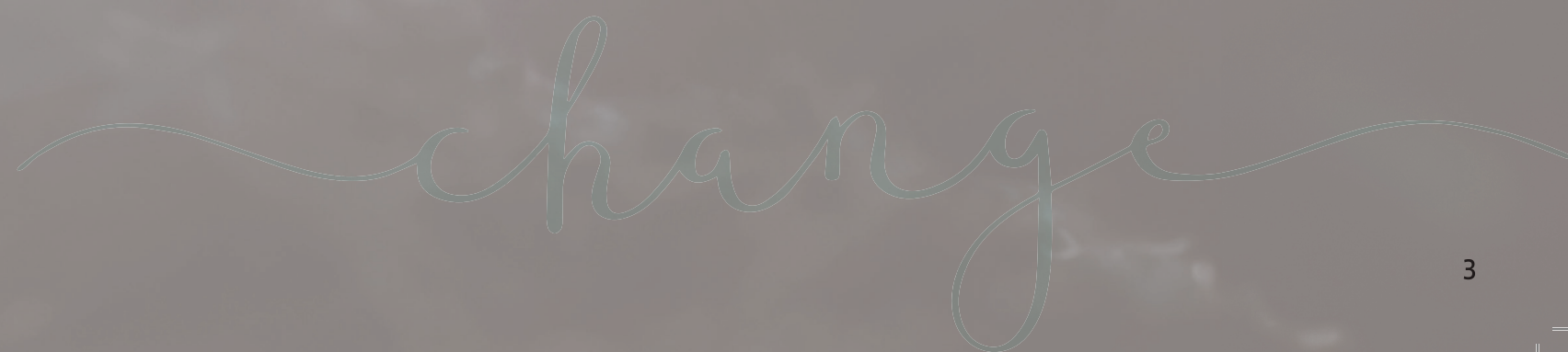
Welcome to the official devotional journal for the final week of the Journey to the Upper Room. We are thrilled that you have made it this far, and believe that the thoughts contained in these bits of paper you hold in your hands, have the power to be transformative. As we have put this together, I can honestly tell you that they have been transformative for us.

It is our prayer that you would engage in this sincerely, thoughtfully, with submission to, and reverence for, the Holy Spirit. It is our prayer that we would all leave this week deeply changed for God's glory.

A quick note on how to use this. On the next two pages you will find the two key texts for this week; Acts 2:42-47 and Revelation 2:1-7. They have been included, with plenty of space and margin, so that you can make your notes on your response to these texts. On the following pages you will find the final eight devotions for the Journey to the Upper Room. You will find a notes page alongside every devotion, where you can put your thoughts, prayers and responses. These notes pages, where you put your reflections, are by far and away the most important pages of the journal. Please make sure that you fill them up.

As ever, we love you, are praying for you daily and believe the absolute best for you. You are almost there! Let's finish the Journey from the Tomb to the Upper Room.

The ELC Team



ACTS 2:42-47

They devoted themselves to the apostles teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

faith

REVELATION

2:1-7

“To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: These are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands. I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked people, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false. You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary.

Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken the love you had at first. Consider how far you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place. But you have this in your favor: You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.

love

DAY | 1

RADICAL OBEDIENCE REQUIRES RADICAL LOVE

This Scripture shows us the response of the Early Church to the message of Jesus and the Baptism of the Holy Spirit. We read this Scripture as a kind 'how to' of Church life. Meet together, break bread, have teaching, do fellowship, witness miracles, give to people that have need, praise God and see people getting saved. That's our to do list - that's what it means to be the Church.

It's interesting to think about how the Early Church had no such guidelines. They were in completely unfamiliar territory. They were not walking a pre-trodden path or following a set of pre written instructions. They were breaking ground. This list of things that the Early Church did as an expression of their devotion to Jesus and His recently birthed Church, was not something they did because they thought that's what they were supposed to do. This is what they wanted to do. They were meeting everyday because they wanted to. Breaking bread together because they wanted to. Giving everything they

had because they wanted to. This expression of Church was an expression of their love, not just of their obedience. They were doing it this way, because they felt this way. When you read it this way you begin to realise that Acts 2:42-47 is not a to do list, it is a wild description of the radical love the early disciples had for Christ and His Body.

ACTS
2:42-47

I wonder if we have let something that should be a matter of love become a matter of obedience? Make no mistake friends, faith that shapes communities requires radical obedience. But it is a radical obedience that is rooted in radical love. The type of radical love that we read in Acts 2:42-47.

Friend, do you feel about Christ and His Body the way the Early Church did? Is your expression of Church rooted in radical obedience which flows from radical love? Is it rooted in a want to? Or is it simply rooted in a desire to be obedient. Hear this truth today; God wants you, to want to.

Additional readings: Ephesians 5:1-2; John 14:15-21; Ephesians 3:14-19

DAY | 2

HARDWORK

Ephesus was a major centre of paganism and witchcraft. Paul's first visit caused a city-wide riot, yet so many people turned to God that it impacted the whole community. (You can read about this in Acts 19.) Paul describes his time in Ephesus by saying, "a great door for effective work has opened to me, and there are many who oppose me" (1 Cor 19:6). Later, when Paul is on his way to Jerusalem, he meets with the elders of the church in Ephesus and warns them that "after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock... So be on your guard!" (Acts 20:28-31). Ephesus was not going to be an easy place to do work for God.

Yet I can think of no better commendation from God than what he gives to the church in Ephesus in Rev 2:1-3. They had worked very hard. They had endured. They had recognised those who were false teachers and dealt with them. And God says he sees it all. He knows, he cares, and he understands.

I wonder if this word that God had for Ephesus, resonates with the Western Church of today? Because goodness knows, we have worked hard. We have put on services, run conferences,

created programmes and pathways. We have given in season and out of season. We have made Church as non threatening as possible. We have started soup kitchens, and food banks and op shops, and light parties. We have created ministries for every age group, from age zero to one hundred. Friend, wherever you are today, God knows and commends you for all your hard work.

But it was hard work sometimes, wasn't it? Wasn't always as easy as we thought it would be. It cost a lot more than we anticipated. Sometimes didn't yield the rewards that we thought it would. We got there, but sometimes deep down, perhaps you asked yourself, why does it seem so hard?

Today, God is pulling up a chair at your table. He is commending you for everything that you have done for his body. Spend time talking with him about the things you have done in ministry that have made him really proud. But God also wants to talk about the flip side of that; he sees, commends and gives space for the fact that some of it has honestly been hard work. Take time today to not just unpack the success, but the unexpected cost.

REV
2:1-3

Additional readings: 2 Corinthians 11:23-31; 1 Corinthians 15:58; Hebrews 6:10

DAY | 3

LOVE LIKE THE FIRST TIME

Do you find these verses challenging? Why would God say that he would remove a church that had worked so hard and seemed to be accomplishing such great things for God? The warning in these verses is very clear. Relationship must come first. All our hard work and perseverance amounts to absolutely nothing if it's not founded on "first love" relationship with God. Jesus says something similar in Matt 7:21-23. There are those who prophesy and do great miracles in his name, but Jesus says in effect, "Go away - I never had any relationship with you".

This is incredibly confronting to our production-driven western culture that measures success by our output. It's also very challenging to those of us who have sacrificed personally, and worked very hard in what we've done for God. Surely these things count for something!?

But today God is asking us to sincerely consider, have we left behind our first love? Can you remember back to the first time you met Jesus.

Like, really met Jesus. Not the small meetings where you saw him briefly, but the meeting where you met him like walking down the aisle and seeing him at the altar. That meeting? Do you love Jesus like you did when you saw him the first time?

Now think about your first introduction to the Church. You remember - when you were at every small group meeting and every Church service, not because you were an intern and had to be there, but because you were a disciple who desperately wanted to be there. Because you just loved the Body of Christ. Do you love the Body the way you did the first time you saw her?

Today, God is drawing you back to this first love. Take time today to remember what this first love was like. Bring before God anything that has happened that has caused you to draw back from him. Know that God's arms are wide open, waiting to embrace you in first love again.

REV
2:4-5

Additional readings: Romans 5:1-8; 1 John 4:7-21

DAY 4

LOVE THAT
LOVES BACK

When I gave birth to my first son, I sat in bed holding my newborn and this wave of love came over me and I knew I would love him all the days of my life. There was nothing I wouldn't do for him and I would protect and provide for him despite the cost or sacrifice. Then a second wave came over me - it was the realisation that this was how my mother felt about me! The depth of love and sacrifice I felt for my son was the depth of love and sacrifice someone else felt towards me! It was quite a revelation. Until I experienced that all consuming, overwhelming, breathtaking love for another, I was not able to fully realise how much I myself was loved.

A lot of us don't have issues with loving God but we do struggle to love his Body. However, here is the twist, if we never truly love the Church, then we never feel truly loved by the

Church. More than that, we are unable to fully feel the love that God has for us because God shows us his love through his Church. Maybe some of the reasons we feel disconnected or disillusioned is because we have forgotten what it is like to love the Church with an all consuming, overwhelming, breathtaking love, which in return, loves us back.

REV
2:2-7

If we want to feel the extravagant, reckless love of God for us, we need to open our hearts to each other. I understand the challenge that this might be. The reservations we might feel and the fear this might create. But we can't be a Bride unless we are first a Body.

What is it that stops you from loving the Church? Where have you been hurt? Come into the arena for healing today and let the Body of Christ, the Church, help you heal.

Handwriting practice lines consisting of 20 horizontal dotted lines.

DAY 5

WHAT'S FIRST?

All this talk of love! Loving God, loving each other, loving the Church. But how do you love when that tank has gone dry? It seems that so much rests on love and yet we can't control it or manufacture it. Then sometimes it goes so horribly wrong! We feel overlooked, overworked or not good enough. Disappointment uses up our love and we are left feeling empty and dry

But if we are to love each other and love the Church then we need to refill our reserves so that we have love flowing from our hearts and lives and the hurts and pain of past disappointments has been healed.

When the thing or the person we love the most doesn't love us back the way we want or need, then we struggle to feel loved by anything. Think about that for a second; if the person that you love the most doesn't love you back, no amount of words of affirmation from other

people, likes on instagrams, hugs on Sunday morning, mentor meetings and supportive texts ever quite has the capacity to make you feel loved. First Love is the building block to all other loves. Being loved helps keep the tank full. If we have been disappointed here then we are reluctant to try again and being vulnerable is almost impossible.

REV
2:4

This is why God needs to be our First Love, because he is the only one that we can guarantee will love us the way we want and the way we need.

If you were really honest, what or who is your first love? If you are struggling to feel loved or struggling to love, go back to God, go back to the foundation of love in your life and attend to the cracks and fractures. Go back to First Love.

Handwriting practice lines consisting of 20 horizontal dotted lines.

DAY | 6

LOVED FIRST

We have been talking about First Love and its importance to all other things we love. By returning to our First Love we may get tempted to think it means we have to try to love God more or try harder to please him. But I want you to consider this, whose very nature is love? Whose love made the ultimate sacrifice? Returning to our first love is not about us loving God more, it is about letting God love us again.

Becoming vulnerable enough to let God love us, challenges our sense of security and independence. But if we don't let God in, we can't love others. The love that we show each other comes from the love that God shows us. One without the other doesn't work. 1 John 4:19 says "We love each other, because he loved us first."

When did we stop letting God love us the way a father would love a child? When did we stop hearing Him say He's proud? When did we stop asking for His advice? When did we stop being

Daddy's little girl? When did we stop inviting him to the sidelines of our sports games? When did we start thinking that we could ever walk ourselves down the aisle? First love isn't so much about how we love God, but about why we no longer let him love us, the way we let him love us at first. I wonder what happened to make us shut God out? Did we get hurt? Did we become proud? Has it never been easy?

REV
2:4

We need to realise that God loved us at our conception, he loved us when we were born, he has loved us every minute of our lives and no matter how things have turned out and he loves us now.

Won't you let him love you? Won't you come back and open up and let him love you, I mean, really love you? Here is your invitation to come like a little child and climb onto your Heavenly Father's lap and let him love you. You may have never done this before, let today be the first time of many.

Additional readings: Psalm 138:13-18; Isaiah 43:1-4

DAY 7

CONFESS YOUR LOVE

There is something about saying a thought out loud for the first time. You might have known it for a long time in your head, but we all know that the first time you say that thing is significant. Romans 10:9 tells us that in order to be saved we must not only believe in our hearts, we must confess with our mouths. There is something sacred about not just knowing something in your heart, but confessing it with your mouth. We have been on quite the journey with the devotional, and perhaps we are at a place where

REV
2:1-7

we need to start confessing some of the things that we have learned. To make them more than commitments, decisions and declarations that are in our hearts - to make them spoken confessions of love and faith for God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, and for the Body of Christ. Below, we will include a confession for you to make, but in the notes section for today, let me encourage you to also write your own. Take the time to frame a personal confession of your love for God and His Church.

“

CONFESS

Today I confess that I am radically and wildly loved by my Father in Heaven. I declare that he alone is my first love. From this day forward I promise that I will let him love me. I choose to posture my heart to receive his love.

Today, I confess again my love and devotion for my Saviour. I promise to walk with him, to adore him, to speak to him, to listen to him, when I feel like it and when I don't. I promise to give him the best of my love and the best of my affection from this day forward, for the rest of my life.

Today I confess again, that I radically love the Body of Christ. I love her wounds, and I love her scars. I love what she is, and I love what she is becoming. I promise to love the people of God like Moses did; to lead them even when they may grumble against me or even blame me. Today I promise to love the people of God like Peter did; to treat everyone with honour and dignity, even when they are fish from the other side of the boat.

Today I confess that I radically love the entirety of the Body of Christ, with all her strengths, flaws, hurts and beauty, and I will give my life to serving her, until the day she becomes the Bride.

In Jesus name,
Amen.

”

Additional readings: Psalm 66

DAY | 8

ANNOUNCE YOUR COMMITMENT

So, it is the last day of our Journey to the Upper Room. Well done! Today is Pentecost Sunday. We are coming down the mountain like Moses, coming down from the Upper Room like Peter. Like Moses and Peter, we have some announcements to make. Yesterday, we made confessions about our love for Christ and His Body. Today, we are challenging you to make some commitments. If yesterday was about confessing your radical love, today is about announcing your radical commitment. And

ACTS
2:42-47

friend, you are going to have to do this, out loud. Remember that the battle we fight is not against flesh and blood, but against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms (Ephesians 6:12). Today, on Pentecost Sunday, you need to rise up, Warrior of Christ, and declare that you will not stop fighting for, you will not stop believing in, you will not stop building the Church that was birthed on this day thousands of years ago. God's plan is still the Church. We are the Body that is becoming the Bride.

ANNOUNCEMENT

Today I announce; to all principalities and powers, to rulers and authorities of this dark world, to the heavenly host and to all of creation that I will give my life for the Church. I will devote myself to the apostles teaching, to fellowship and to the breaking of bread. I will confidently and expectantly go after miracles, signs and wonders, and be filled with wonder and awe when God performs them. I will prize the safety and wellbeing of the community that I am part of, even when it means sacrificing some of my rights as an individual. I will share what I have, with anyone who has need.

I will not forsake meeting together. I will not isolate myself from the Body. Everyday, I will enjoy fellowship with the Body, not out of compulsion, but out of a glad and sincere heart, which inspires worship to God. I declare that this pursuit of unity, will be a witness to the world of the love of Jesus. That as we confidently pursue this together, God will add daily to our number those who are being saved.

I announce that this declaration will not originate in my obedience, but in my love. And should I ever find that I am simply doing this out of obedience again, I will return again to my first love. I will go back again, to being firstly loved by God.

I announce on this day that commemorates the birth of the Church, that I will defend, honour, fight for, and love the Body of Christ, until she becomes his Bride.

In Jesus name,
Amen.

Additional readings: Ephesians 6:10-20, Ephesians 3:1-15



www.elc.ac.nz