

Day One: Ezekiel 34:1-16

1. Against whom is Ezekiel prophesying (2)? In what ways do the “shepherds of Israel” care only for themselves (3)? In what ways do they fail to care for the flock (4)? What impact did this have (5-6)? What is God’s verdict (7-10)? What is the shepherds’ punishment (10)? List all the ways the Lord will rescue the flock (10-16). Which of God’s great deeds do you think some of these symbols of rescue actually represent?
2. Recall a time at work, school, or church when you felt that leaders above you were self-serving. What made you feel that way? Which of their behaviors are echoed in this text from Ezekiel? In what ways did you feel like the scattered and abused flock? What did you do with these feelings? If you face this struggle again, turn to the Lord by re-reading his words in verses 11-17. Which of those verses do you find the most healing and hopeful? Why?

Day Two: Matthew 11:28-30

1. Whom is Jesus addressing (28)? What does he tell them to do (28)? What happens when the weary and burdened come to him (28)? In exchange for one’s burdens, what does Jesus want to give (29)? What two reasons does he offer for this being a worthwhile exchange (29)? What does Jesus claim is easy and light (30)? Why do you think he uses a yoke, a farming symbol?
2. Today, what is loading you down; in what areas of your life do you feel weary and burdened? Has anyone imposed these burdens on you via unreasonable expectations, strict rules, etc.? Talk to the Lord about this. How does he want to free you from these burdens and the wounds they cause? If you don’t feel loaded down, but know others who are, pray for them now. How does God want to use you to draw them toward Jesus and his yoke?

Day Three: Matthew 18:1-7

1. What question did the disciples ask Jesus (1)? Before he spoke his reply, what did Jesus do (2)? What did he then say about simply *entering* the kingdom of heaven (3)? Who is the greatest in the kingdom (4)? What is one way to welcome Jesus (5)? What did Jesus say about those who cause believers to stumble (6-7)? In verse 7, why do you think he said, “Such things must come”?
2. Read Matthew 23:13. How does that verse relate to this earlier passage in the gospel? What are some ways that abusive church leaders can cause a believer to stumble? Specifically, how might someone cut people off from God? Pray for your church leaders now: that they would maintain the lowly position of a child and go to great lengths to not cause a believer to stumble.

Day Four: Galatians 2:11-14

1. Set the scene of this text (11). What did Paul do to Cephas (11)? Why (11)? What exactly did Cephas do wrong (12)? What was the ripple effect (13)? What was Paul’s assessment of this behavior (14)? What did this prompt him to do (14)? How do you think Peter responded to this question? How would you describe Paul’s tone and emotional state in this section of his letter to the Galatians?
2. Abusive leaders do not suffer challenges or disagreements. In Paul’s ability to oppose Cephas (the apostle Peter) “to his face,” what do we learn about Peter’s leadership? Consider leadership positions you hold. Ask the Lord to reveal any walls you put up to keep people from confronting you. What is he speaking? As you respond, begin with repentance; then, ask for grace to faithfully demonstrate to others that it is always safe to question you.

Day Five: Colossians 2:16-23

1. What things are *not* good indicators as to whether someone is “in Christ” (16)? Why (17)? Whom should we *not* allow to disqualify us (18)? How does Paul elaborate on these people of “false humility” (18-19)? What rhetorical question does he then pose (20-21)? Why does he dismiss the world’s rules (22)? What is deceptive about them (23)? What is the reality of these rules (23)?
2. Take a moment to ask the Holy Spirit to allow you to sense the burden and the wounding of believers who have endured abusive church leadership. How does this make you feel? How do you think God wants you to respond? What words and verses from this Colossians passage may serve as a salve for the wounded? Pray those words for them now, and ask the Lord for in-person opportunities to usher them toward further healing.