

An aerial photograph of a turbulent ocean with white-capped waves. A large, solid black circle is superimposed over the center of the image, serving as a background for the title text.

21 DAYS OF PRAYER AND FASTING
REFLECTION JOURNAL

Introduction

John Wesley was a leading influencer of our denomination who lived in the 1700s. He believed that spiritual growth springs out of inward and outward holiness in both "heart and life." In 1729, while a student at Oxford University, he started a discipleship group with his brother Charles. The Wesley brothers formed the nucleus of a group of up to 25 members that met regularly for prayer, Bible study, and discipleship.

Some of Wesley's fellow Oxford students, however, did not take kindly to the group's methods, cynically labeling them "The Holy Club." But ridicule and persecution could not dissuade Wesley or his friends: they were intent on not only believing right creeds but on living in and for Christ. Individually and together, they pressed in to know Jesus Christ.

As we look back on John Wesley's contribution, it is important for us to know that this method and its questions were not born out of a heart of legalism, or a desire to create "rules" outside of scripture. This was simply a way they could create an environment of accountability and self-examination for themselves. These same questions can strengthen us today.

The Method

Club members devised a systematic approach, a "method," to foster individual and shared discipleship. Their method involved rigorous self-examination. Every day, all members asked themselves 21 questions about their devotion to God. They used these questions to methodically examine themselves – not just their beliefs, but their living as well. Members would also query one another. Commitment, discipline, openness, accountability, and a shared journey defined their approach.

We hope that these questions from John Wesley will offer you a focal point for prayer during these next **21 Days of Prayer and Fasting**. As you seek to hear from God, our prayer is that this Journal will be a helpful tool in hearing His voice. In preparation for this journey, please take a few minutes to respond to the following:

Some things I hope to receive from God during the next 21 Days . . .

Some things I'd like to give to God during the next 21 Days . . .

People I am praying for during the next 21 Days . . .

Week One



Is Jesus real to me?

Read John 3:3-17

Wesley's question, "Is Jesus real to me?" may be the most important of all the 21 questions. It gets to the point of our Christian witness and pursuit of holiness. Wesley wanted Christians to make sure that we are not simply following a religion but experiencing a relationship with Jesus. When Jesus is real to us, that reality shows itself to us and others through its impact on our words, actions, disciplines, and practices.

- Discipleship, the spiritual growth process of becoming a deeply committed Christian, isn't about outward piety. Rather, discipleship in the way of Jesus is about experiencing a person.

When has Jesus seemed the most real to you in your life? The least real? What were those circumstances?

- Jesus becomes more real to us through the practices of discipleship each day. Scripture reading, study, prayer, mission work, fasting, moments of solitude, submission to God's will for our life and joining authentic community all change the way we see the world. What discipleship practices can you put into your life to become a more deeply committed Christian?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, please give me a strong inner nudge to move me in the direction of making you and my commitment to you more real. Amen.



Am I enjoying prayer?

Read Luke 11:1-4

To enjoy prayer is to simply have a good prayer experience--be it occasionally, daily, or hourly, prayer is meant to be a positive and enriching worship experience. To pray, and to enjoy it, is to regularly engage in the practice of prayer, and as a result find a deeper understanding of God, self, others and the world. We pray to lean into God's goodness and strength. When we pray well, we learn to enjoy it.

- Think about a time when you prayed passionately. What were the circumstances surrounding that time of prayer?

- Commit to establishing a prayer routine. Pick a quiet place in your home or office. Pray at the same time each day. Start simply, dedicating just a few minutes at first. Pray in a way that works for you. If you enjoy writing, you may write out your prayers. You may want to pray out loud. You can also pray as you walk or exercise. Consider downloading a prayer app or sign up for a daily devotional email. Seek to find a way that leads you to richer experiences. What steps are you taking now to strengthen your prayer routine?

Prayer: Answer me when I call to you, my righteous God. Give me relief from my distress; have mercy on me and hear my prayer. (Psalm 4:1)



Do I insist upon doing something about which my conscience is uneasy?

Read Philippians 4:8-9

The feelings we get when we insist on doing something we shouldn't—gossiping, lusting, lying, stealing, cheating, etc.—usually signal the goodness in us battling the human desire to usurp God's authority and be in charge of our own life. An uneasy conscience is a good thing as it reminds us that we are called to live into the goodness in which God created us.

- What areas of your life are causing you an uneasy conscience? Dig deeply—what is driving these temptations in your life? What steps can you put into place to combat the temptations you are facing?

- When you find yourself leaning into a temptation, ask yourself these questions:

- What are the consequences of giving in to this weakness?
- Who may be hurt by this?
- Will the satisfaction of this moment be worth the consequences I may face?

Answer the questions before you act. It may help to place these questions somewhere that will allow you to see them daily.

Prayer: God, you alone know the true condition of my heart. I may be able to fool others with my words and actions, but you know the truth. Empower me to do and say only what is pleasing in your sight. Amen.



Do I give time for the Bible to speak to me every day?

Read Hebrews 4:11-13

Wesley didn't ask this question to create more for Christians to do. He wanted us to look at our efforts to daily engage the Bible as a way for God to speak to us--to shape us into more deeply committed Christians. Bible reading is not a task to be completed, it is a practice to shape us into who God invites us to be. Learning to listen to God through the Bible forms a foundation that helps us become more aware of other ways, such as music, prayer, or the beauty of creation, in which God also desires to speak to us.

- Do you struggle with finding time to read the Bible each day? As with any other good habit, start small — even five minutes a day. Let the time increase as the discipline strengthens your spiritual life. Is your challenge more with understanding and interpreting what you read? If you know someone who has developed the discipline of daily Bible reading, ask them about their experiences of hearing God through scripture.

What will you do to create time for scripture to speak to you through reading or listening moving forward?

Prayer: God, stir in me a passion to read the Bible daily and to meditate on what I read. Give me the ability to understand, so that I can put your teachings into practice. Help the words of the Bible to be more than just words on a page, but passageways of mercy into my heart. Amen.



Do I go to bed on time and get up on time?

Read Genesis 2:2-3, Psalm 3:3-6

Yes, Wesley's question, "Do I go to bed on time and get up on time?" is about being rested for the work of God in the world. However, his question also points to our willingness to live a disciplined life in general. "Do I go to bed on time and get up on time?" is code for "Are you rested and at your best to meet the challenges of the day, and ultimately represent God well and help make the world a better place?"

- Think about a time you've felt exhausted and depleted. What was your behavior like at that time? How good were the decisions you made when you were in that state of exhaustion? How would you answer John Wesley's question, both on the surface level (adequate hours of sleep) and on its deeper level (rested enough to make the world a better place)?

- Choose a reasonable bedtime this week, one that will provide you with a good amount of rest, and stick to it. Perhaps it's a half hour before you usually go to bed, or perhaps it's a lot earlier than that. Don't allow emails, television, social media, or anything else (that really can wait until the next day) to interfere with the time you've set.

What are some action steps you will take starting today?

Prayer: God, help me be disciplined in my sleep and in my times of rest and recreation. I pray that I will be willing to stick to a schedule that allows me to be at my best for your Kingdom. Amen.



Do I pray about the money I spend?

Read Luke 12:13-15

Wesley famously said, “Gain all you can, save all you can, and give all you can.” This is why he included the question, “Do I pray about the money I spend?” To pray about the money we spend means that we go to God realizing that we do not possess any money of our own. Rather, we are simply holding God’s money for the purposes of God’s work in the world.

- What inner reactions did you have to Wesley’s statement? “Gain all you can, save all you can, give all you can.” Which dimensions of Wesley’s guideline most challenged you? How does this approach to handling money match up or differ with advice you get from financial publications, web sites, or advisers?

- How closely do your habits align with Wesley’s advice? Make a three-column chart: Gain, Save, Give. In each column, estimate the amounts you have gained, saved, and given in the past year. How do you believe your spending habits would change if you prayed daily about the money you spent?

Gain	Save	Give
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Prayer: God, I want to be a faithful steward of all you have provided. Protect me from an attitude marked by greed or consumption. May I grow toward generosity, spending whatever money you entrust to me in a way that brings glory to you and help to others. Amen.



Am I consciously or unconsciously creating the impression that I am better than I am? In other words, am I a hypocrite?

Read Philippians 2:5-8, 2 Timothy 1:6-9

This is a hard question to ask yourself, but Wesley prompted it for a very good reason. Faking it—pretending to be better than we are—actually keeps us from knowing who we are and how we are doing. You don't need to create a false impression of yourself. God's grace says that you, as you are, with all your cracks and flaws and blemishes, are amazing.

- Who do you have in your life who knows the real you? Seek one or more trustworthy people who can honestly and caringly know you and give you honest feedback and guidance. Write a letter to yourself identifying three areas of your life you would like to see grow. Seal it and save it or email it to yourself.

- Are there particular environments in which you feel as though you have to fake it? What are the factors that make you feel that you have to hide some part of the real you in those settings or relationships? Identify two or three steps you could take to be more real with people, either in seeking different settings or in challenging some of your own inner fears.

Prayer: God, help me to see myself as I truly am. Keep me from creating false versions of myself, and let me be surrounded by people with whom I can be real. Amen.

Week One Family Activity

Encourage your family to be thankful for the many blessings you have. Decorate some type of small, simple container such as a basket, jar or bucket. Place a stack of index cards or strips of paper next to the container along with pens, colored pencils or crayons. Every day invite each of your family members to grow in faith by writing or drawing a picture of something for which they are thankful. You can do this together at the same time or individually throughout the day. If you wish, your family can share these aloud each night at the dinner table or before bed. Otherwise, you can save them and read them together on your way to worship each Sunday. Continue to add to them as you thank God daily.



Week Two



Am I proud?

Read Psalm 139:13-14, Ephesians 2:4-10

We all know that person who walks around as if they were puffed up with air, proud of their bank account statement, their title, their looks, their ability. Sometimes we are those people! St. Augustine once said that pride is “the love of one’s own excellence.” This is an unhealthy perspective that says we are somehow superior to others. Take comfort in the fact that you are valuable and precious to God--so is everyone else!

- What are your strengths, from God’s perspective? Are you ever tempted to think and act as though those strengths make you superior to others? In what areas of your life are you masking insecurities with pride?

- What’s the difference between healthy self-esteem and pride? Can you recall a time when you successfully overcame a sense of unhealthy pride? If so, what helped you to do that? Who in your life can honestly challenge you on pridefulness?

Prayer: Creator of the universe, thank you for the gift of life you’ve entrusted to me. Help me find security in you and free me from the need to feel superior. Amen.



Am I defeated in any part of my life?

Read John 16:33, Romans 7:21-25

To admit that we are defeated is an act of courage. To admit that we need help is bravery. To admit that our stability, strength and sustainability come from God is an act of worship. We honor God when we declare our need for God's help. The Psalms were filled with constant cries for help and support. The apostle Paul memorably wrote, "I'll gladly spend my time bragging about my weaknesses so that Christ's power can rest on me . . . when I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Corinthians 12:9-10).

- In what areas of your life do you often feel defeated? What are the warning signs that help you see your need for support? What could change in you that would help you overcome feelings of defeat?

- Read this verse to remind yourself where your strength comes from: "The Lord is my solid rock, my fortress, my rescuer. My God is my rock—I take refuge in him! He's my shield, my salvation's strength, my place of safety" (Psalm 18:2). Consider putting this verse in a place where you will see it regularly. Write it out here in your own words:

Prayer: Gracious God, help me, when I feel defeated, to center my thoughts on the many blessings in my life instead of my current or past circumstances. Grow my capacity for hope and trust. Amen.



Did I disobey God in anything?

Read Deuteronomy 5:32-33, Acts 5:27-32

When we choose to obey God, we honor God's love for us and live as God desires. When we disobey God by choosing to live selfishly, in our own way, we live into our freedom, but also make the possibility of sin a reality. How do we move beyond a love for self and toward a whole-hearted love for God? When we don't do what God intends, we must choose to confess our actions (or inactions) and ask for forgiveness. Confession taps us into God's forgiveness, and forgiveness gives us a fresh start. God's love is always greater than your biggest sins.

- In what areas of my life am I choosing my own desires over what God has for me? Where can I find help in overcoming my shortcomings? In what ways does Jesus model for us the way God intended for us to live?

- How can I worship God with the freedom God has granted me, rather than going my own way in rebellion against God? Try to memorize the verse, "To you, Lord, belong greatness and power, honor, splendor, and majesty, because everything in heaven and on earth belongs to you. Yours, Lord, is the kingship, and you are honored as head of all" (1 Chronicles 29:11). When you sense a struggle within you to obey God's authority, repeat this verse to yourself.

Prayer: God, you gladly and graciously forgive all who repent and turn toward you. Thanks for your promise of enduring and redeeming grace! May I strive to be like Christ so that I might reveal your love to the world around me. Amen.



How often do I grumble or complain?

Read Philippians 2:14-16

Are you a constant complainer? It is easy to find out, simply ask the people around you. When we complain, we think we are just making observations about reality. But constant complaining creates an alternative reality that leads us to shirk responsibility and blame others for our discontent. Wesley called us to ask ourselves and one another this question so that we can replace negative with positive thoughts and start developing new habits marked by hope and optimism.

- Do you think you are optimistic or pessimistic by nature? What kind of feedback have you received from people in your life about this aspect of your personality? Do you believe it is possible to reframe your approach to circumstances to view them in a positive vs. a negative light? What could help you do this?

- Think about any constant grumblers you know. What choices might be driving their negative outlook? Who do you know who is consistently a “glass half full” person? Observe closely what decisions and practices seem to help them live their lives this way. When have you made a conscious decision to be more positive about a particular situation, or about your life overall?

Prayer: Holy God, you always work for my good. May I honor you by avoiding complaining and replacing it with rejoicing, even when things do not go my way. Amen.



Am I a slave to dress, friends, work or habits?

Read 1 Timothy 6:7-9

The underlying principle behind this question of Wesley's is simply, "Who or what owns us? What consumes us? Who or what do we allow to control our lives?" When we are a slave to something or someone, it clearly means that we take our direction from a controlling person or object that is not God. We are called toward a healthy, balanced life of serving the "Kingdom virtues" we see in Jesus Christ.

- What controls your life? Be honest with yourself. What is the focus of most of your thoughts? What preoccupies you? How much time, effort and focus would be available for your participation in the mission of God if this factor did NOT preoccupy your life? Ask your spouse or a trusted friend to alert you when they notice you "feeding" this preoccupation in a way that limits your ability to allow God to control your life.

- One of the best ways to curb your enthusiasm for things that consume you other than God's mission is to regularly serve others. Find a place to serve regularly, in order to help rebalance the priorities in your life. Don't put it off, and don't wait for the ideal service situation to present itself. Try out a variety of service opportunities to find the place that captures your passion and attention. What does this bring to mind?

Prayer: God, help me resist the desire to collect things I do not need, to resist the temptation to allow my impulses and obsessions to direct my decision-making. Help me to give you all I am and have. Amen.



How do I spend my spare time?

Read Thessalonians 3:6-13

It is essential to determine where in your day you have spare time. You must also find what you should do with that time. This is not a time to answer emails you didn't get to during your hours of work! Wesley proposed this as a key question for Christians so that we can determine which activities help us refresh, renew and refocus on the essential priorities of our lives.

- Wesley (and Jesus) both want to make sure that we are not wasting time that we could be using to strengthen our daily pursuit of becoming deeply committed Christians. What activities bring you the most enjoyment and make you feel the most refreshed and energized? How much of your spare time do you spend on these pursuits? If it's less than you would like, how can you restructure your time so that you are spending it in ways that bring you life?

- Make a spare time "map" of your week. For one week, record everything honestly, (for your eyes only). Be specific enough so that you can spot spare time patterns to help you evaluate your map. Use the calendar or notes functions on your phone to help you, or jot down notes in your desk calendar or portfolio, if that works best for you.

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
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Prayer: God, may I use my spare time in ways that please you. Help me develop the consistent practices needed to use the time I have wisely. Amen.



Am I self-conscious, self-pitying, or self-justifying?

Philippians 2:3-4

It is healthy to be self-aware. However, being too aware of self can make us self-absorbed if we're not careful. Wesley wanted us to reflect on the question, "Am I self-conscious, self-pitying or self-justifying?" Here we confront our human penchant to be so concerned with "self" that we lose sight of the "others" in our lives. Do yourself a favor. Reflect carefully and act swiftly on the core of what Wesley was getting at in today's question. Watch it change the way you see the world and also the way others see you.

- How often do you attempt something you will be "bad" at? If your answer is "rarely," why do you think that is? Are you afraid of being embarrassed or looking foolish to others? Are you worried about criticism, or is it because you have an excessive need to always be the "best"?

- Has anyone ever told you that you are self-absorbed, self-pitying, or self-justifying? What were the circumstances of that encounter? What, if anything, did you learn about yourself as a result?

Prayer: God, teach me to serve you first and to seek your kingdom. Help me to be less concerned about myself and more about you and your mission for this world. Help me not to be so concerned with myself that I forget your purpose for me. Amen.

Week Three



Do I thank God that I am not like others?

Colossians 3:12, Luke 18:9-14

We can draw many insights from Jesus' story in Luke 18. Chief among them is this: we are not to compare ourselves to others. Comparing our situation to others is not healthy. Whether thanking God for not being like others, or wishing God would give us what others have, we are discrediting God. We need to come before God in a similar spirit as the tax collector in Jesus' story.

- To whom do you most often compare yourself? Is there one particular person, or group of people, that most often draw this tendency out in you? Why is that the case? When you compare yourself to others, are you more likely to find yourself lacking in some way, or do you tend more to feel superior and grateful that you are not like them?

- Identify the “triggers” for the times you compare yourself to others. Perhaps certain contacts' Facebook posts leave you feeling somewhat self-satisfied, or, conversely, feeling inferior to them. Perhaps a club you're involved in causes you to feel “less than” others in some way. Remove these triggers from your life for a period of time and assess the result. Does not comparing yourself to others impoverish your life, or make it better?

Prayer: God, teach me to see others as you see them—through a lens of love, compassion and mercy. I pray that I might always remember that we are all lost without you. Amen.



Did the Bible live in me today?

John 15:1-8

The Bible is a love story—the story of a loving, creative God who is good. It is a collection of wonderfully engaging stories, written in a variety of genres such as poetry, prophecy and parables, meant not just to amuse or entertain, but to shape our very life. Engaging the Bible is about intimacy more than literacy. Reading the Bible for knowledge of God is one thing. Allowing the Bible to read you for transformation is altogether different.

- Wesley didn't just ask, "Did I read my Bible today?" but "Did it live in me today?" Is the Bible actively shaping your heart, your inner self? To allow the Bible to live in us we must be humble people, taking a posture of listening, learning, action and service. How do you let the Bible live in you each day?

- The Bible is both divine and human. The Bible reveals the human struggle, discloses all that is wrong with humanity—violence, lust, murder, injustice, paganism—and at the same time discloses God's enduring love that overcomes human deficiencies and provides new life. Has your view of the Bible changed throughout your life? Do you value the Bible differently, or relate to it differently, than you did when you were younger?

Prayer: God, prepare my ears to hear your voice in the Bible. Open my heart and mind to the truths held in its pages. Holy Spirit, guide me into all truth and expand my understanding of the person and work of Jesus in a real and loving way. Amen.



Do I confidentially pass on to others what was told to me in confidence?

Proverbs 11:11-13, Daniel 6:3-4

We know that trust is fundamental to establishing and sustaining strong relationships. So why do we feel the need to break trust by sharing matters told to us in confidence? Usually we feel the urge to relay private information because information is power. Humans love to let others know that we have access to powerful information. But when as Christians we cannot keep secrets or hold confidential matters private, we sabotage the very sense of community Jesus came to create.

- Has anyone ever betrayed your confidence? What happened after you discovered that your trust was broken? How did that experience affect that specific relationship, other relationships (especially if they were touched by the information wrongly shared), and your overall willingness and ability to trust others?

- Have you ever betrayed someone's confidence? What were the circumstances? If you have ever betrayed someone's confidence, how did you feel after you shared that person's confidential information? Are you still in a relationship with that person? Why or why not? If you have never betrayed someone's confidence, how was this principle of trust instilled in you?

Prayer: Help me, God, to control my desire to reveal information that was told to me in confidence. Guard my tongue and help me to think before I speak and act. Amen.



Am I jealous, impure, critical, irritable, touchy, or distrustful?

2 Corinthians 7:1, Proverbs 14:29-32

The behaviors John Wesley named in this question live inside all of us. We don't like that we possess these types of behaviors, but we do. We work on becoming less of all of the above, because when we express them, they have an adverse impact on our life and the lives of others around us. That's why God calls us to grow in our capacity to live above and beyond the above characteristics and ones like them.

- Do you know people who “fly off the handle?” What drives their behavior? Do you have a close relationship with anyone who displays any of these behaviors regularly? What is the impact of that person on you when they behave in these ways? How do you manage your interactions with them?

- Which of the characteristics John Wesley calls out in today's question do you struggle with most? The next time you find yourself reacting irritably, or feeling jealousy towards another person, take the time to question yourself and understand what is triggering your negative responses. Then identify healthy outlets for your negative feelings—like exercise (even a quick walk around the block), breath prayers, meditation, a gratitude journal, or playing with your dogs.

Prayer: Holy Spirit, breathe in me so that my thoughts may be pure. Move in me so that my work may be pure. Pull me into your love so that I love only what is pure. Give me strength to guard my heart so that all I do is pure. Amen.



Am I honest in all my actions and words or do I exaggerate?

Colossians 3:9-11

Wesley's question can help you evaluate your level of contentment with life. It can help you be true to your identity in Christ, remembering that Christ loves you for who you are as a child of God, not for what you do or have. And it can challenge you to reflect on your character, to discover how free you are to be content, be grateful, be you—and live inspired by your heavenly worth!

- The next time you are tempted to lie or exaggerate, stop to notice what is driving this temptation. Are you intimidated by the group or person you are with? Do you feel “less than” they in some way? Are you trying to impress someone?

- Is there a truth about yourself that you need to tell someone? Is there something you need to “come clean” about, some exaggeration or falsehood that takes more and more energy to maintain? Set aside some private time with that person or group, confess your truth honestly, and set yourself free.

Prayer: Jesus, you modeled honesty—from your birth to your death, burial and resurrection. I pray that honesty may become one of my most valued and tangible virtues. Amen.



Is there anyone whom I fear, dislike, disown, criticize, hold resentment toward or disregard?

1 Corinthians 13:4-8

Today's question covers a lot of ground. Taking into account the people we fear, those we feel disdain or indifference towards, and the people we resent can add up to a few people, or for some of us, many. We cannot fully live the Christian life, as Jesus meant us to, until we are at peace not only with God and our self, but also with others.

- Have you created or kept separation between yourself and another person because you simply don't like them? If so, ask yourself what is driving this dislike. More broadly, would you say you are at peace with God, self, and others? Why or why not?

- Read Romans 12:9-17 (aloud if possible). Reflect on how living out those Scriptural principles can produce a positive response to today's question. As first steps, sometime in the next week, if the occasion presents itself, speak with a person who "rubs you the wrong way." Find a moment today to say something kind to someone you dislike or have intentionally steered clear of.

Prayer: Lord, change me. Replace comparison with compassion in my heart and mind and make me more like Christ—loving to all. Amen.

Week Three Family Activity

John Wesley's rule stated, "Do all the good you can, by all the means you can, in all the ways you can, in all the places you can, at all the times you can, to all the people you can, as long as you ever can."

As a family, talk about each of these phrases. What does the word "all" mean? Are there any exceptions? Compare Wesley's rule to Jesus' greatest commandments found in Matthew 22:37-40. Identify ways your family can grow to follow Jesus' and John Wesley's rules more completely. Share and celebrate your stories at the dinner table or at bedtime. Pray and ask God to help you love others as God loves you.

ALL
YOU
CAN



