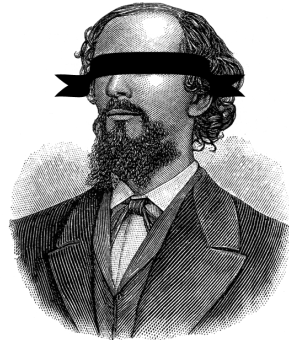


Freedom



**FREDONIA HILL
BAPTIST CHURCH
JANUARY 2013**

In the next 27 days we are going to journey together through 4 areas of Freedom: Health -Fitness, Debt -Finances, Spiritual -Faith and Sabbath Rest -Focus. These four areas are often abused and can lead to destructive lifestyles if not submitted to Christ. He wants all of your heart, soul, strength and mind under His complete Lordship. Too often we settle and believe lies that imprison us. However, Christ has set us free! “For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery” (Gal. 5:1).

My prayer for you in the next 27 days is that you will experience freedom in all four areas for His name & His glory!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Pat K". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large loop at the beginning of the word "Pat".

Pastor Pat

Week 1 – Freedom Fitness

Day 1: Monday, Jan 7th

Read: Eph 3:18-19

Do You Need to Change Your Relationship with God?

Maybe you already know the Lord, but the way you know him isn't working for you. You're not enjoying your relationship with him. You feel like you're doing godly things—reading your Bible, praying, and serving those in need—but no matter how much time you put in, it never feels like enough.

Here's the real secret: You can fulfill the commands of the Bible better by falling in love with God than by trying to obey him. It's funny, the things we do for love. I hate taking out the trash & cleaning the sink—the time, the effort, the trouble. However, my wife feels like the most loved woman in the world when I help her clean or tackle a big project that needs to be done. It's better than sending her a dozen roses—well, almost. The point is, I do it because I love her so much that it brings me joy to do something I know she really appreciates.

What we do for God also reveals the extent of our love. Jesus said, "If you love me, you will obey what I command" (John 14:15). For years I read that verse this way—"If you love me, you will obey me and prove how much you love me." But that's not what he says. He simply says that when we love him, our obedience to him will flow out of our relationship.

So how can we fall in love with God? We can discover more of who he is through the Bible. We can enjoy the fullness of who he is as our Lord, our Savior, and our Creator. This is the fundamental message of the Bible, and yet I often fear that so many have missed it. And we can know him through worship—opening our hearts to him with honesty, sincerity, and humility.

Falling in love with God is just like falling in love with another person. You think about Him constantly and want to be with Him all the time. You can throw away your checklists and just enjoy spending time together.

Your only desire is to be with Him, to enjoy him, to receive what He wants to give you, and to give Him everything you have.

I encourage you to have an honest conversation with God today. Tell Him how you feel. Tell Him where you're frustrated or afraid of loving him. Spend at least a few minutes listening for his response. And remember, God already loves us more than we can imagine.

Day 2: Tuesday, Jan 8th
Read: Matthew 6:16-18

THE SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE OF FASTING

TALKING TO GOD

Thank God for providing for your needs every day. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you be more aware of God's generosity.

GOING DEEPER

Fasting means giving up something you enjoy or need for a designated period of time. In the Old Testament, fasting was common for entire nations who were seeking God's help or direction (2 Chronicles 20:3, Jonah 3:5). In the New Testament, Jesus fasted (Matthew 4:2) and taught His disciples about fasting (Matthew 6:17-18). (Fasting is not always a good idea for children or pregnant women. They can consider giving up something else that they really want or like.) Fasting should be a normal part of our lives; it allows you to focus your time and attention on God. When combined with prayer and time in God's Word, fasting strengthens your faith and helps you become more confident of God's power.

- What are some of the benefits of fasting?
- How does fasting bring you closer to God?
- What is one thing you enjoy that you can give up for a day?

Day 3: Wednesday, Jan. 9th

Read: Joshua 1:8

THE SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE OF MEDITATION

TALKING TO GOD

Thank God for the power of His Word. Ask Him to help you stay focused on His Word throughout the day so you can become more like Jesus.

GOING DEEPER

Sometimes people say, "I need to chew on that," meaning, "I need to think about that for a while." When we meditate on Scripture, we're taking time to think about it and "chew on it." If we ate our food without chewing it, we'd hardly be able to taste it. The more we chew, the more we enjoy the taste and gain strength. It's the same with God's Word. When we take time to think about what it means and how we can use it in our lives, we benefit much more than if we just read it and never think about it again. Romans 12:2 says that we change our lives by renewing our mind, or changing the way we think about things. We can learn to think like God by meditating on His Word.

- What things do you spend most of your time thinking about?
- How might your life change if you spent more time thinking about God's Word?
- What's one passage of Scripture you would like to begin meditating on?

Day 4: Thursday, Jan. 10th

Read: Matthew 19:20-21

The rich young man goes away sad because he won't give up the one thing that consumes him. He is so full with his riches he can't see how undernourished his soul is. It's at this point in the biblical story that most of us start to look at all the rich people we know and think, "Well, I sure hope they get this message. Good thing I'm not rich. Good thing Jesus doesn't ask me to sacrifice in this way." Or does He?

Jesus meant His comment for any of us who wallow in whatever abundance we have. I imagine Jesus looked straight into this young man's soul and said, "I want you to give up the one thing that you crave more than Me."

God made us capable of craving so that we'd have an unquenchable desire for more of Him, and Him alone. Nothing changes until we make the choice to redirect our misguided cravings to the only One capable of satisfying them.

Paul wrote to Christians, "I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better" (Ephesians 1:17 NIV).

It's easy to feel that our struggle with food & maintaining regular exercise is futile. But I encourage you to see the process today as a path that offers both physical and spiritual benefits.

Day 5: Friday, Jan. 11th

Read Ephesians 1:18-19; 1 Timothy 4:8

It is so tempting to quit the health struggle entirely and pretend it doesn't really matter spiritually. But it does matter and not just for the physical or emotional setbacks. It's the denial of a fundamental spiritual truth. What is this truth?

Today, your heavenly Father is telling you the same truth: "You were made for more!" More than this failure . . . more than this cycle of defeat . . . more than being ruled by taste buds, body image, rationalizations, guilt, and shame. You were made for victory.

Ephesians 1:18 – 19 says: "I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which [God] has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe."

This truth is a great script to play in our heads every time we're tempted with guilt, rationalizations, or the "I'll-do-better-tomorrow" escape clauses. Do any of these sound familiar?

Live in truth.

Day 6: Saturday, Jan. 12th

Read: Matthew 4:1-10

I believe God made us to crave. Now, before you think this is some sort of cruel joke by God, let me assure you that the object of our craving was never supposed to be food, sex, money, or chasing after significance.

Think of Eve's temptation in the garden of Eden. While the object that enticed her might have been an apple, the core of her struggle was that she wanted to be like God, knowing good and evil. The very downfall of humanity was caused when the first woman surrendered to a craving to eat something she wasn't supposed to eat, and to pursue a power that she was never intended to wield. But it doesn't stop there.

Look at how Jesus was tempted in Matthew 4:

After fasting forty days and forty nights . . . Satan came to Jesus and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread." Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" (vv. 2 – 4)

Satan tried to appeal to Jesus' physical craving for food. But here's the significant difference between Eve and Jesus. Eve was saturated in the object of her desire. Jesus was saturated in God's truth. Jesus had been in a desert fasting for forty days. But He held strong and set a powerful example of how to escape the vicious grip of temptation. When we feel deprived and consumed with wanting unhealthy choices, we too can rely on the truth of God's Word to help us.

With each of Satan's temptations, Jesus quoted Scripture without hesitation to refute that temptation. Truth is powerful. The more saturated we are with truth, the more powerful we'll be in resisting our temptations. And the more we'll naturally direct our cravings where they should be directed — to the Author of all truth.

Are cravings a curse or a blessing? The answer to that depends on what we're craving. And what we're craving will always depend on whatever we're consuming . . . either the object of our desire or God and His truth.

Day 7: Sunday, Jan. 13th
Read: Matthew 19:23-26

Self-control is hard. We don't like to deny ourselves. We don't think it's necessary. We make excuses very easily.

If we're relying on ourselves, that excuse may be true. But there's another level to self-control that too few of us find. In Matthew 19:23 – 24, Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven . . . it's easier for the camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."

In other words, Jesus was saying that it's hard for people who are satisfied with the things of this world to deny themselves. It's hard for someone who is rich with excess to deny herself and be humble enough to admit, "I must give this up." When the disciples heard this teaching, they were confused until Jesus clarified; "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible" (verse 26).

Maybe you've heard verse 26 spoken in the common context that God can make us healthy, wealthy, and get us to a new breakthrough. We tend to think of it as saying, "With God, all good things are possible! With God, all lavish things are possible!" But if you study this verse in the original context, it actually means, "With man, it is impossible to deny yourself. With man, it is impossible to make sacrifices. With man, it is impossible to have self-control. But with God, all sacrificial things are possible. With God, all self-control is possible."

I believe this one little shift in our thinking can make us feel empowered, instead of feeling denied. Rather than giving in to the foods we crave or the excuse not to walk today, we can have God's self-control to make a completely different decision, such as a decision for health . . . a decision for renewed energy . . . a decision for confidence and peace. Most importantly, a decision that honors both our body and Spirit!

Week 2 – Freedom Finance

Day 8: Monday, Jan. 14th

Read: Romans 13:8; Proverbs 22:7; 1 Corinthians 7:23

Debt can cause so many problems both financially and spiritually. When too much debt is attained it is as if we become trapped, drowning in our finances. Our worries over our debt quickly consume our lives and our thoughts. We become servants to debt, and debt becomes our master. Debt can cause us to have tunnel vision, living life consumed by our financial worries instead putting God first in our lives. We can quickly forget about God and those around us who we care and love. Dallas Willard describes the spiritual bondage we encounter when we get in too much debt.

"In our current world, a large part of the freedom that comes from frugality is freedom from the spiritual bondage caused by financial debt. This kind of debt is often incurred by buying things that are far from necessary, and its effect, when the amount is substantial, is to diminish our sense of worth, dim our hope for the future, and eliminate our sensitivity to the needs of others."

Day 9: Tuesday, Jan. 15th

Read: 2 Kings 4:1; Nehemiah 5:3; Psalms 109:11

When we go into debt we are subject to the decision of those who we borrowed from. Whether be financial institutions or people who lent the money, we quickly find ourselves losing things we hold dearly due to our inability to manage our finances. Not only do we become slaves to our debt, but we find our selves also in a servitude to the wills and desires of our creditors. God teaches us to that he has blessed us and has given us everything we could possibly need to live a debt free life.

Day 10: Wednesday, Jan. 16th

Read: Proverbs 3:28; Psalms 37:21; 2 Kings 4:7; Philemon 1:18-19

The year of release put a stop to the familiar cycle of the rich getting richer and the poor poorer. Regardless of how much debt the poor may have incurred or the reason for the reason for that debt, the year of release provided a comprehensive program of debt cancellation and freedom from indentured servitude.

This radical economic legislation was grounded in Israel's identity as a nation with firsthand experience of God's generosity. God wanted the memories of their release from bondage and inheritance of the promised land to be evident in Israel's economic life. He wanted Israel to be a culture of radical generosity. Exodus 21:2-11 and Deuteronomy 15:1-11 spelled out provisions for the remission of debts every seven years.

Imagine what it would be like to experience a financial jubilee one time in your lifetime: to be able to start from a clean slate with no debts or obligations to be repaid. What would that freedom enable you to do?

Day 11: Thursday, Jan. 17th

Read: Matthew 18:32-33; Luke 7:42; Colossians 2:13-14

Not only does the Bible warn us of debt but it provides us of examples. These examples are meant to teach us about issues surrounding debt. Each example is unique and helps us see different aspects of indebtedness. Use this opportunity to reflect on these passage and explore how you would handle each situation these examples present.

Day 12: Friday, Jan. 18th

Read: Proverbs 11:15; 20:16; 22:26-27

We are reminded of the liabilities debt brings upon us. One of burdens of borrowing and falling into debt is posting collateral. Today's readings remind us that the dangers of putting down collateral does not just apply to us when we are in debt but it also warns of situations when we cosign for a family member, friend, or neighbor. Whether we are posting collateral as a security for ourselves or if we are cosigning, it is still a dangerous aspect of debt, and today's reading reminds us that all situations will create a sense of slavery to debt. Making debt our master is not in the best interest of our spirit because God is our one true master and it is Him who we should follow and love.

Day 13: Saturday, Jan. 19th

Read: Deuteronomy 14:23

Tithing is a simple practice, but one that trips up so many people. The first portion of everything we receive, a tithe as Scripture calls it, belongs to the Lord our God. People usually consider the tithe to be one-tenth of the whole of what we have, but I believe that the tithe is not just a percentage principle but a principle of firsts. It's an opportunity to declare who means the most to us and what we consider the most important priority in our lives. It's holy to the Lord, and he alone has the power to bless the rest of what we have.

Some people say that tithing is a "law principle," something that was instituted during the time of Moses and done away with after Christ's coming, but we need to realize that this practice shows up at least 2,500 years before the Levitical law was established. I see it first in the sacrifices offered by Cain and Abel, the sons of Adam and Eve. They each offered God something, and he was pleased with one offering but not with the other. Why? What was the difference? Let's look at the account and pay attention to the distinction between Cain's offering, which God did not find acceptable, and Abel's offering, which God accepted.

Now Abel kept flocks, and Cain worked the soil. In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the LORD. But Abel brought fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. The LORD looked with favor on Abel and his offering, but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor." (Genesis 4:2-5)

Abel brought the firstborn of his flock; Cain did not bring his first fruits. God cannot accept an offering if it's not the first portion. We show our respect and appreciation to Him by honoring him first.

Growing up, I learned from my dad early on what tithing meant. No matter how much money I received, whether an allowance or a ten dollar bill inside a birthday card, my father always said, "Give the first to God and then think about the rest." I'll be honest: I've always experienced unexplainable favor in my life with money and material possessions. I believe when we honor God first, he does indeed bless us, not as a quid pro quo transaction, but because he knows where our hearts are. He knows we're dedicated to advancing his Kingdom with our resources. He knows he's first in our lives. God doesn't want our stuff; He wants you and me.

Day 14: Sunday, Jan. 20th
Read: 2 Corinthians 9:7-8

Pray: God, connect with me here, as I seek you in your Word. Begin with focus and openness to see what God has for you.

Read: the selected section of Scripture slowly. Take note of intriguing words and phrases and read them a second time.

Reflect: on what strikes you as you read. Think through what God is communicating to you at this point in your life.

Respond: to the passage. Speak to God directly about what's on your mind and heart. Look for ways to live out what you've uncovered.

Week 3 – Freedom Faith

Day 14: Monday, January 21st

Read: John 5:19-24

JESUS FREES YOU FROM DEATH

Thank God that He sent His Son, Jesus, so that you can spend eternity with Him.

Jesus says, "I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life" (John 5:24). Because you believe in Him, you are set free from the fear of death and can look forward to living forever with God in heaven. Thinking and talking about heaven is one way of celebrating your freedom in Jesus and keeping your focus on God's promises.

- How does the promise of heaven make you feel?
- How does eternal life in Christ influence the way you live today?

Day 15: Tuesday, January 22nd

Read 1 John 4:13-18

JESUS FREES YOU FROM FEAR

Thank God that He promises to always be with you. Ask God to help you trust Him so that you can be free from the burden of fear.

Fears are like the books you carry — each one adds weight and increases the burden. In contrast, when you give your fears to God, it's like removing a book from the stack — the load is lighter as your burdens are lifted. God does not want your fears to burden you. John 14:27 says, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid." God loves you and is in control of your circumstances. Even when things do not work out the way you expect or hope, you do not have to worry or be afraid. You can be free from your fears because He will never leave you or forsake you (Hebrews 13:5). He will carry the burden for you!

- How does it make you feel to know God wants to give you peace and freedom from fear?
- Is it ever difficult to trust God with your worries and fears? Why?
- What fears do you need to give to Him?

Day 16 Thursday, January 23rd

Read: Read 1 Peter 5:6- 11

Psalm 56:3 says, “When I am afraid, I put my trust in thee.”

Notice: it does not say, “I never struggle with fear.” Fear strikes, and the battle begins. So the Bible does not assume that true believers will have no anxieties. Instead the Bible tells us how to fight when they strike.

For example, 1 Peter 5:7 says, “Cast all your anxieties on Him, for He cares about you.” It does not say, you will never feel any anxieties. It says, when you have them, cast them on God.

When the mud splatters your windshield and you temporarily lose sight of the road and start to swerve in anxiety, turn on your wipers and squirt your windshield washer.

So my response to the person who has to deal with feelings of anxiety every day is to say: that’s more or less normal. At least it is for me, ever since my teenage years. The issue is: How do we fight them?

The answer to that question is: we fight anxieties by fighting against unbelief and fighting for faith in future grace. And the way you fight this “good fight” is by meditating on God’s assurances of future grace and by asking for the help of his Spirit.

The windshield wipers are the promises of God that clear away the mud of unbelief, and the windshield washer fluid is the help of the Holy Spirit. The battle to be freed from sin . . . is “by the Spirit and faith in the truth” (2 Thessalonians 2:13).

The work of the Spirit and the Word of truth. These are the great faith-builders. Without the softening work of the Holy Spirit, the wipers of the Word just scrape over the blinding clumps of unbelief.

Both are necessary, the Spirit and the Word. We read the promises of God and we pray for the help of his Spirit. And as the windshield clears so that we can see the welfare that God plans for us (Jeremiah 29:11), our faith grows stronger and the swerving of anxiety smoothes out.

Day 17: Thursday, January 24th
Read John 8: 31-38

JESUS FREES YOU FROM SIN

Thank God for sending Jesus to free you from the sin that entangles you.

Sin entraps you and prevents you from obeying God and enjoying true freedom. Romans 3:23-24 says, "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus." God understands that you struggle with sin. He knows that sometimes it is difficult for you to obey Him. But God loves you so much that He sent Jesus to save you, to rescue you from the sin that entangles you. Jesus is the only one who can set you free from sin. To receive this free gift, we must trust Him.

- How does sin keep you from experiencing freedom?
- Do you sometimes get trapped in sin even though you know Jesus has set you free?
- When you feel trapped, what can you do to be free once more?

Day 17: Friday, January 25th

Read: 2 Corinthians 5:6-10

Picture salvation as a house that you live in.

It provides you with protection. It is stocked with food and drink that will last forever. It never decays or crumbles. Its windows open onto vistas of glory.

God built it at great cost to himself and to his Son, and he gave it to you.

The “purchase” agreement is called a “new covenant.” The terms read: “This house shall become and remain yours if you will receive it as a gift and take delight in the Father and the Son as they inhabit the house with you. You shall not profane the house of God by sheltering other gods nor turn your heart away after other treasures.”

Would it not be foolish to say yes to this agreement, and then hire a lawyer to draw up an amortization schedule with monthly payments in the hopes of somehow balancing accounts?

You would be treating the house no longer as a gift, but a purchase. God would no longer be the free benefactor. And you would be enslaved to a new set of demands that he never dreamed of putting on you.

If grace is to be free, which is the very meaning of grace, we cannot view it as something to be repaid.

Day 18: Saturday, January 26th

Read: 1 John 4:7-12

JESUS FREES YOU TO LOVE

Ask God to help you receive His love so that you can show that love to others.

The Bible says in 1 Thessalonians 3:12, “May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else.” Just as the water filled the glass and overflowed into the bowl, God promises that He will give you so much love that it will overflow, and you will be able to love others. Because your love from God is more than enough, you are free to love everyone around you with the “overflow.”

- Will God's love for you ever run out?
- How does God's love help you love others?
- In what ways can you show God's love to others?

Day 20: Sunday, January 27th

Read: 2 Corinthians 4: 1-6

Test yourself.

What is your mindset? Do you begin with God and his rights and goals? Or do you begin with yourself and your rights and wishes?

And when you look at the death of Christ, what happens? Does your joy really come from translating this awesome divine work into a boost for self-esteem? Or are you drawn up out of yourself and filled with wonder and reverence and worship that here in the death of Jesus is the deepest, clearest declaration of the infinite esteem of God for his glory and for his Son?

Here is a great objective foundation for the full assurance of hope: the forgiveness of sins is grounded, finally, not in my finite worth or work, but in the infinite worth of the righteousness of God, God's unswerving allegiance to uphold and vindicate the glory of his name.

I appeal to you with all my heart, take your stand on this. Base your life on this. Ground your hope in this. You will be free from the futile mindset of the world. And you will never fall.

When you make much of God & Christ is your joy, it can never fail.

Week 4 – Freedom Focus

Day 21: Monday, January 28th

Read: Exodus 31:17

What's the Benefit of Practicing Sabbath?

Think honestly about your life right now. Do you ever get tired just thinking of all that you've got to do today, this week, this month? Do you feel just as tired on Monday morning as you do on Friday afternoon? With today's high-pressure lifestyle, not only may you feel physically fatigued, you may run out of emotional, mental, and spiritual energy as well.

If you want to experience a breath of fresh air in your life, then you have to resist the temptation to keep going at the same hurried, hectic pace all the time. You need true rest in your life. Fortunately for us, God's Word clearly tells us one of the main ways we can find balance in our lives and experience true rest: by honoring the Sabbath.

Some people say that keeping the Sabbath was simply part of Old Testament law. But what we must realize is that all of God's laws were designed with our well-being in mind. The motivation behind a law is what we should be focused on, not the external logistics of how it's exercised. So to understand this day of rest, we need to understand the origin of the word and the concept behind it. The word Sabbath was derived from the Hebrew word shabbat, which comes from the Hebrew verb shavat. Both words refer to a stop in the normal routine, to actively and deliberately cease function. It's a concept, not a day on the calendar. The idea means taking one day out of seven to stop doing what we've been doing and focus on restoration, relaxation, and renewal.

So the idea of Sabbath is to stop working for wages and competing for rewards. Stop running and going and striving and doing and just be. When was the last time you weren't worried about what time it was? When was the last time you weren't on the clock? Maybe for some of us, a real way to honor and enjoy the Sabbath would be to go a whole day each week without looking at our watches.

Sabbath is about playing and relaxing. Reading and studying spiritual material—not because you have to but because you want to. Taking leisurely strolls outdoors and enjoying the beauty of God's creation. Talking and enjoying the company of your family. Attending church services and worshiping with others. Praying and meditating. Spending time with God without feeling obligated or rushed. Just hanging out together.

At the heart of it, Sabbath is a day to celebrate our freedom from human rules and regulations and to remember our real purpose: to love God and to serve his Kingdom.

Why is this so vital to our well-being? As we conquer and create all week long, we can easily develop an inflated and self-centered idea of our own power, our own self-sufficiency. The Sabbath is a constant reminder that for one day a week, we are dispensable to work and to the world but not to our families, our community, or to God.

I think you'll find that when you practice the Sabbath fully, these times of rest and reflection can become the most productive moments of your week.

Day 22: Tuesday, January 29th

Read: Romans 8:11

How Can We Define the Holy Spirit?

The word Spirit is mentioned more than eight hundred times in Scripture, so obviously it's crucial to understand its meaning and how it's used. Our English translations use one word, Spirit, but there are actually two different words and two concepts conveyed in the original languages. In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word is ruwach, which literally means "a violent exhalation, a blast of breath, a strong wind." We find it used in the second verse of the Bible: "Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters" (Genesis 1:2).

Have you ever been to a lake or pond to watch the sunrise? It's still dark outside and there's no wind; the surface of the water looks like glass. Then suddenly a mighty wind whips around the hillside over the water, sending ripples and waves across to the shore. This is a miniature version of what I think it must've been like at the beginning of Creation. God's breath seems to be the very energy force from which he created everything—earth, heavens, animals, and of course, the first man and first woman.

In the New Testament, the Greek word for this same kind of breath is pneuma, which also conveys a breath or wind, a current of air, a strong breeze. It, too, usually gets translated into English as "spirit," referring to the Holy Spirit, the spiritual friend who comes alongside us and empowers us with God's presence. "The Spirit [pneuma—breath] gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit [pneuma—breath] and they are life" (John 6:63).

So every time you read the word Spirit in Scripture, it means "breath." Both ruwach and pneuma carry a sense of force, an active, living energy that blows in and brings life. And this is exactly what the Holy Spirit came to do—breathe new life into us.

Some people are uncomfortable with the notion of the Holy Spirit because they want something or someone they can see or touch, rather than someone they can just sense or feel on the inside. But if the best word to describe the Holy Spirit is wind, we can use this example of wind to gain a clearer, more concrete idea of who the Spirit is and his role in our lives.

Wind is something we feel and experience but don't see. While we can observe its effects and see its impact on leaves and trees, kites and windmills, we never actually see the wind itself. Like the wind, the Spirit can't be seen, but he can be felt, experienced, and observed in action.

The Spirit is undeniable, real, and refreshing. It's okay that we can feel the Spirit without seeing him. Like the wind, we can know he's there.

Day 23: Wednesday, January 30th

Read: Jeremiah 33:1-3

The average person speaks 34,000 words a day. You talk a half a book every day! If we're all talking a half a book a day, is there even a page of dialogue with God? When was the last time you gave half a chapter in a single day to the God who says, "Call to Me?" Notice the word call. That's an invitation to intensity. God invites us not to whimper to Him. God is not, "Say something to Me."

"How do you want us to talk to You, God?"

"I want you to call." That's an expression of urgency, intensity, and fervency. It's an invitation to shameless and loud intimacy! God says, "Call to Me."

The implication of God's invitation is that it allows us to call any time and all the time. The situation in which Jeremiah found himself when this invitation was issued holds a significant lesson for us. "The word of the LORD came to Jeremiah a second time while he was shut up in the court of the guard" (v.1). That's a way of saying he was under guard—in prison. In one way or another he was restricted. Based on parallel experiences, we can say we sometimes find ourselves in some kind of a prison. We can identify with being "shut up in the court of the guard."

We listen in as God says, "Hey, Jeremiah, how's it going for you today?"

"Not great. Things are not looking up. What do you want me to do now?"

"Call to Me, son; call to Me."

Can you hear God extending that same standing invitation to you? "Call to Me, My child!"

Day 24: Thursday, January 31st

Read: Isaiah 46:8-11

I believe that God answers every prayer. But it's crucial for us to remember who we're talking to in prayer. We're not giving God orders and He's not at all hesitant about the way He answers.

The first answer is "Yes." That's the most frequent answer you get to prayer. I have never asked for strength and not received it. I have never, ever prayed for wisdom and not received it. But I have often not prayed for wisdom and regretted the decisions that I made. When I've applied James 1:5 and recognized my lack of wisdom and asked God to supply, He has delivered! Most biblical praying receives an immediate "Yes."

God's second answer to prayer is "No." That's why James 4:2 says, "You do not have because you do not ask." But the only time you get a "no" is if you pray for stupid stuff or if you pray for good stuff with a timeline. I have found God very unresponsive to my ultimatums. God doesn't respond to blustering, bluffing, or threats. If we're praying foolishly, we'll get a "no."

But if I'm praying according to God's will, entrusting my future in God's hands, He has a third option: "Wait." The only thing between you and the delayed "yes" is time. How often do we forfeit our "delayed yes" through doubt? God has made promises about a lot of stuff, but He retains the sovereign choice of timing. So we pray unceasingly, and we wait patiently.

Day 25: Friday, February 1st

Read: John 1:1-14

First Reading: Enter. As you read the passage of scripture (John 1:1-14) for the first time, you are simply familiarizing yourself with the circumstances and what God is saying in this particular passage.

Second Reading: Impress. As you read (John 1:1-14) for the second time, notice what word or phrase jumps out at you or makes the biggest impression. Ask God to "impress" upon you what he wants you to see in this passage.

Third Reading: Pray. As you read this passage of scripture (John 1:1-14) for the third time through, spend a few moments in prayer thanking and praising God for His holy word. As you read, be prayer fully asking God what he has for you in this scripture.

Fourth Reading: Live. In this final reading of the passage (John 1:1-14), ask God to show you how he wants you to live based on this scripture. Is there something he would have you start doing, stop doing or continue doing?

Day 26: Saturday, February 2nd

Read: Hebrews 10: 35-39

Pray: God, connect with me here, as I seek you in your Word. Begin with focus and openness to see what God has for you.

Read: the selected section of Scripture slowly. Take note of intriguing words and phrases and read them a second time.

Reflect: on what strikes you as you read. Think through what God is communicating to you at this point in your life.

Respond: to the passage. Speak to God directly about what's on your mind and heart. Look for ways to live out what you've uncovered.

Day 27: Sunday, February 3rd

Read: 1 John 2:24-25

Pray: God, connect with me here, as I seek you in your Word. Begin with focus and openness to see what God has for you.

Read: the selected section of Scripture slowly. Take note of intriguing words and phrases and read them a second time.

Reflect: on what strikes you as you read. Think through what God is communicating to you at this point in your life.

Respond: to the passage. Speak to God directly about what's on your mind and heart. Look for ways to live out what you've uncovered.

(Some devotions come from YouVersion: Focus on the Family; "Future Grace" By J. Piper; "Fresh" by C. Hodges)