JESUS
**WHY “ALIVE”?** Simply put, because Jesus is alive. There is life in no other name. No one but Jesus can give the life of God to us. He laid down His life. It was not taken from Him, and as He said, He had the authority to take it up again. That simple declaration, Jesus is alive, has fueled the Gospel since His resurrection. Jesus is alive, and timid disciples become world-changing miracle workers. Jesus is alive, and the Spirit is poured out on Pentecost. Jesus is alive, and the persecutor Saul becomes the Apostle Paul. The fact that Jesus is alive changes everything. For the next 21 days, pray with us this Easter that He changes the heart of someone you know who seems so far removed from the love of God.

**PREPARING FOR A HARVEST** In John 4, Jesus says that the fields are ripe for harvest. In Matthew 9, He says that we should pray for the Father to send workers to gather the harvest. In Romans 1, Paul writes about his desire and preparations to gather a harvest among the Gentiles. In Proverbs 14, the Spirit of God encourages us that an abundant harvest comes from “the strength of the oxen.”

A literal harvest requires careful preparation. So does a spiritual harvest. Many times God uses the image of lovingly tended crops yielding an abundant harvest. It’s a picture of the miraculous work He does while bringing people into His Kingdom. It’s work to which He’s called us. Do we believe that? Yes? Good. Let’s do this. Here’s how.

**21 DAYS TOGETHER** First, decide what you want to fast from, and for how long. There’s some tips on how to do that in the back of this guide. Then plan to use the time you free up for prayer. Next, use this booklet for your daily devotions, or along with them, starting March 26th. It’s simple:

+ Read the passage and devotion for each day.
+ Jot down a few thoughts prompted by the response questions.
+ Pray as suggested in the daily prayer focus.
DAY 1: THE GOOD NEWS OF JESUS
READ MATTHEW 3:1-17

The world Jesus entered was dominated by Roman occupation and the strict religious rule of the Jewish authorities. You were either an insider with Roman citizenship or you drew power from a position of religious authority among the ruling Jewish officials. The harsh reality was that most were left out of either option. Almost everyone was an outsider. But part of the Good News is that you don’t have to collude with the power structures of the world to be invited into God’s Kingdom. The offer of forgiveness and invitation to enter God’s Kingdom that Jesus preached was unthinkable. But God was up to something new, starting with John the Baptist.

RESPONSE: God is still up to something. What is He doing in your life?

PRAYER FOCUS: Pray that hearts of those who will visit our church family on Easter would be open to the work of God in their lives.
DAY 2: TRANSFORMATION IS COMING  
READ MATTHEW 4:1-11

The story continues after the baptism of Jesus. The Spirit of God descends on Jesus as He rises from the waters of baptism. Then Mark tells us in 1:12-13, “The Spirit immediately drove Him out into the wilderness. And He was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan.” There is a radical shift from the cleansing waters of baptism to the harshness of the wilderness temptation. We experience similar shifts daily. Yet the same powerful Spirit of God that raised Jesus from the dead is alive in you, today and every day.

RESPONSE: What does it look like for the Spirit of God to transform your life? Even in the wilderness of temptation?

PRAYER FOCUS: Pray for the often difficult or uncomfortable preparation God does in the lives of those He draws to Himself.
Most invitations are received with excitement. The life we find in Jesus extends an invitation to us: to live in something new. To engage. Yet it seems to present a paradox. From the cleansing waters of baptism, Jesus was immediately driven into the wilderness of temptation. Sometimes our lives mirror this. One moment you feel like you’re awash in the gentle and cleansing waters of baptism. In the next moment, an unexpected message, a chance conversation, or simply the harshness of life will flood your soul. Through it all, in His life and in His death, Jesus invites us to journey with Him through His baptism into the trials beyond, and to humbly engage.

**RESPONSE:** What’s holding you back from engaging Jesus?

**PRAYER FOCUS:** Pray to engage fully into whatever God is doing and however He wants to use you to reach others this Easter.
DAY 4: SURRENDER
READ MARK 8:27-38

What an awkward and uncomfortable word. Surrender could mean just give up...or give in. But the Gospel casts this idea in a different light. The Apostle Paul puts it this way, “I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.” (Galatians 2:20) Jesus has become all that was good in Paul’s life. The same is true of ours. Peter saw something good when he confessed Jesus as Messiah. But Jesus’ gaze was fixed on something better—the redemption of His people through the Cross. Peter didn’t see that. What do we not see?

RESPONSE: How will you surrender any “good things” in your life that might be keeping Jesus at arm’s length?

PRAYER FOCUS: Pray for an increased sensitivity to what the Holy Spirit reveals as barriers that prevent your full surrender to Jesus.
DAY 5: WHICH CROSS WILL YOU TAKE UP?
READ ROMANS 8:18-39

We seem to have a choice about which cross to bear, the Cross of Jesus or the cross of the world. The world’s cross offers a lifestyle curved in upon our selfish desires. The Cross of Jesus bears the very incarnation of love. There’s no doubt. It is a Cross, but Jesus says we keep our life by losing it (Matthew 16:24-26). His Cross, His call, is one of self-denial. Even so, it also offers the comfort of His love and the solace of His table. We find there eternal blessing and joy, protection from our enemies, and the strength to endure life’s hardships. Jesus invites us to love Him and others the way He loves, selflessly. And His work on the Cross ensures that we are freed to love Him that way. We will all know hardship, sorrow, and suffering. But we find ultimate freedom and peace at the Cross of Jesus. Because the Cross bears Him no longer, His tomb is empty, and He is risen.

RESPONSE: Which cross have you taken up lately, and why?

PRAYER FOCUS: Pray that others would see Jesus’ work on the Cross as Paul did, a way of salvation and not some ancient, meaningless symbol.
DAY 6: THE FOOLISHNESS OF THE GOSPEL
READ 1 CORINTHIANS 1:18-31

Many see the Gospel as a foolish endeavor. Though it may seem foolish to some, it is the power of God for salvation to others. (Romans 1:16-17) That is why Paul preached Christ crucified, a stumbling block to some and foolishness to others. Other religions can be summed up simply: humans seeking God. But the Bible’s narrative is not about us finding God. Rather, God comes and finds us, in the person of Jesus. What God has done seems like a foolish thing to some.

RESPONSE: What do you see as the “foolishness” of the Gospel?

PRAYER FOCUS: Pray that those who see the Gospel as foolish would have their eyes opened to the truth and beauty of God’s redemptive way.
DAY 7: THE COST OF DISCIPLESHIP  
READ LUKE 14:25-35

Jesus understands the power of overstatement. In one sermon He tells His listeners to cut off their hands, or gouge out their eyes if either causes them to sin (Matthew 5:29-30). He couldn’t really mean that, right? No. Jesus was making a point about the seriousness of sin. And He had good reason to do so. Sin would take Him to the Cross. In Luke’s Gospel, Jesus again resorts to exaggeration when speaking of discipleship. He’s making a point about our loyalties and our loves. They motivate us to follow the object, or objects, of our desire. Pinterest? The NFL? Your child’s success? A future spouse? So many things compete for our first love. But Jesus says the cost of following Him is the price of our first love—before our first born (Genesis 22:2), our freedom (Genesis 37:36; 39:20), or even our station in life (1 Samuel 22:1). First love is always a partner to unshakable trust, even through difficult circumstances.

RESPONSE: What loves may compete with your love for Jesus, and why?

PRAYER FOCUS: Pray that God would so capture your heart that He alone remains your first love.
DAY 8: YOUR WILL BE DONE
READ: PHILIPPIANS 4:4-9

“Your will be done.” Four simple words spoken by Jesus. He spoke them to instruct His disciples in prayer. They’re from the Lord’s Prayer and are so common that they sometimes lose their meaning. The words of Jesus that precede this prayer are worth noting. He instructs us to pray but tells us, “... your Father knows what you need before you ask Him.” (Matthew 6:8) Why pray then, if God already knows what we need? Because prayer aligns our will, our desires, our hearts, our minds, and our very lives with God’s will. Especially when we pray with “mustard seed” faith, “Yet not as I will, but as you will.” (Matthew 26:39) This alignment begins during our conversations with God, namely when we pray.

RESPONSE: Have a conversation with God today, allowing Him to align your heart’s desires to His. That’s when “have to” becomes “want to.” Write down what He tells you:

PRAYER FOCUS: Pray for God to speak to you about His desires for your life, and wait on Him for an answer.
DAY 9: TO WHOM SHALL WE GO?
READ: JOHN 6:22-40

Peter answered Jesus’ question about whether the disciples would leave Him, ”Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.” (John 6:68) What prompted that conversation? Hard words from Jesus to a large crowd of followers who had been miraculously fed the previous day. They came looking for another meal. After a lengthy exchange about Moses, manna, and bread from God, Jesus tells them, “I am the bread of life.” (John 6:35) What was more essential for them than physical food was the life-giving sustenance of believing in Jesus. Jesus is the bread that gives eternal life. Without Him we perish, so receive Jesus just as you would food and drink.

RESPONSE: What does it look like for you to be sustained by Jesus today?

PRAYER FOCUS: Pray that people who don’t believe in Jesus would receive Him by faith as the Bread of Life, especially those you can invite for Easter.
Jesus was not a hapless victim who needed to be rescued from the Cross. He told His disciples, “Now my soul is troubled. And what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour?’ But for this purpose I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name.” (John 12:27-28) He continues in John 12:38, “Though He had done so many signs before them, they still did not believe in Him...,” John concludes, “For they loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God.” Jesus always invited trust that accompanied honest doubt (John 4). That kind of trust truly glorifies God. But the Lord always confronted unbelief rooted in a corrosive self-glorifying desire.

**RESPONSE:** Whose glory have you been seeking lately, and why?

**PRAYER FOCUS:** Pray for those who walk in that delicate dance of doubt and faith, trusting Jesus in spite of their unanswered questions.
DAY 11: SUFFERING
READ: ISAIAH 53:1-12

Suffering is a universal experience. Even so, we recoil from the cruel images and stories that flood popular media. Worse still is the suffering that touches the lives of those dearest to us. We may find ourselves asking, “Why doesn’t God do something?” The answer to that question is the Gospel. In the crucifixion and death of the Son, God experiences unimaginable suffering. But Jesus’ resurrection assures us that God has acted on our behalf through His suffering, not apart from it. We can now have a new life, and peace with Him. When Jesus suffered, He made something beautiful possible. That encourages us to trust Him. Even if we experience suffering which might seem senseless, we know that He is able to redeem it.

RESPONSE: Where are you suffering today? Where do you see suffering? How would you share how you feel about this with God?

PRAYER FOCUS: Pray God’s comfort over the suffering church, for those outside of His family who suffer, for those close to you, and for yourself.
DAY 12: SAVED THROUGH FAITH
READ: MATTHEW 25:31-46

“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.” (Eph 2:8-9) Faith is what saves us, but faith is deeply connected with good works. How? When we trust God (have faith in Him), we believe that He knows what’s best for us, including the things we should do. Paul highlights this, “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.” (Eph 2:10) Jesus says that some measure of our good works are intended for the poor and powerless, with whom He identifies. When we feed the hungry, slake the thirst of the thirsty, clothe the naked, or visit those in prison; We do those things, not just for Jesus, but to Him. (Matthew 25:37-40)

RESPONSE: How can you welcome and care for the least of your brothers and sisters, blessing Jesus in the process?

PRAYER FOCUS: Pray for those who are displaced, marginalized, and in desperate need. Pray that they find Jesus, and ask Him how you can help.
DAY 13: WHERE IS THE LOVE?
READ: MARK 12:28-34

The love of self has been raised to new heights in our culture. #selfie = Here I am. Here’s where I am. Here is what I’m doing. Look at me. But who is left out of the picture? My neighbor. Where does this person who I’m to love as much as I love myself fit into my #selfie world? When we ask such questions, we’re asking for clarification like the lawyers in Luke 10:29. The answer Jesus gave is simple: anyone you meet who is in need. Central to the life of God’s people is a love of neighbor, “And He said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And the second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.” (Matthew 22:37-40).

RESPONSE: How can you love someone else today as much as you love yourself?

PRAYER FOCUS: Pray that God will show you someone nearby who needs you to love them, and that you would have the courage to do so.
DAY 14: THE FRAGRANCE OF FORGIVENESS
READ: JOHN 20:19-23, 2 CORINTHIANS 2:14-17

When Jesus appears to His disciples after the resurrection, they recognize Him by the nail prints in his hands. He tells them, “Peace be with you.” He goes on to say, “‘As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.’ And with that He breathes on them and says, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone’s sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.’” Jesus is also talking to us here. He commissions them—and us—to be the fragrance of the Gospel to the world. The forgiveness God extends to us is what makes possible the gift of His peace in our lives. Having received that, God sends us into the world to bear the gift of His forgiveness and peace. What a sweet fragrance that can be.

RESPONSE: How can you be the sweet fragrance of forgiveness today to someone who really needs that?

PRAYER FOCUS: Pray for a fresh in-filling of the Holy Spirit so that you may be the fragrance of Christ. Also ask God who you’re to share that with.
“Don’t let your hearts be troubled.” Jesus gives His disciples this simple command on the night before His crucifixion, “trust in God, and trust also in me.” Trust is a simple word, only five letters, but it re-orders life as we know it. Jesus asks us to set aside our carefully crafted plans and trust all that we are and all that we have to Him. It is this childlike faith in God that Jesus speaks about in Mark 10:15 when He says, “Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.”

**RESPONSE:** What, or who, might you be trusting in more than Jesus?

**PRAYER FOCUS:** Pray that God would refresh your faith, and grant you the simple trust of a child. Pray this also for others that He brings to mind.
DAY 16: THE PRINCE OF PEACE  
READ: LUKE 19:28-48

From the Mount of Olives, Jesus had a commanding view of the city of Jerusalem. With tears in His eyes, He weeps over the city saying, “Would that you, even you, had known on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes.” (Luke 19:42) Like the people of Jerusalem, we are often held in the moment—the concerns of politics and policies, taxes, and threats from enemies. We are in danger of missing the time of God’s coming in the turmoil. But Jesus promises the Holy Spirit and then tells us, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.” (John 14:27). Inspired by the same Spirit, Paul tells us to make our needs known to God, and that God’s peace will guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:7)

RESPONSE: Where do you find peace, and how do you remain in it?

PRAYER FOCUS: Pray that the peace of God would be yours. Pray also for those you know who need peace, the peace only Jesus gives.
Jesus has just broken the bread at the Last Supper. He then turns to Peter and says, “Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers.” (Luke 22:31-32) Of course Peter blusters and declares His strength and commitment to Jesus, and Jesus tells him no, that Peter will deny Him not once, but three times by the rooster’s crow. We’ve all felt the shame and disappointment of letting someone down. But Jesus? Come on Peter, can’t you do better than that? No, he really can’t. You see, he’s human just like you and me. We really don’t do much better. And so Jesus continually strengthens us, rather than sparing us from all difficulty, even as He did Peter.

**RESPONSE:** Where are you vulnerable? How is Jesus praying for you?

**PRAYER FOCUS:** Ask the Lord to pray for you as you need. Ask Him to show you how He’s praying for those close to you and pray with Him for them.
“Father, forgive them” is one of the most remarkable of statements ever uttered. Jesus was praying for His accusers and executioners as He hung from the cross at Calvary. With the notable exception of Stephen (Acts 7:60), most of us would admit that we wouldn’t be able to say these words given a similar situation. But these words are central to the Gospel. Jesus is relentless in His forgiveness and He clearly asks us to follow His lead. Again and again, throughout the Gospels Jesus offers forgiveness to those He speaks with. Many of the greatest men and women in God’s kingdom have been those who are most aware of His forgiveness.

RESPONSE: Where do you need forgiveness, and where do you need to offer it?

PRAYER FOCUS: Pray that God will create a hunger for forgiveness in the hearts of those who will visit our church family on Easter.
Jesus spent three years with His disciples; eating, sleeping, traveling, teaching, and performing miraculous signs. Yet just days prior to His resurrection, they all scattered when He was arrested. Bold enough to follow at a distance, Peter still denied he knew Jesus three times. After the resurrection, on the evening of the first day of the week, with the doors locked, Jesus came and stood among them. He said, “Peace be with you.” Those were precious words in a world that must have seemed out of control. Into that world Jesus would send His disciples; “You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” (Acts 1:8) What a simple mission: be a witness, just telling others what you’ve seen and heard. What great faith Jesus had in His disciples. What great faith He has in us to do this.

**RESPONSE:** In spite of their fear and lack of faith, Jesus says, “You will be my witnesses.” How do you see yourself being a witness to the risen Jesus?

**PRAYER FOCUS:** Pray for specific opportunities to share your faith with others, especially visitors to our church family on Easter Sunday.
DAY 20: WHAT MAKES GOOD FRIDAY GOOD?
READ: MATTHEW 27:45-54

Good Friday is an odd name for the day we remember Jesus’ public humiliation, brutal beating, crucifixion, death, and burial. What’s so good about any of that? In Matthew, Mark, and Luke’s Gospel accounts, they record that Jesus cried out in a loud voice, gave up His spirit and died on that Friday afternoon. Then they tell us that, “The Curtain in the Temple was torn in two, from top to bottom.” The curtain was huge, and multi-layered. It separated the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place where the presence of God would descend. It was symbolic of the separation between man and God. With His death, Jesus made a way into the presence of God for you and for me. When the curtain tore, restoration began. That’s a good Friday.

RESPONSE: What makes Good Friday good in your life?

PRAYER FOCUS: Pray for those on the fence, that they will make a decision to come to Easter service either Saturday night or Sunday morning.
Jesus’ last words were simple. He said, “It is finished,’ and He bowed His head and gave up His spirit.” (John 19:30) His work was done. He had prayed earlier with His disciples in John 17:1, “Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you,” and He continues, “I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do.” (John 17:4) Paul asks the church in Romans 6:3, “Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?” He then offers this, “Just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.” This newness of life is based solely on what God has done for us in Christ. Jesus does all the work, all the heavy lifting. If we strive to earn God’s favor, we strive in vain.

**RESPONSE:** What are you striving for that you need to let go of?

**PRAYER FOCUS:** Pray that God would reveal Himself to those who are trying to earn His love, that He loves them already in Jesus Christ.
WHY FAST?
There are many benefits to fasting. Among them are an increased spiritual sensitivity, a heightened hunger for God, a focused intensity as you contend for God’s best, seeing the bonds of stubborn sin broken, and experiencing a passion for evangelism. It’s especially helpful when you have a major decision to make because it promises to make you more attuned to God’s Spirit.

INSTRUCTIONS ON FASTING
Here are three kinds of fasts found in the Bible. Here’s an example of each, and how to go about doing them:

The Partial Fast—like John the Baptist, who fasted from certain foods in favor of locusts and honey. (Matthew 3:4) You simply fast something selective, like a type of food.

The Normal Fast—The 40 days Jesus fasted, for example. No mention is made of whether He fasted from water, though it is possible. A normal fast is one where you eat no food and drink only water. Following the fast, Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit. (Mark 4:1–4, and Luke 4:14–15) Lots of people regularly fast for 1–3 days and find that it’s not difficult for short periods of time if their health is good.

The Total Fast—like Moses on the Mountain of God. (Exodus 34:28) You don’t eat or drink anything during this fast, including water (In Moses’ case it may have been a sunup to sundown fast each day, or a supernatural occurrence because of its duration.) Only do a total fast for a short time, maybe 8–12 hours, and only if your care provider confirms you’re healthy enough to do so.

Jesus told His disciples to keep their fasts a matter between themselves and God. Apparently, it was not uncommon for those who were fasting to draw attention to themselves, seeking recognition from men. Jesus instructs His disciples not to do that, but to look their best while drawing no attention to their fast. (Matthew 6:16)

BIBLICAL EXAMPLES
There are examples of fasting throughout the Bible, but let’s look at some instances in the New Testament. Anna fasted and prayed at the temple and was able to discern the importance of Jesus when He was presented by Mary and Joseph. (Luke 2:36–38)
In a parable about two men coming to pray, Jesus shows that ritual holiness, like prayer, fasting and tithing, can become prideful exercises that give men a false sense of security in their relationship with God. (Luke 18:12)

In the Book of Acts, fasting was used as a means of receiving direction from the Holy Spirit. (Acts 13:1–3)

It’s also recorded that prayer and fasting are part of the way Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for the churches that they planted. (Acts 14:23)

Fasting should not become a means of fulfilling a vow to God or of drawing attention to yourself. This does not honor God. A fast should be done with a proper heart toward God. Fasting is a sacrifice to God where you give up food, or something else, in order to devote your energy to prayer.

**A PRACTICAL APPROACH**

If you have a medical condition that could make it unsafe to stop eating for an extended time, check with your healthcare provider before fasting. You can fast food and drink as mentioned above, or if your health doesn’t allow for that, you can abstain from something else like social media. Other options might include television, ESPN, or video games. Here’s how to fast, or abstain:

1. Decide what to fast, or what you’re abstaining from, and record it here.
2. Commit to a length of time for your fast. Write it down here.
3. Use the time you gain from fasting to be with God in prayer.

I’ve decided to fast ________________________________

for: _______ days.
HE IS RISEN
JESUS IS ALIVE

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