

RIVER *Flow*

Seven Days of Devotional Practice

July 26 – August 1, 2026

ABIDING IN JESUS SERIES, PART 3 **What the Servant Never Knew**

A Note Before You Sit

This Sabbath we heard Jesus, on the last night of his life, say something to a room full of people who were about to fail him: No longer do I call you servants... I have called you friends.

Most of us have served God faithfully for years and never quite crossed out of the servant's lane. We know the house. We know what he wants. We do the work. Yet we feel far from Him. This week is about crossing the line. To stay in the room when the work is done. To waste a little time with Someone who is glad you came. Seven short readings. Seven two-minute silences.

You'll see each day ends with Stay — and that it comes after the prayer, not before. The prayer is you talking. Staying is what you do instead of hanging up. It's the same word Jesus keeps using in John 15, in plain English: stay.

You will be bad at it. Normal. Being bad at it (at least initially) is what happens to everyone who has ever tried this. Read slowly. One day at a time. Don't make up the ones you miss.

— Pastor Mel Baga, D.Min.
Lead Pastor, Auburn SDA Church

Daily Devotional Guide

SUNDAY, July 26 — On Staff

"No longer do I call you servants... but I have called you friends." — John 15:15

Read: John 15:14–15

Reflect: There is a kind of nearness that is still a distance. You can spend all day in someone's house, know their habits and their moods, anticipate what they need before they ask — and never once be told what they are afraid of, or what they hope for. That is what a servant is. Not unloved. Just not let all the way in. Many of us have related to God exactly this way for decades, and called it reverence. We keep to our lane. We do the work. We don't presume. And then, on his last night, Jesus quietly dissolves the whole arrangement. I have called you friends. Not I will, when you're ready. Not I'm considering it. He has already done it. The distance was closed from his side, while we were still keeping our place.

Notice: Today, catch the moments you relate to God as an employer — reporting in, staying useful, keeping a careful distance. Don't fix it. Just notice it.

Pray: Jesus, I have served you a long time and hidden from you the whole while. I did not know I was allowed closer. Teach me this week what it means that you have called me friend.

Stay: Find a quiet place, shut the door, and sit down. Keep this first one small — two minutes, no more. You have clocked out a thousand times; today, simply don't leave the room. Don't reach for God, don't work at a feeling. Just stay put, awake to the One already here. When your mind bolts — and it will — you don't have to chase it. Only stay seated.

MONDAY, July 27 — Already

"You did not choose me, but I chose you." — John 15:16

Read: John 15:16; 1 John 4:19

Reflect: Every friendship you have ever treasured, someone had to make the first move. A hand extended. An invitation offered before it was earned. And usually, looking back, you realize one of you moved first and the other only later understood what had been given. With God, he is always the one who moved first. Before you prayed a good prayer, before you cleaned yourself up, before you understood any of it — he chose you. The friendship is not a reward you are working toward. It is a gift already handed over, sitting in your hands, often unopened. This is the quiet refrain of this whole series. His abiding in you: already. His face turned toward you: already. His friendship: already. You are not building something. You are waking up to something that is already true.

Notice: Somewhere today a good thing will come to you that you did not earn — a kindness, a beauty, an unbidden moment of ease. Notice it, and let it remind you: this is how he works.

Pray: You chose me. I keep living as though I have to earn my way into a room you have already seated me in. Help me believe the gift is real.

Stay: Two minutes, same chair. You are not staying to earn the visit; you are staying because you are already welcome. So bring nothing. Don't perform, don't produce, don't keep score. Simply sit as one already invited in. The restlessness is not failure — it is a servant learning to be a guest.

TUESDAY, July 28 — Known

"O LORD, you have searched me and known me." — Psalm 139:1

Read: Psalm 139:1-6; John 15:15b

Reflect: There is a difference between someone who knows a great deal about you and someone who knows you. You can be an expert on a person you have never actually let close. And you can be fully known by someone in a single unguarded conversation. We often try to know God the first way — accumulating facts, mastering doctrine, building an impressive

file. All good. But a file is not a friendship. And here is the part that undoes us: a friend is not only someone you know. A friend is someone who knows you — and stays. Psalm 139 says he has already searched you and knows you completely: your sitting down and rising up, the word before it reaches your tongue. And knowing all of it, he did not back away. He called you friend.

Notice: Watch for the reflex to tidy yourself up before God — to pray the presentable version. Notice the impulse. You are already fully known.

Pray: Tell him one true thing today. Not the sanitized version — the thing you would only say to someone already committed to you. I'm afraid. I'm tired. I'm not sure I believe it this week. He has known it the whole time. Say it anyway.

Stay: Two minutes. You are already fully known, so for once there is nothing to manage and nothing to tidy. Let the presentable version of yourself go slack. Sit under a gaze that has seen the worst of you and did not look away. If the urge rises to fix your posture before God, that is only the servant again — let him sit down too.

WEDNESDAY, July 29 — The Missing Piece

"Let him who boasts boast in this, that he... knows me." — Jeremiah 9:24

Read: Jeremiah 9:23–24; Proverbs 3:5

Reflect: For a long time the church tried to fix its distance from God by adding more — more study, more certainty, more right answers. Believe correctly, choose correctly, and transformation should follow. Many of us ran that equation for years and ended up with a fine head and a cold heart. Something was missing, and it was never more information. It was the heart — not the seat of mushy feeling, but the deep organ of perception the ancients said was made to know a Person the way it knows nothing else. Jeremiah says the thing worth boasting in is not wealth or wisdom or might. It is this:

that you know me. Not know about. Know. The missing piece has a name, and it is friendship — the attachment that forms when two hearts turn toward each other and each one realizes: this one is for me.

Notice: Today, catch the difference between thinking about God and being with him. One is analysis. The other is company. Notice which one your prayers usually are.

Pray: I have known so much about you and known you so little. I don't want more information. I want you. Draw my heart, not just my head.

Stay: Two minutes — and today the mind will fight hardest, because you are asking it to stop running the equation. So don't think about God; be with him, the way you sit beside a friend without narrating the friendship. Each time the analyzing starts up, don't argue it down. Just drop the thought and return to being in the room.

THURSDAY, July 30 — Wasting Time

*"Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her." —
Luke 10:42*

Read: Luke 10:38–42

Reflect: Two sisters, one guest. Martha does the right and necessary thing — she serves. She works. She produces. And she is not wrong to; someone has to. But she grows frantic and resentful, and finally scolds the one who isn't helping. Because Mary is doing something that looks, to a working woman, like nothing at all. She is sitting at Jesus' feet. Not serving him. Not fixing anything. Just being with him, letting the doing stop. Wasting time, Martha would say. And Jesus — gently, unforgettably — defends the wasting. Mary has chosen the good portion. The one thing that will not be taken from her is the time she is spending doing nothing but being near him. Friendship is the art of wasting time with someone who is for you. It is the hardest thing a lifelong servant will ever do,

because the whole time you will feel you ought to be useful. That feeling is Martha. You can let her rest.

Notice: Watch the Martha-panic today — the itch to be productive, the guilt of stillness. When it rises, name it, and let it pass.

Pray: Lord, I am so much better at serving you than sitting with you. Teach me the good portion. Teach me to waste time at your feet.

Stay: Two minutes at his feet — and the whole point is that it accomplishes nothing. That is not a flaw in the exercise; it is the exercise. Let the Martha in you insist you should be useful. Let her insist. You are choosing the good portion on purpose. Waste this time with Someone who is glad you did.

FRIDAY, July 31 — Learning to See in the Dark

“Be still, and know that I am God.” — Psalm 46:10

Read: Psalm 46:10; Mark 1:35

Reflect: Your eyes have two ways of seeing. In daylight you see with sharp focus — reading fine print, telling this from that, pinning things down. But when the light fades, that kind of sight goes useless, and something else takes over: a softer vision that doesn't fix on one thing but takes in the whole presence, sensed rather than analyzed. And you cannot flip from one to the other instantly. Step from a bright room into the dark and for a while you see nothing. You have to wait — about twenty minutes — while your eyes learn the dark. The soul works the same way. The part of you that talks and sorts and produces is your daytime sight, and it does not know how to stop. Silence is how you rest it, so the other kind of seeing can wake — the kind that senses a Presence rather than reasons about one. Even Jesus rose before dawn and went to a deserted place to find it. This is not a technique for spiritual athletes. It is simply how a friendship with an unseen Friend is learned: in the quiet, in the dark, with a little patience.

Notice: Notice the noise you keep on — the radio, the scroll, the constant low hum — and what it might be protecting you from. Try one small pocket of silence today.

Pray: Teach me to be still. I have kept the lights on and the noise up my whole life. Let me sit long enough in the quiet to begin to see you.

Stay: Two minutes at least — and if you can, let it run longer today, because the eyes of the soul adjust slowly. Don't strain to see; straining keeps the daytime sight switched on. Just wait, the way you wait in a dark room until the shapes arrive. You have stayed five days now. Stay a little longer, and let the seeing come.

SATURDAY, August 1 — Stay

"Abide in me, and I in you." — John 15:4

Read: John 15:4–5

Reflect: Everything this week has been walking toward one small word. Abide. Stay.

A branch bears fruit by no strategy at all — it simply stays joined to the vine, and the life does the rest. It produces nothing by striving and everything by staying attached. That is the whole secret, and it is almost embarrassingly simple after a lifetime of effort. And notice the gift of this day. Sabbath is God's built-in invitation to waste a whole day with him — not to earn, not to produce, but to rest in the company of the One who made you and is glad you are here. The servant clocks out when the work is done. The friend stays. Today, of all days, stay.

Notice: Sometime today, catch one moment of plain gladness — that you exist, that you are his, that he is with you. Don't analyze it. Just let it land.

Pray: You have called me friend, and I am only beginning to believe it. This Sabbath, I am not going to work my way toward

you. I am just going to stay. Thank you that you have been here the whole time.

Stay: Two minutes, or ten, or as long as the Sabbath will hold you — there is no hurry today. Seven days in, this has stopped being an exercise and become something plainer: what a friend does. So don't sit to accomplish the sitting. Just stay in the room with Someone who has been glad you were here all week.

Next Sabbath: how solitude and silence become a way of life. A different kind of knowing and seeing.

GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Jesus dissolved the servant arrangement from his own side — “I have called you friends,” already done. Where have you kept to the servant's lane with God, doing the work but never quite crossing into friendship? What has kept you there?
2. The friendship is a gift already handed over, often unopened. What would change this week if you lived as though you were already chosen and already welcome, rather than still working your way into a room you have already been seated in?
3. Wednesday named a fine head and a cold heart — knowing much about God and knowing him little. Where do you feel that gap in yourself, and what would it look like to be with God this week rather than think about him?
4. Mary “wasted time” at Jesus' feet while Martha worked. Where does the Martha-panic rise in you — and what would it cost you to choose the good portion, to stay in the room after the work is done?