

# RIVER *Flow*

*Seven Days of Devotional Practice*

October 4 – 10, 2026

## **Fall on the Rock**

*Matthew 21:33–46*

### **A Note Before You Sit**

This week follows one stone and one question. When the word of God comes close enough to name us, something in us decides whether to open or to defend. The parable set that moment before the men who knew the Scriptures best, and it sets the same moment before us. Come to each day unhurried, and let it work on you before you ask what it means.

There are several ways to use this guide, from the most shared to the most personal:

1. As a group — watch this Sabbath's sermon together (our website and YouTube), then walk the week and discuss the questions at the back.
2. As a group that meets once a week — each person walks the days alone, and you gather one day, in person or on Zoom, to pray that day together.
3. One-on-one — read it with someone you are discipling, taking a day, or the closing questions, as your conversation.
4. On your own, or with your family, a day at a time.

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

# Daily Devotional Guide

## SUNDAY, October 4 — The Song Before the Parable

*“My beloved had a vineyard on a very fertile hill.” — Isaiah 5:1*

**Read:** Isaiah 5:1–7

**Reflect:** Before Jesus told the parable of the tenants, Israel already had a vineyard song. Isaiah sings it. God clears the ground, plants the choicest vines, builds a watchtower, digs out a winepress. Nothing is withheld. Then he comes looking for grapes, and the vines give him wild fruit.

The song is about love that has spent itself on a people and waits for a return. God plants, and tends, and then he comes. The question the week will sit with begins here. What has he planted in you, and what will he find when he comes looking for its fruit?

**Notice:** Through the day, notice one thing in your life you did not create and cannot keep on your own. Let yourself see that it was given.

**Pray:** Lord, you planted what I have too easily called mine. Teach me to hold it as a gift again. Amen.

**Stay:** Find a quiet place and sit in silence before God, up to twenty minutes, or less as your time allows. The aim is to rest your thoughts, not to empty your mind. Sit with both feet on the floor and your hands open, and let your thoughts and the body's sensations settle. When a thought or feeling rises, notice it and let it go gently, without scolding yourself. To help you release it, briefly notice your breath at the tip of your nose, or return to one short word chosen beforehand — *God*, or *love*, or *let go*. Do not cling to the word or chase the breath. Use it only to loosen your hold, then let even that fall away and rest again in the quiet. Here you give the Holy Spirit room to do his unseen, transforming work, and learn to be with God in the present moment he has given.

## MONDAY, October 5 — The Word We Bend

*“They realized that he was speaking about them.” — Matthew  
21:45*

**Read:** Matthew 21:33–46

**Reflect:** When the leaders heard the parable, they understood it completely. Matthew uses a strong word, *egnōsan*, they knew, fully and at once. They heard themselves in the tenants. And the understanding moved them to reach for soldiers.

We rarely refuse the truth by shutting it out. We let it in, and we bend it. A word comes to correct us, and by evening we have turned it into evidence that we were right. The bending is quiet. It feels like clear sight. This is the ordinary human guard, doing in daylight what it usually does in the dark.

**Notice:** Catch one moment today when a correction arrives, small or large, and watch what your mind does with it in the next few seconds. Only watch.

**Pray:** Father, I bend your word more often than I break it. Give me the honesty to let it stand. Amen.

**Stay:** As on Sunday. When a defense rises alongside the thought, notice it, let it go, and settle back into the silence.

## TUESDAY, October 6 — The Grip That Will Not Open

*“Do not fear, for I am with you.” — Isaiah 41:10*

**Read:** Isaiah 41:8–10

**Reflect:** Tell a frightened heart to let go and it holds tighter. Beneath our thinking, the body keeps one question running all day, am I safe here or in danger, and when it reads danger it braces before we have decided anything. The part of us that could trust goes quiet.

So God does not begin with a command. He begins with his presence. *I am with you. I am your God.* A hand braced for a blow will not open on an order. It opens when it believes, somewhere below thought, that it is safe. Isaiah never calls the fear foolish. He says you are held.

**Notice:** Notice once today where your body is braced — jaw, shoulders, hands — and let that be a quiet signal rather than a failure. Ask where the danger is.

**Pray:** God who is with me, my hands have been closed so long I forget they can open. Come near enough that they can. Amen.

**Stay:** As on Sunday. Today, as you settle, let your shoulders drop on the out-breath before you take up your word.

## WEDNESDAY, October 7 — Submission and Rest

*“You will find rest for your souls.” — Matthew 11:29*

**Read:** Matthew 11:28–30

**Reflect:** There is a surrender that is only defeat. Scripture calls that bondage, and God does not want it from you. The surrender Jesus offers runs the other direction. It is a loosening of the guard, a laying down of the weight, in the company of someone it is finally safe to lay it down with.

Hear how he says it. Come to me. Take my yoke. Learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart. The yoke is the surprise. The thing that sounds like more burden turns out to be rest, because it is shared, and because the One who shares it has no wish to crush you. You are being drawn home.

**Notice:** Notice the difference today between the tasks you carry braced and alone, and any you carry in trust. The body knows which is which.

**Pray:** Jesus, gentle and humble, I have confused surrender with defeat. Show me the rest on the other side of the open hand. Amen.

**Stay:** As on Sunday. Today let your word be your answer to his call — simply, *Here*.

## THURSDAY, October 8 — The Man Who Fell

*“A broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.” —  
Psalm 51:17*

**Read:** Psalm 51:1–12

**Reflect:** Nathan came to David with a story about a rich man who stole a poor man’s one lamb, and David, not yet seeing himself, thundered the sentence. *The man who did this deserves to die*. Then four words. *You are the man*. He had every defense a king could reach for. He let the word land instead.

What broke in David was not David. It was the story he had been telling, the king who could do no wrong. Out of that break came the most honest prayer in the Psalms. The word for his heart is *dakah*, crushed, the same hard idea the parable uses for judgment, and here it is the very thing God will not despise. The crushed heart is the healed one. David rose from his knees contrite, and whole.

**Notice:** Notice one place where you have been rehearsing your own defense. Set the case down for an hour and see what it is like to stand there undefended.

**Pray:** God of David, create in me a clean heart. I would rather be broken open before you than kept whole apart from you. Amen.

**Stay:** As on Sunday. Today hold your word with open hands, palms up, as a sign of the undefended heart.

## FRIDAY, October 9 — The Rejected Stone

*“The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.”*

— Psalm 118:22

**Read:** Psalm 118:19–24

**Reflect:** Jesus ends the parable with an old line from Psalm 118. The stone the builders threw away became the cornerstone. In the Hebrew the words almost touch, the son is *ben*, the stone is *eben*. The Son they rejected is the Stone the whole house now rests on.

Scripture holds two pictures of that stone. In Isaiah he is a sanctuary to those who trust him and a stone of stumbling to those who will not. In Daniel he is cut without hands, and he strikes the kingdoms of the world. One stone. You come to rest your weight on it, or you meet it another way. Tomorrow is the day to come.

**Notice:** Notice what you have built your footing on this week, a role, a record, a relationship. Ask quietly whether it can bear your full weight.

**Pray:** Cornerstone of God, rejected and raised, let my life rest on you and not on what I can defend. Amen.

**Stay:** As on Sunday. On the eve of the Sabbath, let your word be *Yours*, and let the week’s holding loosen as you say it.

## SABBATH, October 10 — Built on the Stone

*“Given to a people who will produce its fruit.” — Matthew 21:43*

**Read:** Matthew 21:42–43

**Reflect:** The parable ends with the vineyard changing hands. It is given to a people who will produce its fruit. Notice what is spared. In Isaiah’s old song the vineyard itself is ruined. Here it stands. The judgment falls on the grip, never on the garden. He takes it back into his own hands and keeps it growing.

This is where the week arrives. The hand that finally opens does not come up empty. It finds the vineyard still there, larger than it could have held, and work to do in it that is a joy rather than a weight. On the Sabbath you rest from your grip. You let yourself be a tenant again, and find that it is relief.

**Notice:** Today, rest from one thing you have been gripping. Let the Sabbath be the day your hand stays open, and notice what remains when it does.

**Pray:** Lord of the vineyard, I stop holding today. Grow what you planted, and make me fruitful in a kingdom that was always yours. Amen.

**Stay:** As on Sunday, and without hurry. Let the whole sit be your open hand before God. When the word fades and only stillness is left, stay there.

## Group Discussion Questions

1. Name one thing you have slowly begun to call “mine” that was first handed to you to tend — a role, a relationship, a reputation. What changes in how you hold it when you remember it was given, and that the Owner will come looking for its fruit?
2. Tell the group about a time you understood a hard truth about yourself completely and still did not move. Looking back, what was the truth actually threatening — and what did you do with it instead of letting it change you?
3. We do not pry a clenched hand open; it opens when it feels safe. Where are you safe enough with God to stop defending yourself, and where do you still feel you have to make your case before he can get close?
4. Until this week, what has the word “surrender” carried for you — defeat, or rest? Where did that meaning come from, and has anything in these seven days begun to move it?
5. David was broken open rather than crushed because he let the word land in the presence of a God he trusted. What is one defense you are tired of carrying, and who or what in your life makes it safe enough to set down?
6. Strip away the role you play and the record you keep. Underneath them, what is actually bearing your weight right now? Say it plainly to the group, and ask together whether it can hold you.
7. Jesus does not tear the vineyard down; he gives it to people who bear its fruit. If your hand opened this week, what do you sense God waiting to grow in the ground you have been gripping — and what would the first honest sign of that fruit look like?