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# THE ISM SCHISM

A Six-Day Devotional

Lift City Church

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## How to Use This Devotional

This six-day devotional is designed to go deeper than Sunday's message. Each day has a unique focus that takes the week's big ideas and moves them from the head to the heart and then into action.

Set aside 25–30 minutes each day. Find a quiet place. Read slowly. Sit with the reflection questions before you rush to answer them. Pray the prayer as your own or let it be a starting point and add your own words. Then do the application. Transformation isn't just something we understand; it's something we practice.

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**MONDAY** | **What Is an 'Ism' and Why Does It Matter?**

*"Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind." — Romans 12:2 (NIV)*

**TODAY'S DEVOTION**

We live inside ideas without always knowing it. An 'ism' is a belief system — a lens that quietly shapes how we see the world, what we value, and how we treat others. Some isms are life-giving. Others slowly tear apart the fabric of community.

This week's message introduced a handful of them: individualism, racism, sexism, ageism, and nationalism. Each one has the power to build walls where God intends bridges. Before we can address them, we have to name them and more importantly, we have to be willing to look honestly at the lenses we've been handed by our culture, our families, or our pain.

The Apostle Paul's challenge in Romans 12 is radical. He doesn't say 'try a little harder.' He says be transformed by a renewed mind. That kind of change isn't cosmetic. It goes all the way down.

The Gospel doesn't just forgive us and leave us the way we found us. It rewires us. It gives us new eyes to see people the way God sees them, not through the categories the world assigns, but through the lens of the cross.

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## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Without thinking too hard, what 'ism' do you think has had the biggest influence on your own worldview, even if you've never called it that?
2. Paul says transformation happens through the renewing of the mind. What does that process look like practically in your everyday life?
3. Is there a belief you've held that, when examined honestly, looks more like the world's pattern than the Kingdom's?

## PRAYER

*Lord, I confess that I don't always know what's shaping me. I pick up ideas from the culture, from old wounds, from what I've been taught and I sometimes mistake those ideas for truth. Today, I ask You to do what only You can do: renew my mind. Help me see people, situations, and myself through Your eyes. Give me the courage to name what doesn't belong and the grace to be changed. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

## PRACTICAL APPLICATION

Spend five minutes today identifying one area where you notice the world's pattern showing up in your thinking. Write it down.

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**TUESDAY** | One in Christ — The Unity the Gospel Creates

*"There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." — Galatians 3:28 (NIV)*

**TODAY'S DEVOTION**

When Paul wrote Galatians 3:28, he wasn't being idealistic. He was being theological. The cross had done something unprecedented: it leveled every human category used to assign value, rank, and belonging.

In the Roman world, those categories: ethnicity, social class, gender were everything. They determined your seat at the table, your access to power, and your worth in the eyes of society. Paul's announcement was shocking: in Christ, none of that counts anymore. You are one.

That word 'one' is doing enormous work. Paul isn't saying differences disappear, he's saying they no longer divide. Your background doesn't make you more or less valuable. Your status doesn't make you more or less loved. Christ is the great equalizer.

The church is meant to be the one place on earth where this reality is lived out, where the divisions that fracture the world outside are healed by something stronger. Not by pretending differences don't exist, but by declaring that what unites us is greater than what separates us.

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## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Think about a time you felt like an outsider — in a group, a church, or a community. What created that feeling? How does Galatians 3:28 speak to that experience?
2. What categories do people in your world use to rank or separate each other? How does the Gospel challenge that?
3. Is there someone in your life who is different from you in background, opinion, or experience whom you've been slow to see as fully equal in Christ? What might change if you did?

## PRAYER

*Father, thank You that in Your Kingdom there are no second-class citizens. You didn't create a hierarchy of worth. You created one family. Forgive me for the times I've drawn lines that You didn't draw, or for staying comfortable in sameness when You were calling me toward unity. Help me to live as though Galatians 3:28 is actually true, not just in what I believe, but in how I love. Amen.*

## PRACTICAL APPLICATION

Think of one relationship in your life that crosses a cultural, generational, or social boundary. Take one step today to invest in it — a text, a meal, a conversation.

*"The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth." — John 1:14 (NIV)*

### **TODAY'S DEVOTION**

One of the hardest things about navigating division in culture, in the church, in our own hearts is knowing when to lead with grace and when to speak truth. Most of us lean one way or the other. We're either so focused on love that we avoid hard conversations, or so focused on being right that we lose the relationship in the process.

Jesus did neither. John 1:14 says He was full of grace and truth, not grace or truth, not 51% of one and 49% of the other. Both. Completely. At the same time.

Grace leads with love. It creates a safe space for honesty. It doesn't excuse wrong, it makes room for people to change without fear of rejection. Truth corrects and aligns. It calls things what they are. It doesn't leave people comfortable in patterns that harm them or others.

When we talk about isms (the systems of thinking that divide us) we need both. Grace keeps us from turning conversations into condemnations. Truth won't let us hide behind politeness while someone is quietly falling apart. The goal isn't to win an argument. The goal is to love someone toward wholeness.

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## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Which do you tend to lean toward more naturally: grace (avoiding conflict, leading with acceptance) or truth (naming things directly, prioritizing clarity)? What are the strengths and risks of your tendency?
2. Can you think of a time when someone offered you both grace and truth at the same time? What did that feel like, and what did it produce in you?
3. Where in your life right now do you need to speak more truth? Where do you need to lead more with grace?

## PRAYER

*Jesus, You are the perfect picture of grace and truth held together. I confess that I often choose one and abandon the other. I either go soft on what's true, or I go hard without love. Give me the wisdom to know how to hold both, and the courage to practice it. In every hard conversation, every difficult relationship, every moment I'm tempted to run from truth or hide behind it be my guide. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

## PRACTICAL APPLICATION

Practice grace today by listening to someone you disagree with without planning your rebuttal. Just listen to understand.

*"Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions."* — Luke 12:15 (NIV)

### TODAY'S DEVOTION

Jesus didn't tell the parable of the Rich Fool because the man was a criminal. He told it because the man was ordinary. He worked hard, his land produced well, and he planned ahead. By every external measure, he was a success. The problem wasn't his wealth. The problem was where he looked when it was time to talk to himself.

Read Luke 12:17–19 again slowly. Count how many times the words 'I' and 'my' appear. The man was in a conversation with himself, about himself, for himself. There is no mention of God. No mention of neighbor. The only voice in the room was his own.

This is the spiritual danger of individualism taken to its extreme. Not that we have things but that things, and self, and comfort become the whole story. The man in the parable didn't just accumulate barns. He accumulated a worldview: life is about securing what you have.

God's response cuts to the heart: 'You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you.' It wasn't cruel, it was a wake-up call the man had been sleeping through for years. What we center our lives on will ultimately define what we lose and what we keep.

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## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Where do you most clearly see the 'I, my, me' pattern in your own internal conversations? What tends to be at the center of your mental world?
2. The Rich Fool didn't do anything illegal. Why did God call him a fool? What was the deeper failure?
3. What is something in your life right now that you might be holding onto too tightly, something that could be keeping you from fully trusting God or serving others?

## PRAYER

*God, I don't want to live the Rich Fool's life, building bigger barns for a future I don't control. Forgive me for the ways I've centered my own comfort, my own security, my own plans. Remind me today that my life is not my own. You bought it at a price. Help me hold loosely what You've given me, and help me use it in ways that matter beyond the moment. Amen.*

## PRACTICAL APPLICATION

Do an honest audit of how you spent your time and money in the last week. What does the pattern tell you about what you're actually centering your life on?

*"But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well." — Matthew 6:33 (NIV)*

### TODAY'S DEVOTION

The message this week drew a clear contrast: individualism asks, 'What benefits me?' The Kingdom asks, 'What glorifies God and serves others?' That shift sounds simple. In practice, it's one of the most challenging reorientations a human being can make.

We are wired by a broken world to see everything through the lens of personal benefit. What's in it for me? How does this affect my future? What do I have to give up? These aren't necessarily wrong questions but when they become the only questions, we've lost the Kingdom perspective.

Matthew 6:33 doesn't say ignore your needs. It says reorder your priorities. Seek first asks us to make the Kingdom the starting point, not the afterthought. Jesus understood that when God's reign is our first concern, everything else falls into its proper place. We stop clutching and start trusting.

This is the antidote to the isms that divide us. When we are genuinely seeking what glorifies God and serves others, there's no room for racism because every person is made in God's image. There's no room for sexism because every person is gifted and called. There's no room for ageism or nationalism because the Kingdom has no expiration date and no border.

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## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Think about a decision you're currently facing. How does 'What benefits me?' differ from 'What glorifies God and serves others?' when applied to that decision?
2. What would it look like for your daily routine to reflect Kingdom priorities rather than personal ones? What would change?
3. Which of the isms discussed this week do you think most directly threatens the Kingdom perspective in your own community? How can you be part of the solution?

## PRAYER

*Father, I want to live with Kingdom eyes. I confess that so much of my default thinking is 'me first', my comfort, my plans, my preferences. Today, I'm asking You to shift my center of gravity. Help me see every situation through the question: What glorifies You and serves others? Make that reflex, not just a once-in-a-while thought. Let my life point to something bigger than myself. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

## PRACTICAL APPLICATION

Write down three things you are 'seeking first' in your life right now. Honestly evaluate which of those are Kingdom priorities and which are personal ones.

*"Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others." — Philippians 2:3–4 (NIV)*

### **TODAY'S DEVOTION**

Every great problem has a real solution. This week closed with a powerful formula: the cure for individualism and by extension, the isms that flow from it is the Cross, Community, Covenant, and Christlikeness. Let's take a moment to sit with each one.

The Cross reminds us that we were bought at a price. We don't belong to ourselves. When Jesus died, He broke the power of the 'me first' instinct at its root. The cross is where self-centeredness goes to die and self-giving love is born.

Community is God's design for growth. You cannot follow Jesus well alone. The church isn't an optional feature of the Christian life t's the ecosystem where transformation happens. We need each other to see our blind spots, carry our burdens, and remind us of what we're living for.

Covenant means we are committed not just when it's convenient. Real unity isn't built on feelings. It's built on promise. A covenant community says: I am for you even when it's hard. I will stay even when it's uncomfortable. That kind of commitment is counter-cultural and deeply needed.

Christlikeness is the destination. Philippians 2 makes it concrete: look to the interests of others. Consider them above yourself. This isn't weakness, it's the pattern of the One who made Himself nothing and became the Savior of the world. As we close this week, the invitation is not just to think differently. It's to live differently starting today.

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## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Of the four elements Cross, Community, Covenant, Christlikeness, which one feels most accessible to you right now? Which one feels most challenging?
2. What does it look like to practically 'value others above yourselves' (Philippians 2:3) in your specific context — at work, at home, in your church?
3. As you look back over this entire week of devotions, what is the one thing God has been pressing into your heart most consistently? What is your response going to be?

## PRAYER

*Lord Jesus, this week You've shown me where I've been looking inward when You were calling me to look outward. You've shown me the isms that divide and the Gospel that heals. I don't want to just be informed, I want to be transformed. Let the Cross be the lens I see through. Let the community You've placed me in be the place I grow. Let covenant commitment mark my relationships. And above everything, make me more like You in how I speak, how I serve, how I love. The world needs to see what the Kingdom looks like. Let it start with me. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

## PRACTICAL APPLICATION

This Sunday, come to church with an intentional posture. Look for someone to serve, someone to welcome, someone who might feel like an outsider. Be the community you've been reading about.

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