

Devotional Guide

September 28 – October 3, 2026

Hope In the Promises #2



When God Feels Absent

Your search is not for something, but for Someone—Jesus has already come looking for you.

Speaker: Mike Kleven, Lead Pastor

Bible Text(s): Ezekiel 10:18-19; 11:22-23; Haggai 2:3-9; John 1:9-14; Matthew 1:20-23

The message explores the ache of searching hard and still feeling empty—the job, the person, the stuff that never quite fills the longing. That ache is the heartache of exile: knowing you belong somewhere and not being able to get there. Ezekiel watches the glory of the Lord leave the temple because God's presence will not share the house with rival gods. Haggai comforts people who weep over a smaller temple and promises that God will fill the house with greater glory. John 1 and Matthew 1 announce that the Presence has come home: the Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us; His name is Immanuel, God with us. The Big Idea is clear: Your search is not for something, but for Someone—Jesus has already come looking for you.

How to Use This Guide:

Set aside 10-15 minutes daily. Read the Bible, reflect on the thought, answer questions, pray, and take the action step. Commit to this for growth—journal insights and share with a friend for accountability.

*Keep this guide close this week. Return to the Big Idea each day:
Your search is not for something, but for Someone—Jesus has already come looking for you.*

Day 1: The Ache of Searching

Bible Reading: John 1:9-10; Psalm 42:1-2

John 1:9-10 (NIV) "The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him." Psalm 42:1-2 (NIV) "As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, my God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?"

Devotional Thought:

The sermon opened with a search that never quite ends. You hunt for a tool and find it. You hunt for meaning and keep coming up empty. U2 put the cry to music: "I still haven't found what I'm looking for." The job, the vacation, the relationship, the stuff you always wanted can still leave you asking, "Is this all there is?"

That emptiness is not proof that nothing can fill you. It is a signpost pointing to the story the Bible tells: God made us for His presence, and life without that presence leaves a wound. The Big Idea invites you to name the ache and consider that your search is not for something, but for Someone—Jesus has already come looking for you.

Reflection Questions:

- 1. What have you chased that still left you feeling empty?**
- 2. How do John 1:9-10 and Psalm 42 describe a world that misses God even when He is near?**
- 3. Where does the U2 lyric land in your own story right now?**
- 4. What if the emptiness is a signal, not a sentence?**
- 5. How does the Big Idea change the way you hear your own longing?**

Prayer Prompt:

Lord, I name the emptiness I have tried to fill with other things. Teach me to see it as a signpost that points to You. Amen.

Action Step:

Write one sentence naming the ache you feel. Place it where you will see it, and pray it back to God once today.

Day 2: When Glory Walks Out

Bible Reading: Ezekiel 10:18-19; 11:22-23

Ezekiel 10:18-19 (NIV) “Then the glory of the Lord departed from over the threshold of the temple and stopped above the cherubim. While I watched, the cherubim spread their wings and rose from the ground... They stopped at the entrance of the east gate of the Lord’s house, and the glory of the God of Israel was above them.” Ezekiel 11:22-23 (NIV) “Then the cherubim, with the wheels beside them, spread their wings, and the glory of the God of Israel was above them. The glory of the Lord went up from within the city and stopped above the mountain east of it.”

Devotional Thought:

Ezekiel sees what the people on the ground could miss. Idolatry filled the temple: elders in the dark, women weeping for another god, men with their backs to the house of the Lord worshiping the rising sun. God’s holy presence refused to share the house with rivals. The glory moved from the threshold to the east gate, then up from the city to the mountain, and departed.

Losing the land was the wound everyone could see. Losing Presence was the greater wound. Punishment had a purpose and was filled with promises, but the pain was real. When God feels absent, the Bible does not shrug. It tells the truth: unfaithfulness has a cost, and the children are still His. The Big Idea holds even here. The One we long for has already come looking for us.

Reflection Questions:

- 1. What details in Ezekiel 10–11 show that the departure of glory was slow and painful?**
- 2. Why will God’s presence not share the temple with rival gods?**
- 3. Where have you noticed “backs to the temple”—giving your best attention to something other than God?**
- 4. How is losing God’s nearness a deeper wound than losing a place or a plan?**
- 5. What hope remains if the people are still His children even in judgment?**

Prayer Prompt:

Holy God, forgive the rivals I have let into the house. Do not let me settle for life without Your presence. Draw near again. Amen.

Action Step:

Identify one “rival god” that has been taking the center of your attention. Confess it and give that space back to the Lord today.

Day 3: A Smaller House and a Larger Promise

Bible Reading: Haggai 2:3-9

Haggai 2:3-9 (NIV) “Who of you is left who saw this house in its former glory? How does it look to you now? Does it not seem to you like nothing?... Be strong, all you people of the land,” declares the Lord, ‘and work. For I am with you... And my Spirit remains among you. Do not fear... I will fill this house with glory... The glory of this present house will be greater than the glory of the former house... And in this place I will grant peace,’ declares the Lord Almighty.”

Devotional Thought:

A generation passed in exile. Captives returned. A much smaller temple rose from the rubble. Older eyes that remembered Solomon’s house wept. Haggai does not scold the tears. God speaks into them: Be strong and work. I am with you. My Spirit remains among you. Do not fear. I will fill this house with glory greater than the former house. In this place I will grant peace.

A new temple is not yet the same as Presence come home. The faithful remnant did the next right thing and waited. Ezekiel 43 promised God would live among His people forever. Malachi promised the Lord they were seeking would suddenly come to His temple. The Big Idea keeps us from settling for a lesser house when God intends to come Himself.

Reflection Questions:

1. Why do the older eyes in Haggai 2 weep, and why doesn’t God scold them?
2. Which of God’s four promises in Haggai 2:4-9 do you most need this week?
3. Where have you built something faithful that still feels smaller than what you hoped?
4. How is “I am with you” different from “the glory has fully returned”?
5. What would it look like to work and wait without settling for a lesser thing?

Prayer Prompt:

Lord Almighty, I am small and the house looks like nothing. Be with me. Keep Your Spirit among us. Teach me to work and not to fear. Amen.

Action Step:

Do one faithful act of “building” today—encourage a person, serve, or keep a promise—and pray Haggai 2:4 as you do it.

Day 4: The Word Pitches His Tent

Bible Reading: John 1:14; Matthew 1:20-23

John 1:14 (NIV) “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.” Matthew 1:23 (NIV) “The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel” (which means “God with us”).

Devotional Thought:

After four hundred years of silence, the Gospel of John says the unsayable: the Word became flesh and tabernacled among us. The glory Ezekiel watched leave the east gate came back—not as a cloud over a building, but as a Person walking Judean roads. An angel told Joseph to name the child Jesus, Savior, and then quoted Isaiah: they will call Him Immanuel, God with us.

God has come home to His people—and to all people. This is not the returning Presence anyone expected. It is better. The glory is full of grace and truth. The Big Idea becomes a name you can speak: Your search is not for something, but for Someone—Jesus has already come looking for you.

Reflection Questions:

- 1. What does “made his dwelling among us” mean after Ezekiel watched glory depart?**
- 2. How do the names Jesus and Immanuel fit together?**
- 3. Why might people waiting for God’s return have missed Him in Jesus?**
- 4. Where do you need “God with us” to be more than a Christmas phrase this week?**
- 5. How does seeing glory in a Person change the way you pray?**

Prayer Prompt:

Word made flesh, thank You for pitching Your tent among us. Let me see Your glory, full of grace and truth. Be God with me today. Amen.

Action Step:

Read John 1:14 slowly three times. Each time, say aloud: “God has come home.”

Day 5: Received or Refused

Bible Reading: John 1:9-13

John 1:9-13 (NIV) “The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God.”

Devotional Thought:

Jesus is the light that shines into your darkness. He is not for a few people. He is for all people. He made the world, yet many did not recognize their Creator. He came to His own, and many of His own wanted Him on a cross. That did not stop Him from finishing what God intended.

The filling Presence is a Person who can be received or refused. Those who received Him brought their emptiness, loneliness, heartache, and pain—and discovered they belonged as children of God. The Big Idea is an invitation, not a slogan. Jesus longs to make His home with His people. To do that, He must be received.

Reflection Questions:

- 1. What stands out to you about the people who missed Jesus in John 1:9-11?**
- 2. Why is receiving Jesus different from simply knowing facts about Him?**
- 3. What emptiness, loneliness, or pain do you need to bring to Him?**
- 4. What would it mean for you to receive Him, not refuse Him, this week?**
- 5. How does becoming a child of God answer the feeling that you still haven’t found what you’re looking for?**

Prayer Prompt:

Jesus, I do not want to miss You because You are not what I expected. I receive You. Make me a child of God. Amen.

Action Step:

Read John 1:12 out loud. If you have never received Jesus, tell Him yes today. If you have, thank Him that you belong.

Day 6: The One Who Came Looking

Bible Reading: John 1:12, 14; Ezekiel 43:7a

John 1:12, 14 (NIV) "Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God... The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us." Ezekiel 43:7a (NIV) "He said: 'Son of man, this is the place of my throne and the place for the soles of my feet. This is where I will live among the Israelites forever.'"

Devotional Thought:

Review the week: an ache that will not go away, glory walking out of a defiled house, a smaller temple and a larger promise, the Word pitching His tent, and a Light who can be received or refused. God promised to dwell with His people again. In Jesus that promise has a face, a name, and an open invitation.

What you have been looking for is not a better job, house, car, boat, spouse, or a better version of you. The One you are looking for has already come for you. Live the Big Idea: Your search is not for something, but for Someone—Jesus has already come looking for you.

Reflection Questions:

- 1. What key insight are you taking from this week's readings?**
- 2. How has your view of "God's absence" changed?**
- 3. Where will you apply the Big Idea in the coming week?**
- 4. Who around you is still searching for something that cannot fill them?**
- 5. How will you keep receiving Jesus after this guide ends?**

Prayer Prompt:

Loving Father, thank You that the glory did not stay gone. Thank You for Jesus, God with us. I receive Him again today. Amen.

Action Step:

Memorize John 1:14 this week. Share one takeaway from this guide with a friend or family member today.



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