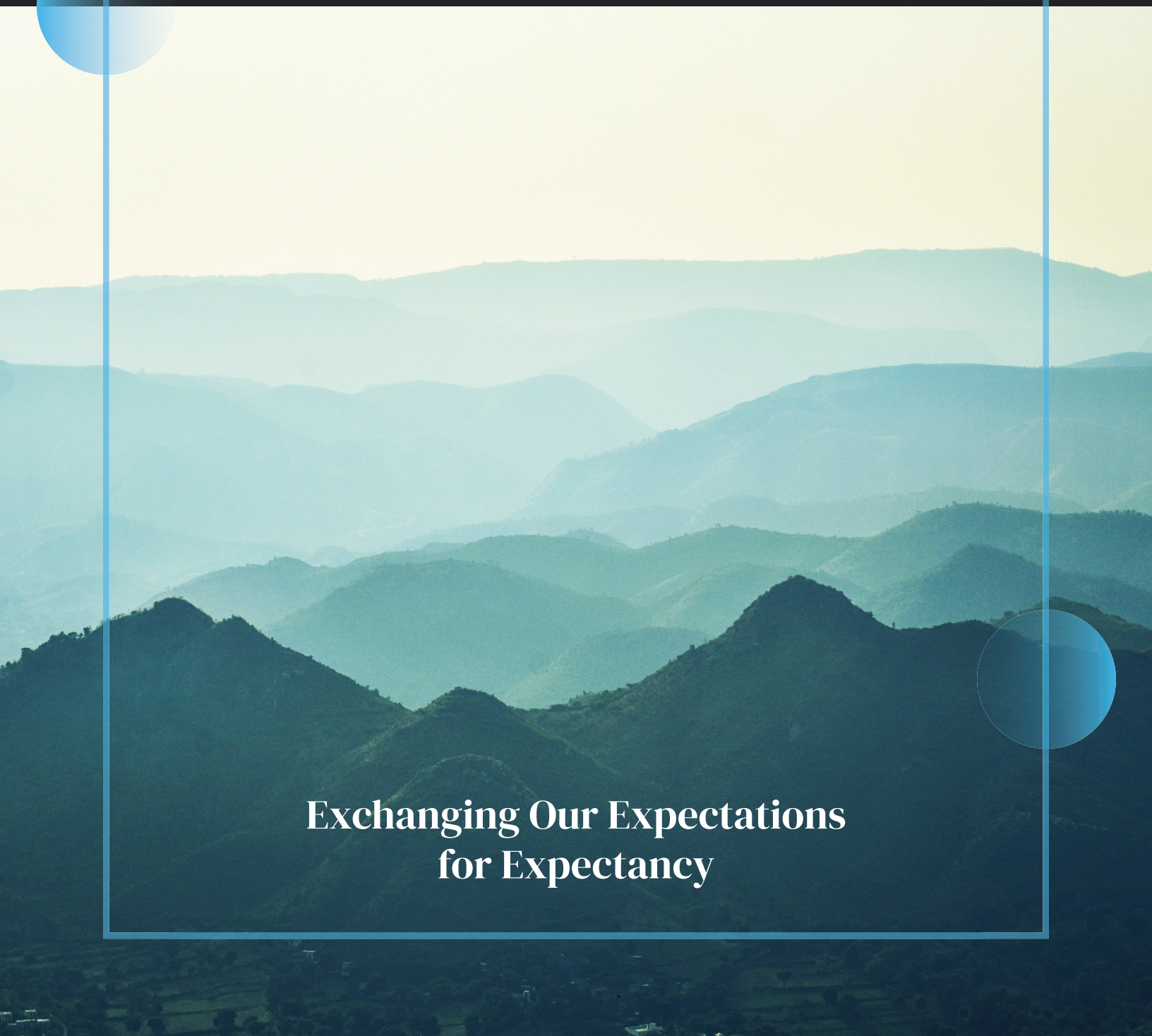
FOSTER THE CITY

# A Soul Care Retreat for Foster Families



## Exchanging Our Expectations for Expectancy

# Preparation

The 3-4 hours of a Soul Care Retreat are designed to provide a time of rest and refreshment when you can lean into God, embrace your limitations, and allow space for God to speak through silence, solitude, and stillness.

1. Block out 3-4 hours on your calendar to step away.
2. Utilize your Support Friend Team to help provide childcare and meals for your family while you take a few hours to care for your soul.
3. Prepare your space and gather your supplies: Bible, journal and your favorite pen or pencil, music, and a candle and lighter.
4. Silence your phone and computer notifications, change your email and text status, and let folks know that you wil be inaccessible for the next few hours.
5. When struggling to find the time for a Soul Care Day, choose to embrace the thought that you can achieve more *later* by resting *now*.

# Expectations

We enter foster care with so many expectations. We expect the licensing process to go smoothly. We expect to get approved without hiccups. We expect to get a call for a child right away. We expect our church to support our decision to foster. We expect our friends and family to love the kids that come into our home as much as we do. We expect to have a voice in advocating for the kids in our home. We expect court case decisions to be fair and quick. We expect our love and care for these precious children to be enough.

But when we look at our life from the depths of fostering we see waiting, brokenness, sorrow, more waiting, and so many unmet expectations.

God's chosen people had a long list of expectations of the Promised Savior, too. Jesus' disciples held a list of what kind of Messiah and King Jesus should be. We, as His followers, have a list of who we want Christ to be and what we want Him to do for us.

Can we exchange our list of expectations for expectancy? Can we trust our Holy God and find hope in the midst of the hard we are experiencing?

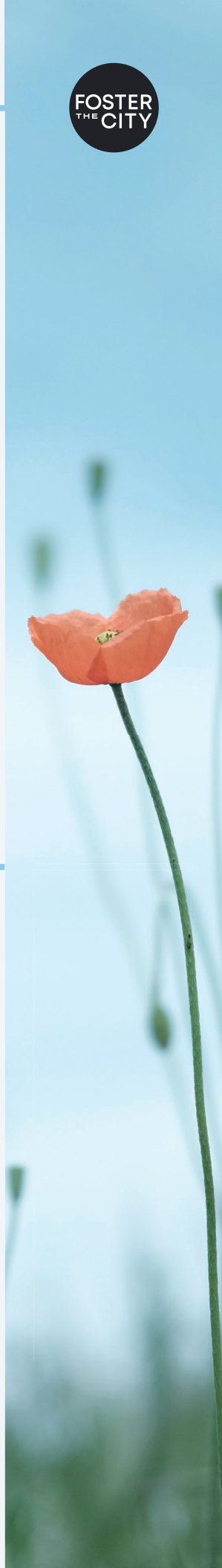
As you pray and seek His face, look with an open heart and release with open hands what is on the list of your expectations of your Lord and Savior.

# Invitation

*Romans 5:2-5 (MSG)*

> We throw open our doors to God and discover at the same moment that he has already thrown open his door to us. We find ourselves standing where we always hoped we might stand- out in the wide open spaces of God's grace and glory, standing tall and shouting our praise.
>
> There's more to come: We continue to shout our praise even when we are hemmed in with troubles, because we know how troubles can develop passionate patience in us, and how that patience in turn forges the tempered steel of virtue, keeping us alert for whatever God will do next. In alert expectancy such as this, we're never left feeling shortchanged. Quite the contrary- we can't round up enough containers to hold everything God generously pours into our lives through the Holy Spirit!

*Redeemer God- Open my eyes to the reality of who You really are- in all of Your reigning glory and majesty as Almighty God and in all of Your humbleness and lowliness as the Son of Man. Help me exchange my unmet expectations for holy expectancy. Amen and Amen*



# First Movement:
# Naming Our Expectations

**Quiet your heart**

Prepare your prayer space and then rest and relax for 10-20 minutes to quiet your heart. Listen to music. Sip your favorite beverage. Breathe. Rest in this quiet space. Lean into God with one of these simple breath prayers.

**Breath Prayer**

Breath Prayers are simple, rhythmic prayers, whispered to the pattern of your breathing. Spend several minutes using these breath prayers as prayers of surrender.

| Count 1<br>Inhale | Count 2 & 3<br>Exhale | Scripture |
|---|---|---|
| ***Call on a Name of God*** | ***Share a God-given desire*** | ***Call on a Name of God*** |
| Qedosh Yisreal,<br>"Hope of Israel" | Renew my hope | Jeremiah 17:7-8,13 |
| Immanuel,<br>"God with Us" | Be with me now | Matthew 1:23 |
| Jehovah Shalom,<br>"The LORD is Peace" | Be my peace | Judges 6:24 |





# Listen to God's Voice

Now that your heart is quiet and ready to listen, turn down the music, clear your space, light a candle and relax into a posture of prayer. Consider using the Palms Down, Palms Up Prayer, from Celebration of Discipline, by Richard Foster (Foster, Richard J., et al. Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth. LifeSprings Resources, 2005).

***Palms Down***

Sit in a comfortable and relaxed position, with the palms of your hands facing down and resting gently on your legs. This "palms down" posture is a symbolic indication that you want to relinquish or "hand over" your requests and petitions to God.

As you sit with God, name the worry or anxieties that are at the forefront of your heart. Be specific in your prayers and tell God exactly which things are causing tension in your mind and heart. As you name the things weighing on your heart and mind, imagine yourself laying them before God and letting the fear and worry go. Imagine God holding your hands, receiving your worries and cares as you hand them over to Him. As you surrender each worry and engage with God's Presence, release them into His capable and caring hands.

Remember to release any family member, friend, circumstance, or issue causing worry or anxiety. Let go of unresolved conflict, unanswered prayers, unfinished projects, incomplete goals, and unmet expectations. Release your feelings of bitterness, fear, anger, anxiety, jealousy or any other emotion standing in-between you and God. Rest here for a few minutes.

***Palms Up***

After a few minutes of silence, turn your hands up, with your hands open and the back of your hands resting on your legs. Your open hands are a symbol of your readiness to accept God's good gifts. Ask the Spirit to fill your empty spaces with His peace, His strength, His wisdom, His courage, His discernment, His Presence. Accept these gifts from Him in exchange for the spaces left vacant by your worries and fears.

Listen for His voice; His promptings; Words from Scripture that come to your heart. Listen without asking for anything. Rest in His Presence and in His love. Allow His Presence to be enough.

# Feast on God's Word

There is life to be found in God's Word. Allow His Words to pour into you and provide refreshment and renewal to your heart.

**Read**: Luke 10:38-42 & John 11:1-23

Read the passages three times slowly. Circle words that resonate or underline entire phrases that you want to remember. Take time to pause and reflect and let the Word of God fill your heart.

**Reflect:**
*The Death of Lazarus*

Faithful Martha opened her home and regularly hosted Jesus and His followers. Her TO DO list was long and she kept a list of expectations for herself and her sister Mary.

> "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me! (Luke 10:40b).

She bustled, organized, prepared, and served. She listened to Jesus' teaching, heeded His correction, watched Him perform miracles. She knew Him well.



As she watched her brother Lazarus fall ill and die, Martha had a list of expectations of her dear friend and Savior, Jesus. After Lazarus was buried and Jesus had finally arrived, it was Martha who ran out to meet Him. You can hear her expression of longing and expectation as she spoke with Jesus.

> "Lord," Martha said to Jesus, "If you had been here, my brother would not have died..." (John 11:21).

Her expectations were good, worthy, and in all truth, not small. She knew Jesus could have healed her brother. But it seemed He hadn't come in time. Her brother was dead.

And then you hear her adjust her expectations and state with expectation,

> "But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask." (John 11:22).

Oh, may you learn from Martha, set aside your list and shift your expectations and look towards your Savior with expectancy. Martha doesn't know it yet, but healing is on its way!

Resurrection is coming!

# Journal

Use your journal to copy or to respond to the Scripture verses you just read. Consider the following questions:

- How often has your heart cried, "If only you had been here, Lord?"
- What are you most longing for? Hoping for? Expecting from God this hard season?
- Can you adjust your expectations, trust Jesus' timing, and cling to hope?



# Pray

*Redeemer God- This day, remove my doubts about Your goodness, Your intentions, Your plan. Replace my doubts and adjust my expectations. Help me look with expectancy towards what You have promised in your Word. Open my eyes and open my heart to receive you as my crucified and risen Lord. Amen and Amen*

# Second Movement:
# Releasing Your Expectations

**Tend to your body**

After sitting for a while, you may need to move around or have something to eat or drink. Take this opportunity to stretch and move and enjoy a break.

**Do something that brings your heart joy!**

- Plan to spontaneously bless someone
- Go on a hike or leisurely walk
- Browse the library or a bookstore for your next literary escape
- Create something beautiful
- Read for pure enjoyment



**A few hints:**

- If possible, keep technology and the digital world silenced during this time
- Prioritize self-care instead of self-indulgence
- Notice ways that you can dialogue with God in this experience through listening, meditation, prayer, or journaling
- Prayerfully release the expectations you named
- Close this time with a prayer of thanksgiving
- Write out your prayer if time allows

# Third Movement: Exchanging Your Expectations for Expectancy

**Read**: John 11:5; 23-44

Take time to pause and reflect and let the Word of God fill your heart.

**Listen**: Jireh, Maverick City Music
Take a few minutes to worship God through music.

**Reflect:** *The Resurrection of Lazarus*

Since first hearing the story of Martha and her sister Mary back in Sunday School, you may get the impression that Jesus loved tender Mary a bit more than the bustling Martha. After all, Mary was the sister who chose to sit at His feet, to pour out her precious perfume, and wash His feet with her hair.

In contrast, Martha was hustling and bustling and a bit exasperated. You may hear disappointment in Jesus' voice as he redirected her, "Martha, Martha..." (Luke 10: 41-42).

But take a look at this passage from John 11:

> *Now Jesus loved Martha* and her sister and Lazarus (John 11:5).

He LOVED Martha. Just as He made her. She opened her home to Him and He trusted her to care for Himself and for His disciples (Luke 10:38). Her home was a refuge.

When Martha went out to meet Jesus after Lazarus died, after she expressed her longing and expectations of Jesus, it was to Martha He said these powerful words:

> "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?" (John 11:25-26).

His extravagant and unchanging love for her helped continue to shift her list of expectations. Here's her faithful response to Jesus' query:

> "Yes, Lord," she replied, "I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who is to come into the world." (John 11:27).

This statement shows Martha's tremendous faith AND YET her expectations still weren't high enough. She expected a miracle, a healing, a future resurrection. But that very day, because of His great love, Jesus was preparing to RAISE HER BROTHER FROM THE DEAD.

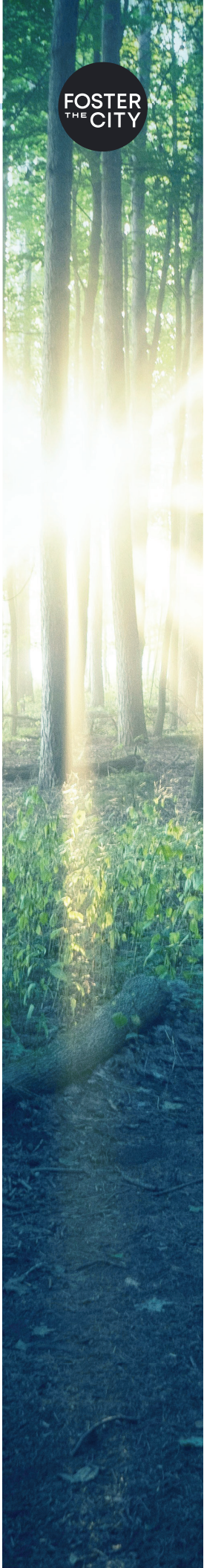
What was Mary's list of expectations compared to experiencing resurrection life here on Earth? First, with her brother, and soon after, with her Savior.

Jesus IS the resurrection and the life. Are you ready to ditch that list of expectations you are carrying and fall in love with your resurrected Savior?

As you love and serve the children in your home, remember this lesson from Martha's life:

Jesus cannot love you any more than He does right now. No matter what your list of expectations holds. No matter how hard or faithfully you serve.

Resurrection life is here for you, NOW.



# Pray

*You are the Resurrection and the Life. Help me release my list of who I want You to be and what I want You to do for me. Help me to remember that I could never be loved any more than I am right now- redeemed, ransomed, and resurrected. Forgive me for dwelling on my unmet expectations. Help me to live instead with expectancy and hope. Amen and Amen*

# Journal

- What is one area in your life (spiritual life, emotional life, thought life, relational life) that you are longing for to be different?
- Can you identify a reason (or a few reasons) why you are feeling stuck and unable to bring about change and growth you long for in this area?
- "Not all growth results in blooms or fruit." Can you see any growth in this area, even if you are not yet blooming or bearing fruit?
- Was there something that you read, listened to, or prayed today that inspired you or encouraged you in this area of longing?
- Write a brief prayer asking God to step into this area of your life.



# Give Thanks

Bring your Soul Care Retreat to a close by expressing thanksgiving to God from right where you are (instead of where you expect or wish to be). Take time to journal this prayer of thanksgiving.

Consider praying through Romans 5:2-5 as your prayer of thanksgiving:

*God, Help me throw open my door to You, so that I can discover how You have already thrown open Your door to me. May I find myself standing where I always hoped I might stand- out in the wide open spaces of Your grace and glory, standing tall and shouting praises to You.*

*Help me to remember that there is more to come: I can continue to shout my praises even when I am hemmed in with troubles, because I know how troubles can develop passionate patience in me, and how that patience in turn forges the tempered steel of virtue, keeping me alert for whatever You will do next. In alert expectancy such as this, I am never left feeling shortchanged. It's the opposite! I can't round up enough containers to hold everything You generously pour into my life through the Holy Spirit.*

*Thank you for reminding me of these promises through Your Holy Word. Amen and Amen*

