

SACRED WHISPERS

VOLUME 6

Whispers of Hope Through the Winds of
Change

31 DEVOTIONS FOR
DISCERNING THE VOICE OF GOD

Compiled and Published by:

New Life Church

Decatur, GA



NEW LIFE
CHURCH

SACRED WHISPERS: VOLUME 6 – “*Whispers of Hope in Seasons of Change*”

CREDITS & COPYRIGHTS

This devotional is a collaborative effort of the New Life Church family, with heartfelt contributions from members of our Ministerial Team, our Bible Teacher Training (BTT) Class, and Pastors.

SCRIPTURE REFERENCES:

Scripture quotations are taken from the following versions of the Bible:

New King James Version (NKJV)®. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

English Standard Version (ESV)®. Copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

King James Version (KJV): Public domain.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS:

This devotional was made possible by the sacrificial efforts of:

- **Contributors:** Devoted members of the Ministerial Team of New Life Church and New Life’s Bible Teacher Training (BTT) Graduates, whose heartfelt submissions form the foundation of this devotional, namely:

Pastor Marlin D. Harris	Dr. Joyce Lewis
Lady Monica Harris	Dr. Lynette Lewis
Dr. Morcease Beasley	Minister Frank Luke
Tapika Howard	Dana Mann
Jewell Jackson	Nakia Means
- **Pastoral Guidance:** Pastor Marlin D. Harris, whose vision, editing, and spiritual insight shaped this work into a cohesive reflection of God’s love and faithfulness. And to **Dr. Morcease Beasley** and **Lady Monica Harris**, whose editing, coordinating, and oversight were crucial to making this work possible.
- **Design Development:** Special thanks to **Vivian Fisher, Concepts, Inc.** of Atlanta, GA., and all who contributed to the editing and refinement of these devotionals, ensuring clarity, accuracy, and impactful messaging.

ADDITIONAL SOURCES AND INSPIRATIONS:

The following works were consulted and served as inspiration for the Fasting Guide and for various devotionals:

Fasting Guide Sources and Inspirations:

- *Celebration of Discipline*, by **Richard Foster**

- *A Hunger for God: Desiring God Through Fasting and Prayer*, by **John Piper**
- *The Daniel Fast: Feed Your Soul, Strengthen Your Spirit, and Renew Your Body*, by **Susan Gregory**
- *The Daniel Plan*, by **Rick Warren, Daniel Amen, and Mark Hyman**

Inspiration for Devotionals

- *Streams in the Desert*, by **L.B. Cowman** (Public Domain)
- *Morning and Evening*, by **Charles H. Spurgeon**
- *Fasting for Spiritual Breakthrough: A Guide to Nine Biblical Fasts*, by **Elmer Towns**
- *My Utmost for His Highest*, by **Oswald Chambers**
- *Jesus Calling: Enjoying Peace in His Presence*, by **Sarah Young**
- *God’s Wisdom for Navigating Life*, by **Timothy Keller** and **Kathy Keller**

SPECIAL THANKS:

To our church family at New Life Church, for your commitment to seeking God through prayer, fasting, and devotion. Your dedication inspires this sacred work.

PERMISSIONS AND COPYRIGHTS:

This devotional is for non-commercial use within New Life Church, its online viewing audience, and affiliates of New Life Church. Duplication or reproduction beyond the intended audience requires written permission.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or any other means, without the prior written permission of New Life Church.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Sacred Whispers Volume 6: Whispers of Hope Through the Winds of Change

FORWARD6
 PRAYER & FASTING GUIDE.....9

WEEK 1: FAITH, HOPE & LOVE 19

Day 1: Keep Hope Alive 20
 Day 2: Hope Has A Song..... 23
 Day 3: Abba Father 27
 Day 4: Faith Does Come By Hearing (Ask Rahab)..... 32

WEEK 2: TRUST THE PROCESS 37

Day 5: Finding Strength In Weakness 38
 Day 6: Yielding To The Process, Yields Greater Fruit 42
 Day 7: Spiritual Elasticity 45
 Day 8: You Are An Overcomer 48
 Day 9: Hold Still..... 51
 Day 10: The Power Of Prayer..... 54
 Day 11: Anchored In Wisdom: Navigating Life’s Storm 58

WEEK 3: LOVE, GRACE AND GRATITUDE 63

Day 12: Your Heavenly Father: The God Of A Second Chance..... 64
 Day 13: “I’m Sorry” 66
 Day 14: Our Daddy Loves Us 69
 Day 15: He’s Waiting..... 73

Day 16: The Echo Of Gratitude76
 Day 17: Rest In The Lord So We Can Live.....80
 Day 18: Master Class..... 83

WEEK 4: TRIUMPHANT EVEN IN TRAGEDY 87

Day 19: With All... 88
 Day 20: But If He Doesn’t 91
 Day 21: Lions And Lambs..... 96
 Day 22: Beauty In The Broken Pieces 98
 Day 23: The Hidden Gift In Suffering 101
 Day 24: How Have The Mighty Fallen 105
 Day 25: God Can Use The Affliction 109

WEEK 5: GROWTH AND DISCIPLESHIP 113

Day 26: The Cost Of Discipleship: Part 1 114
 Day 27: The Cost Of Discipleship: Part 2 117
 Day 28: The Seated Servant 121
 Day 29: Salt Of The Earth 124
 Day 30: A Vessel For The Lord..... 127
 Day 31: Up To The Moutaintop 130

ENDING THOUGHTS..... 131

FOREWORD

Sacred Whispers Volume 6: Whispers of Hope Through the Winds of Change

My dear New Life Family: life often unfolds before us in seasons. Some seasons are marked by joy and abundance, while others are marked by pain and broken hearts. This past year, our beloved church family has weathered many seasons of profound change. We have grieved the loss of cherished loved ones, borne the weight of debilitating illnesses, faced personal economic uncertainties, and stepped forward with bold faith into the transformative vision of our DREAM Community Revitalization Campaign. Through it all, one truth has remained constant: our God is faithful, and His whispers are louder than the fears and anxieties shouting all around us.

This devotional, *Sacred Whispers Volume 6*, was born out of our desire to prepare your heart to hear God's gentle whispers of hope—hope to guide us through shifting circumstances, hope that anchors us in God's unchanging character, and hope that inspires us to continue building His Kingdom. This year's theme, *Whispers of Hope Through the Winds of Change*, reflects the gentle yet powerful way God sustains us as we navigate the unpredictable waters of life.

In these pages, you will find reflections that mirror the complexities of life's seasons. As you read, you will hear of sorrow, triumph, stillness, and transformation. Each devotion invites you to pause and listen for the sacred whispers of God, gently guiding you forward with hope. Our prayer is that as you engage with these writings, you will experience the peace of Christ in your circumstances, the renewal of His strength in your weakness, and the joy of knowing that no matter what season you are in, God is with you.

The devotions in this collection are much more than words on a page; they are spiritual roadmaps drawn from the deep wells of Scripture, personal testimonies, and the heartfelt reflections of our New Life family. They

speak to the challenges we've faced this year, offering encouragement for the weary, strength for the struggling, and a renewed sense of purpose for those called to dream big for the future. You'll find reminders of God's steadfast love, His mercy that is new every morning, and His promise to carry us through every storm.

This past year has been a powerful testament to the resilience of hope. As a church, we have prayed together, wept together, and believed together. We've reminded one another that hope is not found in the absence of challenges but in the presence of God. Whether walking through grief, navigating illness, or pressing forward into the unknown, we have seen the fingerprints of God's faithfulness in every step. And as we continue to build and strengthen our church family, we know that our hope rests securely in the One who never changes, even when everything around us does.

As you journey through this devotional, I encourage you to approach it with an open heart, ready to receive the whispers of hope that God has for you. Let His Word steady you; let His promises encourage you; and let His Spirit empower your faith. Whether you are mourning a loss, wrestling with uncertainty, or simply seeking to grow closer to God, may this book remind you of His unfailing love and His purpose for your life. And as a church family, may we hold tightly to one another, lifting each other up as we press forward into the hope that God has placed before us.

I'm praying that hope overflows your heart like a mighty stream rushing over dry ground. In the words of Isaiah 43:19, God is saying to our church family, "Behold, I will do a new thing, now it shall spring forth; shall you not know it? I will even make a road in the wilderness and rivers in the desert." In every season, may we find joy in knowing that the God who whispers His hope to our hearts is leading us into the glorious future that He has crafted for each one of us. Our First Lady and I love you all dearly, Hope Yet Lives!

Pastor Marlin and Lady Monica Harris
New Life Church – Decatur, GA



PRAYER & FASTING GUIDE

WHAT IS FASTING?

Fasting is a spiritual practice that entails refraining from food, drink, or certain activities for a specific time to draw nearer to God. Grounded in Scripture, fasting has been embraced by devoted individuals throughout biblical history. This practice is not intended to harm the body; instead, it emphasizes the importance of nurturing the spirit. Fasting aims to eliminate distractions that divert our attention, allowing us to concentrate on prayer, worship, and discerning God's will.

THE BIBLICAL FOUNDATION FOR FASTING

The Bible offers numerous examples of fasting, each revealing its purpose and power in the lives of God's people. Let's explore these foundational principles:

1. Fasting to Seek God's Guidance

Ezra 8:23 reminds us of the power of fasting when faced with critical decisions: *"So we fasted and entreated our God for this, and He answered our prayer."* Ezra and the Israelites fasted to ask God for protection and direction as they prepared to return to Jerusalem. Similarly, fasting can align our hearts with God's will and help us discern His voice. When we set aside time to fast, we humble ourselves before God and invite Him to guide us through decisions, uncertainties, and life's complexities.

2. Fasting as an Act of Repentance and Humility

The Psalmist wrote, *"When I wept and chastened my soul with fasting, that became my reproach"* (Psalm 69:10). In repentance, fasting humbles our hearts and enables us to recognize our dependence on God's grace and mercy. The Ninevites fasted in Jonah 3, demonstrating their sorrow for sin and turning away from evil. Fasting is a powerful way to confess our sins, express remorse, and seek God's forgiveness with a sincere heart.

3. **Fasting for Spiritual Breakthrough**

Jesus told His disciples in Matthew 17:21, *“This kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting.”* Fasting intensifies prayer and strengthens our spiritual resolve, equipping us to confront challenges, overcome temptations, and experience deliverance from strongholds. Whether battling spiritual warfare, addictions, or discouragement, fasting invites God’s power to intervene and bring victory.

4. **Fasting to Draw Closer to God**

Fasting is a means of setting aside earthly distractions to focus on God’s presence. *“I humbled myself with fasting; and my prayer would return to my own heart”* (Psalm 35:13). It is a sacred time to sit at God’s feet, meditating on His Word, and enjoying uninterrupted communion with Him. When we fast, we acknowledge that our deepest need is not physical sustenance but the bread of life—Jesus Christ.

5. **Fasting as Intercession for Others**

In Daniel 9:3, we see Daniel fasting and praying on behalf of the people of Israel, saying, *“So I turned to the Lord God and pleaded with Him in prayer and petition, in fasting, and in sackcloth and ashes.”* Fasting is not just for our benefit; it empowers us to stand in the gap for others. By fasting for loved ones, communities, and nations, we partner with God in His redemptive work, bringing heaven’s will to earth.

THE BENEFITS OF FASTING

1. **Spiritual Benefits**

Fasting draws us closer to God, purifies our hearts, and heightens our sensitivity to the Holy Spirit. In fasting, we set aside physical and worldly distractions, allowing God to renew our spirits and fill us with His presence. This sacred discipline positions us to hear His voice more clearly, align with His will, and experience spiritual breakthroughs that deepen our relationship with Him.

2. **Emotional Benefits**

Fasting teaches discipline and self-control, strengthening our ability to resist temptations and unhealthy patterns. As we quiet our hearts, fasting clears the mental clutter that often hinders reflection and

focus. It brings peace to our souls, enabling us to trust God more fully and experience emotional healing in areas of anxiety, fear, or grief.

3. **Physical Benefits**

When approached wisely, fasting can provide physical benefits, such as resetting unhealthy eating habits and promoting detoxification. By abstaining from food or specific indulgences, we allow our bodies to rest and recalibrate, experiencing renewal not just spiritually but also physically. However, these benefits must always be pursued with care, ensuring that health and safety remain a priority.

TYPES OF FASTS

1. **The Daniel Fast**

Inspired by Daniel’s commitment to purity (Daniel 1:12 and 10:3), this fast focuses on consuming only vegetables, fruits, whole grains, and water while abstaining from rich foods, sweets, and meats. The Daniel Fast teaches us to rely on God’s provision and reminds us of the importance of spiritual and physical discipline.

2. **Intermittent Fasting**

This fast involves abstaining from food for a specific portion of the day, such as skipping meals or eating within a designated window of time (e.g., 12 p.m.–6 p.m.). Intermittent fasting is ideal for those seeking a structured approach while dedicating time for prayer and worship during fasting hours.

3. **The Partial Fast**

A partial fast involves abstaining from specific foods, beverages, or activities. For instance, skipping a particular meal daily or refraining from indulgent foods such as sweets can be a meaningful sacrifice while maintaining physical strength for your responsibilities.

4. **Media or Activity Fast**

A media or activity fast involves abstaining from distractions such as social media, television, or hobbies to dedicate time to prayer, study, and worship. This is a powerful option for those who may have medical conditions or wish to refocus their minds and spirits.

5. The Absolute Fast

An absolute fast, where no food or drink is consumed, should only be undertaken for short periods (1–3 days) and with great caution. Biblical examples include Moses (Exodus 34:28) and Esther (Esther 4:16). This fast requires prayerful preparation and should not be attempted without ensuring physical health and divine leading.

6. The Fast of Compassion and Service

In Isaiah 58:6-7, the prophet Isaiah outlines the kind of fast God desires: *“Is this not the fast that I have chosen: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, to let the oppressed go free, and that you break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and that you bring to your house the poor who are cast out; when you see the naked, that you cover him, and not hide yourself from your own flesh?”*

This type of fast, often referred to as a **Fast of Compassion and Service**, focuses on practical acts of mercy and kindness. Instead of solely abstaining from food, this fast calls for actively meeting the needs of the oppressed, hungry, and homeless. It is a call to selflessness, using time, resources, and energy to serve others while seeking God’s heart for justice. This fast aligns your actions with God’s priorities and manifests His love in tangible ways.

7. The Marital Abstinence Fast

In 1 Corinthians 7:5, Paul writes, *“Do not deprive one another except with consent for a time, that you may give yourselves to fasting and prayer.”* This fast, often called the **Marital Abstinence Fast**, involves spouses mutually agreeing to refrain from sexual intimacy for a specific period to focus on prayer, fasting, and seeking God together. It requires clear communication, prayer and unity between spouses, emphasizing spiritual intimacy with God over physical connection. This type of fast fosters mutual spiritual growth, alignment, and intercession within the marriage while strengthening the bond between husband and wife through shared faith.

PREPARING FOR A FAST

1. Pray for Guidance

Before beginning your fast, seek God’s guidance to clarify the type and length of fast He desires for you. Commit your intentions to Him and ask for His strength and grace to sustain you.

2. Set Clear Goals

Define your spiritual goals for the fast. Are you fasting for a deeper relationship with God, breakthrough in a specific area, healing, or direction? Clear goals will keep you focused and intentional.

3. Ease into the Fast

Prepare your body by gradually reducing meal portions and caffeine intake in the days leading up to the fast. This prevents sudden physical shock and helps you adjust to fasting more smoothly.

SAFETY GUIDELINES FOR FASTING

1. Consult Your Doctor

Before beginning any fast, especially one involving food restriction, consult with your doctor. This is especially critical if you have pre-existing medical conditions such as diabetes, heart issues, or a history of eating disorders. A medical professional can help you tailor your fasting approach to ensure it aligns with your health needs. For instance, intermittent fasting or a partial fast may be safer options for those with dietary restrictions or metabolic concerns. It’s better to fast wisely than to risk your health.

2. Start Slowly

If you are new to fasting, start with a smaller commitment, such as skipping one meal a day or engaging in a media fast. Jumping into a prolonged or intense fast without preparation can lead to physical discomfort or discouragement. Gradually build your fasting discipline over time, allowing your body and spirit to adjust. Consider shorter fasts before attempting a full-day fast or abstaining from specific foods entirely.

3. Stay Hydrated

Water is essential during any fast. Dehydration can lead to fatigue, headaches, and dizziness, which can detract from your focus on prayer and spiritual growth. Drink plenty of water throughout the day, even if you are fasting from food. Herbal teas or clear broths may also be incorporated into some fasting practices, depending on the type of fast you choose. Remember, fasting should never involve endangering your physical well-being.

4. Plan for Rest

During a fast, your body may require extra rest as it conserves energy. Avoid scheduling demanding physical or mental activities on fasting days. Instead, prioritize quiet time with God, prayer, and Bible study. Resting doesn't mean being idle but creating space to focus on spiritual renewal rather than worldly busyness.

5. Maintain Balance

Fasting is not about extremes but about creating space to focus on God. While food fasts are common, they are not the only option. If a food fast is not possible for health or personal reasons, consider a media fast, a Fast of Compassion, or another form of abstinence that allows you to focus on God without compromising your health or responsibilities.

6. Focus on the Spiritual, Not the Physical

The purpose of fasting is not to achieve physical goals like weight loss but to draw closer to God. Keep your heart and mind focused on prayer, Scripture, and spiritual growth. Use the time you would spend eating or engaging in other activities to seek God's will, worship, and intercede for others.

7. Fast with Accountability

Consider sharing your fasting plan with a trusted friend, spouse, or prayer partner. Accountability can provide encouragement, prayer support, and a safeguard against overexertion. Fasting in community, such as a church-wide fast, allows you to share the journey, pray for one another, and collectively seek God's direction.

8. Remember Grace

Fasting is a spiritual discipline, not a legalistic requirement. If you stumble, forget to pray, or break your fast prematurely, don't be discouraged. God's grace is sufficient. Simply recommit your heart to Him and continue seeking His presence. The heart of fasting is about aligning with God, not achieving perfection.

BREAKING THE FAST**1. Ease Back Into Eating**

Conclude your fast with small, light meals such as fruits, vegetables, or soups. Avoid heavy or fried foods, as your body needs time to readjust to regular eating.

2. Reflect and Give Thanks

Take time to thank God for sustaining you throughout the fast and reflect on the spiritual insights and breakthroughs you experienced.

3. Sustain the Growth

Let the habits cultivated during your fast—prayer, worship, and Scripture study—become a regular part of your daily life moving forward.

A FASTING PRAYER

Lord, as I prepare to fast, I ask for Your guidance and strength. Help me to fix my heart on You and align my desires with Your will. Teach me through this fast to rely on You, to listen for Your voice, and to grow in faith and trust. As I seek You, may I find new depths of intimacy with You and clarity in my purpose. Thank You for the privilege of setting aside distractions to focus on You, Your Word, and Your will for our lives.

Father, as we enter this sacred season, we ask for Your guidance and strength. Help us to fast with sincerity, not as a ritual, but as an act of worship that honors You. Lord, let this fast bear fruit in our lives. Transform us from the inside out, making us more like Jesus in our words, actions, and thoughts. Stir within us a hunger for righteousness and a thirst for Your presence. Use us, Lord, to bring light to the darkness and to be salt in a world that desperately needs Your truth.

Lord, we lift up every burden and care to You. During this fast, we ask for Your divine intervention in our lives and the lives of those we love. Break chains of bondage, restore relationships, heal broken hearts, and deliver us from anything that keeps us from walking fully in Your purpose. Father, let Your will be done in us, through us, and around us.

We pray for clarity and wisdom as we seek Your face. Reveal to us the hidden things that we need to surrender to You. Expose any sin, unforgiveness, or distraction that hinders our relationship with You. Purify our hearts and renew our minds so that we may see You more clearly and love You more deeply.

Thank You, Father, for Your faithfulness and mercy that are new every morning. Thank You for the strength to endure, the grace to forgive, and the love that never fails. We dedicate this fast to You, asking that it be a fragrant offering, holy and pleasing in Your sight.

In the mighty name of Jesus, we pray,

Amen.

Resources on Fasting:

1. Books and Devotionals:

- *Celebration of Discipline* by Richard Foster – A classic text on spiritual disciplines, including fasting.
- *Fasting* by Jentezen Franklin – Offers practical and spiritual guidance on fasting.
- *The Spiritual Disciplines Handbook* by Adele Ahlberg Calhoun – Covers fasting as a spiritual practice.

2. Christian Teaching and Commentary:

- *Life Application Study Bible* Notes on Matthew 6:16-18 and Isaiah 58.
- *Commentary on Isaiah* by Matthew Henry for insights on Isaiah 58 and fasting.

3. Historical and Traditional Practices:

- Early Church Fathers (e.g., Augustine, Tertullian) on fasting and its role in spiritual growth.
- Jewish traditions of fasting (e.g., Yom Kippur as described in Leviticus 23:27-32).

4. Medical and Practical Guidance on Fasting:

- Mayo Clinic or Cleveland Clinic articles on safe fasting practices for physical health.
- *The Daniel Plan* by Rick Warren and others, focusing on a Biblical and health-conscious approach to fasting.



WEEK ONE
DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

FAITH, HOPE & LOVE

DAY 1

KEEP HOPE ALIVE

By Joyce R. Lewis M.D.

“But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope.”

Thessalonians 4:13 (NKJV)

My dad had a “good death.” Wait—what? Let me explain.

In 2019, my dad was diagnosed with cancer. He underwent major surgery and chemotherapy, and by early 2020, we were told he was clear. But only a week later, we received the news: his numbers had gone up, indicating metastasis. Surgery was no longer an option. He tried another round of chemotherapy, but it didn’t work. When we asked what God was saying to him, his answer was simple yet profound: “He said He is with me.”

After an unsuccessful procedure that brought no relief, my dad made the decision—with our full support—to stop treatment. We brought him home, moved his bed to the first floor, and made the space as comfortable as possible. Friends and family came to visit. His best friend shared her favorite Scripture with him, and he responded by offering her a fresh interpretation of it. Even the hospice nurse, touched by his faith, listened as he shared Bible wisdom with her.

The night before he passed, my sisters found him on his knees praying, though he no longer recognized us. He knew to pray. When his breathing changed, I sat by his side, reading Psalms aloud as hymns played softly in the background. Family surrounded him, hands resting on him in love and prayer. As I continued reading, he stopped breathing.

He passed away exactly as he had wanted to: at home, surrounded by those he loved. Though we grieved, we were comforted by the assurance of where he was and ‘Whom’ he was with.

THE ASSURANCE OF HOPE

God’s hope is not wishful thinking. It’s not a gamble or a fleeting desire. God’s hope is a confident expectation, an assurance that we can trust completely.

I miss my dad every day. There are moments when I want to share something with him or ask for his advice. When those waves of grief come, I take a deep breath and remember today’s scripture. Death was not the end for my dad, and it is not the end for your loved one who died in Christ.

Scripture urges us to use this hope as a source of comfort. Paul reminds us in **1 Thessalonians 4:13** that we do not grieve as those who have no hope. Our ultimate reality is eternity with God and the reunion with those we love. My present reality is that I miss my dad, but my hopeful expectation is bright.

Hebrews 11:1 tells us that faith is the substance of things hoped for. Hope, then, is the forward-looking element of our faith. The Greek word for hope, *elpizo*, means confident expectation. While there are few things in this world we can truly count on, with God, hope is - guaranteed.

THE SOURCE OF HOPE

Hope originates with God. **Psalms 12:5** and **Romans 15:13** affirm that He alone has the power to give hope. Through His Word, we see His promises and are reminded that Christ’s sacrifice secured those promises for us (**Romans 15:4**).

This hope is not something we earn—it’s a gift. **Ephesians 2:12** explains that because of Jesus’ death and resurrection, we are no longer separated from God. We can rest in His grace (**2 Thessalonians 2:16**), and by living a Spirit-filled life, we find hope overflowing within us (**Romans 15:13**).

THE POWER OF HOPE

Hope changes everything. It gives us joy and peace even in the midst of grief. It strengthens us to face each day without our loved ones and equips us with the endurance to carry on.

This hope also empowers us to minister to others. Like Paul, we can comfort those in sorrow with the comfort we've received. As a doctor, I now relate to patients and grieving families on a much deeper level. Hope has given me the strength to continue this ministry.

Lastly, hope guards us against despair. In the face of death, hope shields our hearts, reminding us that this life is not all there is. Charles Spurgeon once said, "Hope itself is like a star—not to be seen in the sunshine of prosperity, but only to be discovered in the night of adversity."

Hope doesn't erase grief, but it transforms it. It points us toward a future where all things are made new, where tears are wiped away, and where we will forever be in the presence of God.

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, thank You for the gift of hope that sustains us in our grief. Thank You for the assurance that death is not the end, and that we will be reunited with our loved ones in Christ. Fill our hearts with joy and peace as we trust in Your promises. May this hope strengthen us to face each day and encourage others along the way. In Jesus' name, Amen.

SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE

Reflect on your journey with hope. Write down moments when God's promises have sustained you. Consider the people or events that have deepened your confidence in Him.

If you are grieving, take time this week to write a letter to God. Share your feelings honestly, then thank Him for the hope of eternity. Meditate on **1 Thessalonians 4:13–19** and let its truth settle in your heart: death is not the end.

DAY 2

HOPE HAS A SONG

By Pastor Marlin D. Harris

"This I recall to my mind, Therefore I have hope. Through the Lord's mercies we are not consumed, Because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning; Great is Your faithfulness."

Lamentations 3:21-23 (NKJV)

The book of Lamentations is a poetic lament written by the prophet Jeremiah while he witnessed the destruction of Jerusalem and the subsequent exile of God's chosen people. It is a book laden with grief, painting a vivid picture of ruin, loss, and heartache. Lamentations embodies a nation's sorrow as Jerusalem, the heart of God's chosen people, is burned to ashes, and women and children are led away into the hopelessness of the Babylonian exile. Yet, nestled here, right in the middle of the book, is a spark of light—a reminder that even in the deepest sorrow, hope has a song. Jeremiah's words, "This I recall to my mind, therefore I have hope," rise up like a melody from the ashes. His bold declaration reminds us that God's mercies are new every morning, and His faithfulness will never change.

LOSING HOPE

I can't read these verses without reflecting on my own journey—a time when I thought hope had no song at all. When I was 19 years old, I found myself homeless, sleeping on a park bench in the heart of Atlanta, near the college I had just enrolled in. I was broke, hopeless, and filled with despair. Each day, I would carry my luggage to the Student Center and ask a few kitchen workers if I could leave my bags while I attended my classes for that day.

During the day, I worked hard to keep up appearances, trying to hide my situation from those around me. I'd retrieve my luggage in the evenings, grateful for whatever snacks those in the kitchen were kind enough to allow me to eat for free. But then, at night, when the Student Center closed, my

world grew cold and dark. I'd sit alone on the steps and wonder if I had made a mistake coming to Georgia to go to school and if I would be okay throughout the night. By 1 a.m., I would gather my luggage, head to the park, and find a bench or patch of grass to sleep on.

Lying there under the vast expanse of the night sky, I couldn't help but feel a deep, abiding sense of despair and hopelessness. Questions swirled in my mind: Had God forgotten about me? Did He even have a plan for my life? Did He know where I was? My anxious thoughts became the only lullaby that would lull me to sleep. In those moments, it felt as though hope had abandoned me. I couldn't imagine that hope could still "sing." Even though I was a minister and had preached to others, in my own heart, I didn't think that hope existed. In my head, I knew better, but my heart struggled to feel what my head knew to be true.

FINDING HOPE

But God hadn't forgotten me. In the midst of my suffering, small acts of kindness began to weave their melody into my life. A few classmates would offer me their couches to rest on in the dormitory lobbies. Someone would hand me their key pass so I could wash my clothes at the end of the week. Others offered me food or a little money to grab a bite to eat in the Student Center. At the time, these gestures seemed like drops in a bucket. But now I realize they were melodies of hope—softly, yet powerfully—singing their song in my heart. I refused to fall into despair. Though I cried myself to sleep and hid my face from some of the other kids because I was too ashamed to let them see me sleeping in the park, I never gave up. I never stopped humming hope's song in my heart.

MY SONG OF HOPE

Every morning, even as I woke up on a park bench, God met me with new mercies. His faithfulness was there, even when my circumstances said otherwise. He surrounded me with people who reflected His compassion, people who reminded me that no matter how dark the night seemed, the dawn was just around the corner. To me, those days were strangely, but wonderfully, precious days. They became permanent bricks in the foundation of what made me fall in love with God. While on that park bench, hope found me. Hope found me not through money, rescue, or an immediate change in my circumstances. No, hope found me with a little song:

"When peace like a river attendeth my way, when sorrows like sea billows roll. Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say, 'It is well, it is well, with my soul.'" This is the song that chased away the darkness for me. This is the melody that brought me hope.

The truth is, God's faithfulness doesn't always come the way we may expect it to. Sometimes, it's the quiet voice of a stranger's kindness, or the untraceable strength to get back up after falling down, or maybe even the courage to keep going when all seems lost. The song that hope sings in your heart may not be loud, but it is always persistent. It echoes through the chambers of our hearts, reminding us that no matter how dark it gets, we are not consumed because God's compassions will never fail.

THE PURPOSE OF HOPE

As I look back, I see how those days on the park bench played a significant part in the foundation of my life's ministry to homeless, hurting, and helpless individuals and families. He was my strength when I was weak, my light in the darkness, and the steady rhythm of hope that kept my heart from breaking. I learned that even in the most difficult seasons of life, the song of hope can still be heard if we just learn to listen close enough.

Today, you may find yourself in a season of ruin or despair. Perhaps you're lying awake at night, questioning God's plan, wondering if He sees you. Let this truth rise within you: His mercies are new every morning. His compassions never fail. Hope's song is still singing, even if it's just a faint melody in your heart.

Remember, hope doesn't deny that your pain is real; it simply declares that God's love is greater than your pain. No matter how dark the night, His faithfulness can't be shaken. Every morning, He offers us a fresh start, renewed strength, and a reason to keep going.

PRAYER

Lord, thank You for Your faithfulness that never wavers. When I am overwhelmed by despair, remind me that Your mercies are new every morning. Help me to hear the song of hope that You are singing over my life. May I trust in Your unchanging love and find strength in Your compassion. You are the anchor of my soul, and I rest in the promise that You will never leave me. In Jesus' name, Amen.

DAILY SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE

Find a quiet moment each morning this week to reflect on God's new mercies for the day. Write down three things you are grateful for and meditate on Lamentations 3:21-23. Let these truths renew your hope and frame your day with gratitude and trust in God's faithfulness.

Then, consider how you can be a melody of hope to someone else, whether it's through a kind word, a helping hand, a prayer, or just a smile. Let God use you to remind somebody else that hope has a song.



**Hope doesn't deny
that your pain is real;
it simply declares that
God's love is greater
than your pain.
No matter how dark the night,
His faithfulness
can't be shaken.**

DAY 3

ABBA FATHER

By Pastor Marlin D. Harris

"For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, 'Abba, Father.'"

Romans 8:15

Imagine the voice of a child, pure and without care or reservation, calling out the only name she knows for her father: "Daddy." That word is a call of love. Within it is the very essence and heart of dependence and trust. When a child uses that word, "Daddy," it comes from a little one who knows where love, safety, and strength reside. To a father's ears, there is no sweeter, more majestic sound than his little baby girl calling out for her daddy. This is the very invitation extended to us by God, our "Abba Father." He beckons us to move away from the staunch formality and fearfulness of a religiously shallow experience with Him and be enveloped by the strong embrace of His sheltering and protective love. Out of all the worthy causes and people that you and I may give our hearts to, this is the stunning truth that we must never forget: the One who formed the galaxies and placed His throne above the stars has chosen to make our small and often broken hearts His home.

I remember driving our daughter back from a youth concert that she was ministering at when she sang with an amazing worship leader named Ricardo Sanchez. After the concert, everyone else in the group were adults and had the freedom to spend the night in the city where they were ministering. But Bebe was just a young college student and had to get home for classes in the morning. She sang from her heart that night, and I watched the scores of young people at this concert being led into a passionate and personal worship of God as He used the incredible gift of music that He blessed her with to draw them closer to Him. After she said

her goodbyes to the group she was a part of, she climbed in the back seat of our car and “allowed” me to chauffeur her back to Atlanta. Not long after we mounted the highway, I looked back in the rearview mirror, and she was sound asleep.

My heart was overwhelmed with an indescribable joy as I watched this young girl, whom I love more than words could express, asleep, completely trusting her father to get her home safely. At that single moment in time, while glancing back at her asleep, I knew—although deeply limited by my human flaws and weaknesses—what it felt like to love and be loved the way our Heavenly Father loves us. It seems small, and even a little insignificant to some, but I was overwhelmed by the thought that this precious young girl, whom God has granted me the unspeakable honor of being a father to, trusted me to get her back home. Normally, we would argue and banter with each other about anything and everything we could think of when we were riding together, but not this night. Tonight, she trusted her dad to drive her home. It would be some ten years later that she would write the song, “Abba Father.” Not at all about her earthly dad, but about her Heavenly Father. Though this song was then unwritten, the sentiments of that song resounded in my heart a decade before she ever placed them on paper. God used that night to help shape my view of what His love for us could possibly look like.

THE CREATOR’S LOVE FOR ‘DUST’

My unquenchable love for my wife and my children grows deeper and deeper each day. But though my love for them is deeper than the depths of a hundred oceans, I am reminded that I am “dust” loving “dust.” However, the Father’s love for us is not “dust” loving “dust,” but it is “Deity” loving “dust.” There is no equivalent. There is no love that stands parallel to it. Listen to these words from my daughter’s song:

You made a million stars, but they don’t move Your heart,

The sun and moon give light, but from dust, You gave life.

Hallelujah, You have made me new,

Abba Father, my heart belongs to You.

The sheer vastness of the universe, where stars scatter across the heavens and where the sun and moon declare the glory of God, is more than head

and heart can take in. The grandeur of creation is simply breathtaking. Stars burn brightly across galaxies that have no end, and the sun sets our world aglow with warmth, light, and color. Yet, despite all that beauty, what moves God’s heart is not the splendor of the heavens but these humble human beings that He formed from dust. That truth simply amazes me. I can’t think of it without my eyes filling with tears. It’s the whisper of my heart reminding me that even though I am dust, He loves me. His heart beats for me and you—not for the glories of the cosmos, but for broken people like you and me.

Genesis 2:7 tells us that God breathed life into humanity, imparting His very image and essence into our dust-framed bodies. Did you hear that? He “breathed” into us. When He made the soaring birds of the air, the leaping gazelle, and the kingly animals of prey, He only called them into existence. When He desired fish to populate His waters with life and mystery, He merely spoke them into being. But not so with us. When He wanted someone He could love and show His heart to, He did something personal and intimate—He “breathed” into them His very own breath.

What does it mean that He “breathed” into them? This act was a declaration of love, setting us apart as the crown of His creation. He placed His Divine DNA into our fledgling and lifeless bodies, and in that very instant, man became a living soul. Wonder of all wonders, we live by the very breath of His mouth. Tell me... have you ever paused long enough to realize that your life, shaped by His hands, matters more to Him than all the wonders of the universe?

A THRONE TRADED FOR A CRADLE

Yes, your life matters so much that He left the splendors of His throne just to dwell among us. Why? Why would a God who needs nothing and owns everything choose to be bound to an earth where He owned nothing and needed everything? What could cause such a voluntary reversal of fortunes? The only answer to such madness is love. This is what it means to be madly in love with another. Listen to these words:

You came down from Your throne,

And You made this world Your home.

Just to reach my broken soul.

Jesus, Your love made me whole.

The image of the Creator descending from His heavenly throne to live among us is both awe-inspiring and humbling. Jesus left the perfection of heaven to enter the mess of earth. His was not a birth into power or privilege but into poverty, weakness, and rejection. An answer to why He would do such a thing is demanded of us. He came to mend what was broken, to restore what was lost, to heal what was shattered, and to love what was hopelessly flawed.

In Luke 19:10, Jesus declares His mission: “For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.” That includes every broken soul—yours and mine. When you first hear these words, and the truth of them sinks into your thoughts, you may immediately consider that this couldn’t possibly include you. You think you are too flawed to be loved like that. You believe you have made too many mistakes, sinned too deeply, hurt too many people, and damaged too much of your life to be loved this way. You feel this way because you don’t understand the nature of love.

That day when I looked at my daughter in the back seat asleep, I loved her not because she had given me any reasons whatsoever to love her. I loved her “just because.” My sons, Henry and Brandon, don’t have to do anything at all to receive my love. I love them “just because.” Love needs no reason. It keeps no scorecard. It has no prerequisites, and it demands no examination. If this is true of those whom we call “dad,” how much more true is it of Him whom we call “Abba.” This is the beauty of the gospel. Jesus doesn’t wait for us to be whole. He meets us at the very core of our brokenness and transforms us from the inside out.

BEING MADE “NEW”

You cannot experience the love of Christ and remain the same. His love is an irresistible force that changes us if we have truly come in contact with it. No, it doesn’t make us perfect—at least not yet—but it does make us “new.” 2 Corinthians 5:17 teaches that “if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature, old things are passed away; behold, all things are made new.”

“New”—what a beautiful word. Your old life, washed away by His relentless love; you are made new. Listen to these words:

Hallelujah,

You have made me new.

Abba Father,

My heart belongs to You.

When we grasp the depth of God’s love, it makes everything new—not on the outside but on the inside. “Though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day” (2 Corinthians 4:16). Because of Jesus, we are no longer slaves to fear, bound by our shame, or held hostage by our sins. We have been adopted into a new family and given the right to call our God “Abba, Father.” This term conveys intimacy and trust, much like “Daddy” or “Papa.”

You have not been renovated or given some kind of moral makeover. You have been made “new.” It’s about surrendering both our achievements and our failures to the One who loves us perfectly and finding our identity in Him. This is why He owns my heart. When we surrender our hearts to Him, we find love and purpose. When we give Him our life, only then do we truly find it. Our lives become a symphony of gratitude that echoes back to Him, in our weakened human version, the kind of love that He so perfectly gives to us.

PRAYER

Abba Father, thank You for loving me so deeply that You left Your throne to rescue my soul. Thank You for making me new, for transforming my brokenness into beauty. Teach me to rest in Your love, to trust in Your promises, and to live with a heart that belongs fully to You. May my life be a song of praise to Your faithfulness. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

DAILY SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE

Spend a few moments today reflecting on the ways God has made you new. Write down the areas of your life where you’ve experienced His transforming love. Are there parts of your heart you still need to surrender to Him? As you pray, call Him “Abba” and let the intimacy of that name remind you of His nearness and care. Then, find a quiet moment to sing or listen to a worship song that reminds you of His love, allowing this truth to sink into your heart and spirit.

DAY 4

FAITH DOES COME BY HEARING (ASK RAHAB)

By Dana L. Mann

“And as soon as we had heard these things, our hearts did melt, neither did there remain any more courage in any man, because of you: for the Lord your God, He is God in heaven above, and in earth beneath.”

Joshua 2:11 KJV

In reading the scripture above, I can almost visualize and hear Rahab talking to the two Israelite spies Joshua had sent to scout the Promised Land. I can see Rahab explaining why she risked her life and her family’s lives to hide these spies from the King of Jericho. I can hear the reverence in her voice as she spoke of the Lord God of Israel, recounting how she knew they were the future inhabitants of the Promised Land.

She had heard about how the Lord parted the Red Sea, allowing Israel to cross on dry land as they left Egypt. She had heard how He utterly destroyed the two Amorite kings on the other side of the Jordan. Rahab’s words revealed a heart fully persuaded that the Lord God of Israel was indeed the God of heaven above and earth below.

Rahab’s faith is an example of Divine Providence. God used the least likely person in Jericho—a prostitute—who happened to have the best location, the best vantage point, and the least suspected hiding spot, to protect His spies. Through His grace and mercy, God pricked Rahab’s heart, giving her ears to hear and the faith to believe in El Shaddai, the Lord God Almighty, and Jehovah Mephalti, the Lord our Deliverer. Her faith, born of what she heard, propelled her to action.

As Lia and Thiago Dantas wrote in *Red Rope of Faith*, Rahab’s faith and courage became part of God’s redemption story, weaving her into the lineage of Jesus Himself. What a testimony to the power of faith in action!

FAITH THAT MOVES US

Rahab’s story reminds us of the power of hearing and believing. When we face trials that seem insurmountable, when life feels overwhelming, or when we’re tempted to despair, we can focus on what we have read, heard, and experienced about the Lord.

Faith challenges us to move forward without seeing the whole plan, to act courageously, and to trust when others think it’s foolish. Rahab didn’t just believe in God—she acted on that belief, protecting the spies and ensuring her family’s safety.

Romans 15:4 reminds us, “For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.” Rahab’s example gives us hope and courage to put our faith into action.

Even if our names are not written in the Hall of Faith in Hebrews 11, we can rest assured they are written in the Lamb’s Book of Life. That is the ultimate reward of faith.

A GOD OF REDEMPTION

Rahab’s story also points us to the redemptive nature of God’s plan. The world knew her as a prostitute, yet God saw her as a vessel for His glory. In the same way, He looks beyond our shortcomings and failures to fulfill His purpose in us.

Charles Spurgeon once said, “A faith which works by love and purifies the soul is a faith of divine operation.” Rahab’s faith was just that—a divine work in her heart that transformed her life and legacy.

Her actions remind us that no matter our past, faith in God changes everything. The same God who redeemed Rahab stands ready to redeem and restore us, calling us to walk in obedience and trust.

PRAYER

Lord Jesus, forgive us for our unbelief and disobedience. Thank You for being the God of many chances. We praise You for Your grace, mercy, and redemption plan. Thank You for delivering us from sin and working all things together for our good and Your glory. Help us to walk in obedience to Your Word and fulfill the purpose You have for our lives. May we be

strong and courageous, trusting that You are the Lord God of heaven and earth, and that nothing is too hard for You. In Jesus' name, Amen.

DAILY SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE

Think of a situation where you must exercise faith and trust in the Lord for deliverance, direction, or the next step. Write down Scriptures that remind you of God's promises and His faithfulness.

Place His Word where you can see it throughout the day—on your mirror, your phone screen, or your journal. Let His promises keep your focus on what He has done, who He is, and His power to guide you forward. Trust Him as Rahab did, knowing He is faithful to deliver.



**Faith challenges us
to move forward
without seeing
the whole plan,
to act courageously,
and to trust
when others think
it's foolish.**



WEEK TWO
DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

TRUST THE PROCESS

DAY 5

FINDING STRENGTH IN WEAKNESS

By Pastor Marlin D. Harris

“He gives power to the weak, and to those who have no might He increases strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall, but those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.”

Isaiah 40:29-31 (NKJV)

Everything around us relies on the power of God for its life and vitality. Look at how strong and stately the trees stand rooted in the ground beneath it. Look at how graceful and effortless the birds fly from limb to limb without any signs of care. Notice the beauty of the flowers in the open field, or the majesty of the mountain peaks soaring above the horizon. All of God’s creation exists because He gives it strength. How much more does He desire to strengthen His children – those who are the crowning work of His creation? Let the words of Isaiah 40:29-31 become an anchor for our souls: God gives power to the weary and increases the strength of those who have no might. What I love about this passage, is that it doesn’t deny the reality of our weariness, nor the inevitability of our human limitations. Instead, while acknowledging that we are “weak and... have no might”, it audaciously points us to the One who alone can “increase” and “renew” our strength. These words paint for us an unforgettable picture of a strong God picking up the frail body of one His precious children, and breathing new life into him, filling him with strength, passion and courage for the journey ahead.

The prophet Isaiah knew the importance of hope. Without any doubt, the Israelites, worn down by captivity, must have wondered if their strength would ever return, and if their discouraged hearts could ever be healed. Yet Isaiah reminds them, and us, that man’s ability can never bring about

the strength and resilience of God. We do not thrive in this life as a result of our own efforts. Our wit and ingenuity is woefully insufficient to bring about God’s unfailing strength. This kind of strength can only come from waiting on the Lord.

THE STRENGTH OF A LIBERATOR

To understand this truth, we need only look at the life of Harriet Tubman, a woman who embodied the promises of Isaiah 40. Born into slavery, Tubman endured unimaginable hardship, physical labor and torture at the whims of her slave masters. Her life was a testament to human vulnerability and divine strength. Stripped of the human freedom and dignity she was created by God to have, she experienced the kind of weakness that Isaiah speaks of—a weariness that no human power could overcome.

Yet Harriet Tubman did not succumb to despair. Instead, she placed her hope in God and allowed His strength to carry her through. After escaping slavery herself, she could have chosen to stay in the safety of freedom. But Tubman felt a divine call, a God-given mission, to return to the South and rescue others. Leading over 70 enslaved individuals to freedom through the Underground Railroad, she earned the code name “Moses.” What Tubman was able to accomplish was not a result of physical strength, but it was the result of a spiritual strength rooted in an unwavering faith.

Time after time, she risked her life to lead other slaves to freedom on the Underground Railroad. She journeyed through the darkness, often without food or rest, driven by an unshakeable knowledge that God’s strength was greater than her own. In her own words she accredited her success to the guidance and power of God, when she is quoted in Sarah Bradford’s biography of her, saying, “*Twasn’t me, ‘twas the Lord! I always told Him, ‘I trust to you. I don’t know where to go or what to do, but I expect You to lead me,’ and He always did.*”¹

Harriet Tubman’s life reflects the essence of Isaiah 40:31: “*But those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength.*” She didn’t run from weakness, or fear, or the threats of losing her life at the hands of lynch mobs who vowed to kill her. No, Harriet found herself waiting on the Lord, and facing

¹ Bradford, Sarah H. Harriet, the Moses of Her People. New York: Geo. R. Lockwood & Son, 1886.

each of these deadly adversaries head-on. When we wait on God, we find power to rise above our circumstances, to “mount up with wings like eagles.”

HOPE FOR THE WEARY

Tubman’s story reminds us that no matter how weak or weary we feel, God’s strength is available to us. She could have been paralyzed by fear, and felt completely overwhelmed by the enormity of assignment that was placed upon her life. But instead, she chose to trust in the God who called her. Her life was a living testimony to the truth of Isaiah 40:29-31: God “*gives power to the faint and increases the strength of those who have no might.*”

Like Harriet, we are called to trust in the Lord’s provision, rely on His strength, and persevere in the face of adversity. We may not be leading others to freedom through dangerous terrain, muddy swamps and dark starless nights, but we are each on our own personal journeys of faith. I have a burden to carry and so do you. I have obstacles to overcome, and so do you. The news that rejoices my heart and fills me with hope is that any man who walks with God, never walks alone.

When you feel like you’ve simply run out of gas. You can’t take another step, and you feel your faith slipping through your fingers, remember this: God is the source of your strength. Trust Him, He will renew you. There is a refreshing that He provides that can come from no other source. Lean on Him and let Him empower you, and enable you to soar on wings like eagles.

LESSONS FOR OUR LIVES

What can we learn from the timeless truths of Isaiah 40:29-31, and Harriet Tubman’s extraordinary life?

1. **We Learn to Acknowledge our Limitations.** Like Tubman, we will face seasons when our strength is insufficient, and the challenges before us seem larger than our power to bear. This is not the time to run away from the Lord, this is the time to run towards Him, surrendering all of our strength to Him and trusting His power to sustain us.
2. **We Learn to Embrace the Discipline of Waiting on the Lord.** The Hebrew word for “wait” in this passage implies ‘active trust’, not ‘passive doubt’. Literally, waiting on God in scripture means to possess a patient expectation that God will do everything He has promised. Be assured that waiting on the Lord is not passive; it is a

deliberate act of faith. It means seeking Him in prayer, meditating on His Word, and trusting that He is working behind the scenes even when we can’t see it.

3. **We Learn That the strength God Provides isn’t Just for Surviving—it’s For Thriving.** Isaiah’s imagery of mounting up with wings like eagles reminds us that when God strengthens us, it enables us to rise above life’s challenges, to see our circumstances from His perspective. He gives us the endurance to run our race and the resilience to keep walking. Even though the night is long, keep walking. Even though the journey is hard, keep walking. It’s a strange paradox. The more you walk, you soon find the power to run, and the more you run, you soon find the power to fly... like eagles.

PRAYER

Lord, I confess that I often try to rely on my own strength, and I grow weary under the weight of life’s challenges. Help me to trust in You, to wait on Your timing, and to lean into Your power. Renew my strength, Lord, so I can run the race You’ve set before me. Thank You for the example of faithful servants like Harriet Tubman, who trusted You through trials and triumphs. May I find courage and hope in Your unchanging faithfulness. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

DAILY SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE

Take a walk outside and observe the world around you. Notice the strength of the trees, the flight of birds, and the steady rhythm of nature. Reflect on how these elements rely on God’s design and provision. As you walk, pray and thank God for His sustaining strength in your life. Let this time be a reminder that He renews your strength, just as He renews creation daily.

DAY 6

YIELDING TO THE PROCESS,
YIELDS GREATER FRUIT

By Dana L. Mann

“I am the True Vine, and My Father is the Vinedresser... I am the Vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit.”

John 15:1, 5a NKJV

When I was a child, every summer meant leaving the familiar comforts of Atlanta, Georgia, to spend time in Grady, Alabama, with my grandmother. To me, this was no summer vacation—it was exile. I hated the slow pace, the farm work, the bugs, the animals, and the chores. The outhouse, the party-line telephone, and the endless boredom were the highlights—or lowlights—of every visit.

But as much as I resisted those summers, a lesson was being planted in my heart as surely as the crops my grandmother tended. I vividly remember watching her grow muscadines and scuppernongs, vine-grown fruits larger than grapes but smaller than plums. Every season, she devoted herself to the care of those vines: pruning, watering, pulling them off the ground, tying them up high, removing weeds, ensuring sunlight, battling pests, and discarding damaged or unproductive vines. She labored endlessly so the harvest would be abundant.

I didn’t appreciate it at the time, but years later, as I studied John 15, I realized how much I had learned about God’s Word through her work. My grandmother was living out the role of a vinedresser, though she never used the term. Her goal—to produce the healthiest and most abundant fruit—mirrored God’s purpose for our lives. We are to produce much fruit that glorifies Him.

THE WORK OF THE VINE AND THE VINEDRESSER

In John 15, Jesus paints a vivid picture: He is the Vine, we are the branches, and God the Father is the Vinedresser. The Father’s goal is for us to bear

much fruit that glorifies Him. This fruit comes only when we remain connected to the Vine.

The pruning process—the trials and tribulations we endure—is essential. Pruning removes what hinders our growth and strengthens our dependence on God. It cuts away the unnecessary to make room for the abundant. Though painful, pruning allows us to remain faithful and obedient, trusting that God’s Word is powerful enough to both cut and heal. As Hebrews 4:12 declares, “For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.”

I remember watching my grandmother’s unpruned vines produce fruit, but it was sparse and weak compared to the harvest from her pruned vines. Similarly, when we resist God’s pruning, we may produce something, but it won’t be the abundant fruit He desires.

Vines left untended—those lying on the ground—often spoiled, became infested with pests, or harbored snakes. Jesus warns us in John 15:6, “If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned.” Disconnected branches resemble the spiritually vulnerable—those the enemy prowls around seeking to devour. Jesus teaches that He is the Vine, offering us nourishment and Living Water, and He is the Light. We simply need to stay connected and trust that everything the Vinedresser does is for our good and His glory.

ABIDING IN THE VINE

To abide in Christ is to remain fully connected to Him. He is our source of nourishment, the Living Water, and the Light that sustains us. Just as a branch cannot bear fruit apart from the vine, we cannot bear spiritual fruit unless we remain in Christ.

This process is not easy, but it is purposeful. Romans 5:3–4 reminds us that “suffering produces endurance, endurance builds character, and character brings hope”. Trusting in the Vinedresser’s wisdom, we find that every trial, pruning, and refining moment is designed for our good and His glory.

Theologian Charles Spurgeon once said, “It is the branch that bears the fruit that feels the knife.” Pruning is evidence of God’s care, not His

neglect. The trials we face are proof that He is working in us to produce something far greater than we can imagine.

A LESSON FROM THE HARVEST

Looking back, I now see that my grandmother's labor on the vines was a metaphor for God's work in our lives. She carefully removed weeds that threatened growth, tied up vines to expose them to light, and discarded branches that no longer served their purpose. Her goal was not just fruit but abundant fruit—fruit that could nourish others, be preserved, and bring joy.

God's goal for us is no different. He prunes, waters, nourishes, and provides all we need to thrive. When we yield to His process, we experience the fullness of what it means to abide in Christ and bear fruit that glorifies Him.

PRAYER

Dear Heavenly and Gracious Father, our Vinedresser, thank You for caring for us so deeply. Forgive us for questioning Your process or thinking our trials are purposeless. Help us to trust in Your pruning, knowing that it is for our good and Your glory. Strengthen us to remain faithful and connected to You. Teach us to rejoice in our sufferings, recognizing that they produce endurance, character, and hope. May we yield to Your process and bear fruit that glorifies Your name. In Jesus' name, Amen.

DAILY SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE

Set aside time this week to study John 15 and reflect on what it means to abide in Christ. Write down the promises God gives to those who remain connected to Him.

Consider areas in your life where you are resisting pruning. Pray for the strength to trust God's process and yield to His work in you. Trust that His pruning is not to harm but to prepare you to bear much fruit for His glory.

DAY 7

SPIRITUAL ELASTICITY

By Nakia Means

“Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content: I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”

Philippians 4:11–13 (NKJV)

It was a crisp Saturday morning, the kind of day where the sunshine deceives you into thinking it's warm, only for a sharp chill to greet you the moment you step outside. Preparing for a jog, I grabbed a jacket and started my run. The first mile was cold. By the second, I felt just right. By the third, I was peeling off layers, sweat pouring as the temperature climbed. As I rounded the last stretch to my porch, a whisper surfaced in my spirit: *“The season is changing, Nakia. Prepare yourself.”*

Life, much like that run, is full of changing seasons. One moment, we're bracing against the chill of trials; the next, we're basking in the warmth of God's abundant blessings. We must remain prepared for various conditions as we each run the God-ordained race set before us. This is what I call “spiritual elasticity”. The key isn't to resist the fluctuating seasons of life, but to remain spiritually elastic—flexible enough to adapt to whatever conditions arise while staying anchored in Christ. We are instructed to flex between the mundane and the miraculous. Our spiritual elasticity and maturity are fortified as we lean on the Lord through both the abased and abundant seasons of life. We become stabilized and fully equipped to steward highs and lows because we rely on Jesus Christ, the only true constant in our lives.

LEARNING THE SECRET OF CONTENTMENT

The Apostle Paul knew this lesson well. When he penned his letter to the church of Philippi, he had just been imprisoned for casting a demon out of a fortune-telling slave. While writing from his prison cell, Paul reflected

on his life: a journey filled with dizzying highs and devastating lows. His words in Philippians 4:11–13 reveal a hard-won wisdom, one born from the turbulence of his walk with God.

One of the keywords in Philippians 4:12 is “learned.” Like all of us, Paul was not born with spiritual elasticity. Instead, he writes from a rich perspective constructed by the turbulence in his life. After all, the same man who wrote two-thirds of the New Testament was once a staunch persecutor of believers. After encountering Jesus on his way to Damascus, his life reflected exactly what the Holy Spirit said: I will show him how much he will suffer for my name (Acts 9:16). Paul’s life was marked by extremes. He preached the gospel boldly and witnessed miracles, yet he was also beaten, imprisoned, and ultimately martyred. From the mountaintops of spiritual triumph to the valleys of suffering, Paul discovered the secret: *Christ is the constant*. He could endure all things because of the strength he drew from Jesus. This is what the apostle Paul meant when he said in Philippians 4:13, “I can do all this through Christ who gives me strength”.

Many believers quote Paul’s famous words: “I can do all things through Christ.” Remember that he learned this through extreme highs and lows while walking closely with the Lord. At this lower point of his ministry, he poured his heart out to the church about his hopeful expectation of what awaited him. Paul maintained this perspective: “For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.” (Philippians 1:21)

THE OIL OF PREPARATION

In every season, the Holy Spirit wants to produce precious oil within you, further conforming you to the image of Christ. The oil that fuels a lamp is not created during moments of ease, but through the process of crushing. Just as olives are pressed to extract their oil, our trials produce the spiritual “oil” we need to sustain us during seasons of trial and testing. Paul’s resilience reminds us that God uses both abundance and adversity to shape us. The same God who walks with us in the valley, is the same God who stands with us on the mountaintop. Each season—whether one of hardship or harvest—serves a purpose in conforming us to the image of Christ.

There is a quote by Corrie ten Boom, a woman who endured the horrors of a Nazi concentration camp yet clung to God’s faithfulness that illustrates this truth best: *“When a train goes through a tunnel and it gets dark, you don’t throw away the ticket and jump off. You sit still and trust the engineer.”*

The oil produced privately during the low valleys of life is the very thing we need to flourish on the mountaintops. The Lord wants us to succeed in every season and is faithful to carry us from one season to the next.

FINDING STRENGTH IN EVERY SEASON

Paul’s words in Philippians 4:12 challenges us to embrace both the highs and the lows of life. When we are “abased,” we learn humility. When we “abound,” we learn gratitude. When we are “abased” we learn endurance. When we “abound” we learn generosity. Each season has its own lessons, its own blessings, and its own opportunities enclosed within it.

Highs and lows -
 Lord, You’re with me either way it goes
 Should I rise or should I fall.
 Even so -
 Lord, Your mercy is an even flow
 Should I rise or should I fall,
 You are faithful through it all.

Aodhan King, Ben Tan, Joel Houston

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, please hold my hand as I walk through the highs and lows of life. Your Word declares that all things work together for the good of those who love You and are called according to Your purpose (Romans 8:28). In seasons of trial, help me to come out of the fire refined and not burned. In seasons of triumph, give me the wisdom to steward the success you give me to enjoy. In Jesus’ holy name, Amen.

DAILY SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE

Reflect on your most recent mountaintop season and your most recent valley season. What did you learn about God in those seasons, and how did it change you? As you reflect, spend some time thanking the Lord for His faithfulness to you through your highs and lows. Then, identify one practical way to honor Him in the current season you are in—whether it’s through gratitude, faithfulness, or a renewed commitment to His Word.

As you move forward, remember: the seasons may change, but God remains constant. Draw your strength from Him and press on.

DAY 8

YOU ARE AN OVERCOMER

By Dr. Morcease J. Beasley

*“He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God,
and he shall be my son.”*

Revelation 21:7 KJV

During the 20th day of the church fast in 2024, after a long week that ended with an urgent call from my doctor to schedule an appointment about a recent test result, I woke up thinking about heaven. No, I wasn't concerned about death or dying. Inspired by the Bible study Pastor had been leading on the book of Revelation, I turned to chapters 21 and 22 and became excited about the prospect of heaven. As I read Revelation 21, the reality of God's tabernacle being with us captivated me. However, my attention stopped at Revelation 21:7, which declares, “He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son.”

The word “overcometh” resonated deeply with me. The Apostle John uses this action-packed word to describe anyone born of God who believes that Jesus Christ is the Son of God (1 John 5:4–5). John reminds believers that they have already overcome the wicked one (1 John 2:13–14; 4:4).

Often, we define ourselves by the challenges we overcome—whether they are health issues, financial setbacks, or unhealthy relationships. While it's natural to pray about these things and seek victory over them, John invites us to a higher dimension of thinking and living.

A HIGHER PERSPECTIVE

John elevates our perspective, teaching that those who are born of God and believe in Jesus Christ are already overcomers. This victory isn't dependent on life's circumstances but on the reality of living a life rooted in faith in Jesus as the Son of God. Just as Christ overcame the world, so too will we, through the Spirit of God within us.

Pastor has been teaching about the seven churches in Revelation during this fast. The Apostle John, instructed by Jesus Christ, wrote letters to

these churches, each concluding with a promise to those who overcome. As I reflected on these promises, I found myself marveling at the incredible assurances given to overcomers throughout church history and today.

Take a moment to consider the seven promises given to overcomers:

1. **Ephesus:** Overcomers will eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God (Revelation 2:7).
2. **Smyrna:** Overcomers will not be hurt by the second death (Revelation 2:11).
3. **Pergamos:** Overcomers will eat of the hidden manna and receive a white stone with a new name known only to the recipient (Revelation 2:17).
4. **Thyatira:** Overcomers will have power over the nations and be given the morning star (Revelation 2:26–28).
5. **Sardis:** Overcomers will be clothed in white garments, their names will not be blotted from the Book of Life, and Jesus will confess their names before the Father and His angels (Revelation 3:5).
6. **Philadelphia:** Overcomers will be made pillars in the temple of God and will have written upon them the name of God, the name of the city of God (New Jerusalem), and Christ's new name (Revelation 3:12).
7. **Laodicea:** Overcomers will sit with Christ on His throne, just as He overcame and sat down with the Father on His throne (Revelation 3:21).

YOUR VICTORY IN CHRIST

Scripture affirms that you are an overcomer in Jesus Christ, regardless of your circumstances. Rejoice in the knowledge that your name is written in the Lamb's Book of Life and that the promises for overcomers are yours. These promises only hint at the glory of God you will experience for eternity.

Remember, every life circumstance is temporary and unworthy of defining your identity or victory. Your identity and victory are found in Jesus Christ—through His life, death, burial, and resurrection. As Paul exhorts in 2 Corinthians 4:18, “While we look not at the things which are seen, but at

the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.”

You are an overcomer, and your victory is eternal in and through Jesus Christ our Lord. You will inherit all things, God will be your God, and you will be His child—forever.

PRAYER

God, I thank You for choosing me for eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. Today, I declare that I am an overcomer through the blood of Jesus Christ and the word of my testimony. I rejoice in knowing that my eternity is secure and my victory is certain, regardless of my circumstances. Thank You, Father, for Your goodness, grace, and unfailing love. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

DAILY SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE

Take time to train your mind and thoughts not to define your life by temporary circumstances but by who Jesus Christ is and what He has done for you. Whenever your thoughts revert to focusing on your challenges, redirect them to your identity in Christ and His eternal promises.

DAY 9

HOLD STILL

By Nakia Means

“...for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.”

Philippians 2:13 NKJV

Patient rooms in doctors’ offices have always made me uneasy. The harsh, sterile lights beam down from the ceiling, reflecting off the stark white paper stretched over the patient’s chair. The walls are lined with brochures, each displaying conditions from diabetes to the flu. Then there’s that red biohazard box mounted on the wall—a container for used syringes that always catches my attention.

Sitting in one of those rooms, my mind wandered. I imagined the stories behind each discarded syringe, wondering what they had been used for. My thoughts were interrupted by a knock at the door. “May I come in?” a voice called out. I took a deep breath and reluctantly answered, “Yes.”

The door opened, and in he walked. His presence was warm, instantly making the room feel less daunting. Seeing my nervousness, he smiled gently and said, “There’s nothing to fear. This will be over soon.”

Knowing what was coming—a shot—made me stiffen. “Relax your arm,” he instructed. I took a deep breath, trying to loosen up, but the moment I felt the syringe near my skin, I instinctively shifted in discomfort. His eyes met mine, calm but firm, as he said, “Hold still.”

The prick of the needle stung, but he stayed present, engaging with me the entire time. “This will be over soon,” he reassured me.

That word “soon” felt relative. A minute passed, then an hour. An hour turned into days, weeks, and months. This wasn’t a regular shot, and this wasn’t a regular doctor. This doctor knew everything about me. During a

routine check-up, ‘He’ had diagnosed my heart and decided it was time to inject more of the Holy Spirit into me.

HOLDING STILL THROUGH THE PROCESS

His instruction to “hold still” was critical. If I moved—even slightly—I would only hurt myself. By submitting to His procedure, the fruit of His Spirit would flow into my life: His action-driven love, His chaos-proof peace, His indestructible long-suffering. But I had to resist the urge to rush through the process, to leave the patient room prematurely, unprepared for what lay ahead.

In **Philippians 2:13**, Paul soberingly reminds us that it is God who works within our hearts, not us. Our job is to submit and surrender to His process. A few verses before this statement, Paul exhorts the recipients of his letter to obey God and work out their salvation with fear and trembling. We let God work in us, and we work out our salvation by obeying His Word diligently and swiftly. This doesn’t mean earning our salvation but responding to God’s work with reverence and obedience. When we do, we remain in the healthy posture of surrender, demonstrating our utmost reverence for Lord.

THE SAFEST PLACE TO BE

Friends, this is the safest place to be. In the posture of submission, we experience the fullness of God’s power, peace, and provision. This is where His purposes for our lives come to fruition. Yet, all of these promises hinge on our ability to do one thing: hold still.

- As the Lord produces more of Himself in you...
- As He injects the fruit of His Spirit into your character...
- As He prepares you to thrive exceedingly, abundantly above all you could ask or think...

Remember to hold still. Even when the process feels endless or painful, trust His timing and His purpose. It will be over soon, and the outcome will be worth it all.

PRAYER

Lord, it is not always easy to submit to Your ways, but I know they are higher than mine. Through the power of Your Spirit, help me to fully surrender to the work You are doing in me. Even when the process is painful, I rejoice in knowing that You are conforming me to the image of Your Son, Jesus Christ. Strengthen me to remain still and trust You completely. Keep me near the cross, where I see the ultimate example of surrender. I love You, Lord, and I trust You with all of me. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

DAILY SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE

Take a moment to pause and ask the Holy Spirit to reveal what He is working to produce in you this season. Is it patience? A servant’s heart? Greater wisdom? Write these areas down, and prayerfully consider how God may be using your current circumstances to grow you.

Reflect on **Philippians 2:13** and pray for strength to remain still in His process. Finally, seek opportunities to actively practice the qualities He is cultivating in you, knowing that He is working all things for your good and His glory.

DAY 10

THE POWER OF PRAYER

By Tapika Howard

“Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray...”

James 5:13

Like many, my pursuit of God in prayer initially stemmed from a desire to receive something beyond my natural reach. The Scripture says in James 5:13, “Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray...” A diagnosis from the doctor drove me into the presence of God with an earnest plea for healing. Yet, while I was fervently seeking the manifestation of my personal desires, God’s agenda was different. His focus was on drawing me into a deeper relationship with Him as Lord and Savior, while redirecting my heart to intercede for others.

What began as desperation for my healing evolved into a consuming passion for God’s presence, overtaken by His love and the discovery of His statutes. Somewhere along the journey, my perspective shifted—from pleading for a personal breakthrough to fervently praying for others to encounter God’s transformative power.

Prayer became a divine vehicle of breakthrough. For me, it served as the way to get closer to God and break generational cycles in my life. Prayer and intercession became the instruments God used time and time again to move me to the other side of my struggles. This is no coincidence. Jesus, according to Hebrews 7:25, “ever lives to make intercession for us.” He is seated at the right hand of the Father, interceding for us even now (Romans 8:34). Prayer isn’t just a duty; it is a mechanism through which God births His promises in our lives.

The Scripture in James 5:16 declares, “...pray one for another, that you may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.” I discovered this truth firsthand. God’s pathway to my healing was hidden in my prayers for others. I sowed seeds of uninterrupted intercession for women longing for children. In the midst of my own suffering, those

sacrificial prayers brought healing to my own barren heart. Today, our two daughters stand as living testimonies of what happens when we align our hearts with God’s purposes.

THE CONDITION OF THE HEART

The Scripture in 2 Peter 1:3-5, 8 says, “According as His divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him that hath called us to glory and virtue: whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises...if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

If I’m transparent, I wasn’t barren because of a medical diagnosis. I was barren because unforgiveness had taken root in my heart. This is a critical connection between prayer and the condition of the heart. Matthew 5:8 says, “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.” The state of our hearts directly impacts the harvest of our prayers.

The Parable of the Sower in Mark 4 provides a vivid illustration of this truth. Jesus explains that the seed is the Word of God, and the soil represents the attitudes and conditions of our hearts. Some seeds fall by the wayside, some on stony ground, and others among thorns. Only the seed sown on good ground yields a fruitful harvest.

The incorruptible Word of God, as stated in 1 Peter 1:23, is pure and powerful, impervious to external conditions. Yet, a hardened or unforgiving heart can stifle its growth, causing spiritual crop failure. To see God’s Word manifest in our lives, we must continually ask, as David did in Psalm 51:10, “Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me.”

In Hebrews 4:12, the Scripture declares, “For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.” This verse highlights the Word of God’s unique ability to discern both the thoughts and intents of a person’s heart. It is also able to sever anything in our hearts that may hinder our prayers.

THE NECESSITY OF PRAYER

In 2 Peter 1:8, the Scripture says, “...if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the

knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.” When the Word of God is received into good ground—a receptive and pure heart—it should result in prayers that are abounding. The Greek word for *abound* is *perisseuo*, meaning “to be abundantly furnished.” Our goal should be to cultivate a pure heart so that we can release prayers that are abundantly furnished and effective.

We cannot declare a holy Word while harboring “holes” in our hearts caused by resentment, unforgiveness, bitterness, or other barriers. A pure heart is essential if we want to truly see God. Matthew 5:8 reminds us, “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.”

Lastly, in Matthew 26, God is preparing to bring ultimate deliverance from spiritual death and slavery through the sacrifice of the ultimate Passover Lamb, Jesus Christ. This chapter shows Jesus in preparation mode, fully aware of the weight of what is to come. By the time He reaches the Garden of Gethsemane, He instructs His disciples to “watch and pray.” Yet, even as Jesus prays fervently three times, His disciples fall asleep each time.

Luke’s Gospel offers insight into their fatigue, stating they were “asleep from sorrow” (Luke 22:45). However, it is clear that Jesus wanted them to remain awake—not just physically, but spiritually—to teach them another vital lesson about prayer. Earlier in Luke 11:1-4, one of the disciples had asked, “Lord, teach us to pray...” Here in Gethsemane, they missed one of the greatest opportunities to learn by watching Jesus Himself pray in the midst of great suffering.

Three days later, on the road to Emmaus, Jesus reflects with His disciples, saying, “Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into His glory?” (Luke 24:26). Jesus wanted them to grasp the intrinsic connection between suffering and transformation. He demonstrated how prayer strengthens us to carry the tension of suffering without succumbing to despair.

Consider these examples in Scripture:

- Jesus prayed in Gethsemane while bearing the weight of the cross.
- Hannah prayed in her barrenness.
- Ezekiel prayed in the aftermath of his wife’s death.
- Paul and Silas prayed and sang praises while imprisoned.

In 1 Thessalonians 5:17, we are exhorted to “pray without ceasing.” This

consistent, unyielding commitment to prayer is the key to maintaining a pure heart and staying connected to the love of God. Let nothing—no pain, bitterness, or discouragement—separate you from Him. Keep praying, even in the midst of suffering, until transformation comes.

PRAYER

Father God in the name of Jesus, as your sons and daughters, we desire to let nothing separate us from you, your love or your promises for our lives. Whatever role we played in the hindering the manifestation of our own prayers, we repent right now and confess our faults before you. We ask that you create in us a clean heart and renew the right spirit within us that our prayers be not hindered. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

DAILY SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE

Reflect on prayer requests you’ve made in the past that remain unanswered. Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal the condition of your heart at the time you prayed them. Write down any insights He gives, and ask God to realign your heart with His will. Commit to daily reading of the Word and self-examination, ensuring your heart remains fertile ground for the seed of God’s promises to grow.

DAY 11

ANCHORED IN WISDOM: NAVIGATING LIFE'S STORMS

By Pastor Marlin D. Harris

*“Hold fast to wisdom, do not let it go; guard it,
for it is your life.” (NIV)*

Proverbs 4:13

A STEADY COMPASS IN A RAGING SEA

For many of us, the following paints a vivid picture of the chaos that abounds in our lives:

“The wind is howling with an unrelenting fury, and the waves are crashing against my little ship with unforgiving repetition. The surging sea is rocking the deck beneath my feet so violently that I fear I won’t be able to stand upright much longer. Here I am, bracing myself against the rage of Mother Nature. I’m drenched. I’m shaken. And this vast ocean hides any sign of a hint of landfall. What’s worse? I am without a compass, and my ship is helpless against the currents. I am being tossed about at the mercy of the sea, facing this chaos without an anchor.”

This isn’t just a scene of a boat in a storm; this is a vivid picture of what life often feels like—tumultuous and unsteady. In the whirlwind of emotional, spiritual, and personal storms, you and I can feel adrift, overwhelmed by the roar of competing opinions, endless information, and constant distractions.

Yet, **Proverbs 4:13** contains the steadying compass we need. It issues the command to “Hold fast to instruction, do not let it go; guard it, for it is your life.” This verse reminds us that wisdom, grounded in God’s eternal truth, serves as our steady anchor. It doesn’t silence the storm but equips us to navigate it with purpose, clarity, and strength. It is the unmovable anchor

that keeps us grounded in the truth of God’s Word while we are seeking to navigate the storms of life.

DWELLING ON THE WORD: CULTIVATING A STEADY HEART

There are many truths that we can discover in life. There are mathematical truths, scientific truths, philosophical truths, moral truths, and even religious truths. But nowhere in life can we find the Truth about life as comprehensively and completely as we find it in the Word of God. We should not be surprised to find that the God who created life possesses the unique and abiding truths about it. When you and I read the Word of God, we are reading the eternal assessment of how God designed life to be lived. God’s Word is not a fleeting idea or a quick fix—it is the eternal truth that nourishes our souls.

Yet, like a gardener tending to her precious field, we must be intentional about cultivating God’s wisdom in our lives. Consider for a moment how diligent the gardener is. She is watering those tender buds daily, pulling weeds, reinforcing the soil with nourishment, and waiting patiently for growth. In the same way, dwelling on God’s Word requires consistent effort. It is not enough to skim the surface or glaze over the profundity of its truths; we must immerse ourselves in the depths of the Word of God.

The more we meditate on Scripture, the more its revelations take root in our hearts. Like the ship’s compass, the Word orients us, pointing us toward true north. It realigns our perspective, drawing us back to the unchanging power of God when the stormy currents of life rock us to our core and knock us off course.

APPLYING THE WORD: LIVING WISDOM

How might this look in our daily lives? Well, living by God’s principles might mean choosing forgiveness when bitterness feels easier or standing firm in integrity when dishonesty offers a quicker path to success. It’s in the thicket of these moments that wisdom proves its greatest value.

But how do we “hold fast to instruction” as Proverbs 4:7 commands us? How do we guard it as our life? I have come to discover that the answer is actively seeking the wisdom of the Word of God and letting it penetrate our hearts.

We do this simply by:

1. **Dwelling on the Word:** Just as that gardener tends to her plants, we must cultivate the seeds of God’s Word in our hearts. We must not merely read it, but meditate on it, and allow it to wash its waves of wisdom over our souls. We can’t expect it to take root and grow if we only glance at it casually.
2. **Living by the Word:** We must remember that wisdom is not merely intellectual; it is profoundly practical. God’s instructions are meant to shape our daily decisions, guide us in our actions, ultimately developing our character. It’s not enough to know what is right—we must live what is right.
3. **Telling Others of the Word:** Sharing the truth of God’s Word is an essential part of guarding it. As we share our faith, we deepen our own understanding and commit to living in accordance with its principles. Dwelling on the Word of God, applying the Word of God, and sharing the Word of God is an amazing cycle that produces growth and spiritual maturity.

A LEGACY OF WISDOM

Consider the life of Mahatma Gandhi, who carried the banner of nonviolent justice and love in an unjust culture of Indian subjugation to British oppression. Rooted in the wisdom of God’s Word, he reminded the world that love triumphs over hate and that equality is not just an ideal but a divine mandate. His willingness to share and live in an unusual wisdom inspired generations and reshaped history.

What legacy of wisdom are you leaving? If wisdom is the truth of God relayed through practical instruction, then how are you using God’s truths to shape your life and uplift others?

THE WISDOM IS NOT FOUND IN PERFECTION, IT IS FOUND IN PERSISTENCE

The wisdom is not about perfection, it’s about persistence. It is about returning to the Word again and again, letting it shape our character and

guide our actions. It is about building a life anchored in God’s eternal truth, a life that not only withstands the storms but shines as a beacon to others.

When we dwell on His Word, live its principles, and share its truths, we embody the wisdom that Proverbs 4:7 calls us to guard so carefully. Like the captain steering a ship through uncharted waters, we are equipped to navigate life’s complexities with confidence and grace. Holding fast to wisdom is not always easy. There will be moments when the attractions of this world tempts us to let go of the wise treasure that we have found. Times when fear, doubt, or frustration clouds our judgment. But even then, if we allow it, the Word of God will prove to be a steady compass, guiding us back to His path.

Psalms 119:105 reminds us, “Through Your precepts I get understanding: therefore I hate every false way. Your word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.” Allowing the light of the Word of God to serve as our honing beacon in the darkness is the only way to ensure that we will make it safely home.

My prayer is that His wisdom serves as your guide.

PRAYER

Lord, thank You for the gift of Your Wisdom. Thank you that it is a steady compass in the chaos of life. Help me to hold fast to Your instruction, to treasure it as the foundation of my life. When distractions arise, guide me back to Your truth. Strengthen my heart to apply Your wisdom daily and to share it boldly with others. May my life be a reflection of Your love and an instrument of Your peace. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

DAILY SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE

Identify one area of your life where you feel adrift—where the winds of life have pulled you off course. Find a verse from Scripture that speaks directly to that area and commit to memorizing it this week. Meditate on it daily, allowing it to reshape your perspective and anchor your heart in God’s truth.



WEEK THREE
DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

LOVE, GRACE & GRATITUDE

DAY 12

YOUR HEAVENLY FATHER: THE GOD OF A SECOND CHANCE

By Jewell Jackson

“I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely, for My anger has turned from him.”

Hosea 14:4 (NKJV)

The book of Hosea is a powerful testament to God’s unending love and grace. Despite Israel’s repeated unfaithfulness, God offers them a second chance, urging them to return to Him. Hosea 14:4 speaks of God’s promise to heal, restore, and love freely. It is a message for all of us—no matter how far we have strayed, our Heavenly Father is the God of a second chance.

Israel’s waywardness symbolizes the many times we fall short, wander away from God’s path, and make choices that lead us into spiritual drought. The story of Hosea’s pursuit of his unfaithful wife, Gomer, illustrates God’s relentless love for us. Even when we turn away, God’s heart longs for us to return. The call is clear: no sin is too great, and no distance is too far for God’s grace to reach us. He stands ready to embrace us again, to heal our wounds, and to restore what was lost.

During this season of fasting, God is calling us to come back to Him. He is waiting with open arms, not to condemn but to restore. The invitation is to lay down the guilt, shame, and burdens that have kept us away. God’s love is not dependent on our perfection; it is based on His nature. He desires to heal our brokenness and offer us a fresh start—a chance to walk in His freedom and purpose.

A PROMISE OF RESTORATION

God’s grace extends beyond just forgiving our sins; He offers complete restoration. Like the prodigal son who returned home and was welcomed with open arms and celebration, God is waiting to celebrate our return. His healing goes deep, touching every area of our lives that needs

restoration—whether they’re emotional wounds, spiritual dryness, or broken relationships.

The beauty of restoration is that it doesn’t merely erase the pain of the past—it transforms it into something meaningful. God takes the broken pieces of our lives and creates something beautiful, showing us that nothing is beyond His ability to redeem. This is the essence of a second chance: not just to move forward, but to be renewed in every way.

FINDING FREEDOM IN GRACE

During this fast, we are invited to receive His love afresh. It’s a call to release the idea that we need to earn His favor. God’s love is not based on our performance; it is based on His character. He loves us because we are His children, and nothing can change that. Embrace this truth and let it be a source of strength and comfort.

As you fast, allow God’s love to fill the empty places in your heart. Let His grace remind you that His forgiveness is complete and His restoration is perfect. This is not about striving to fix ourselves but about surrendering to the One who has already done the work on our behalf. His grace is sufficient, and His power is made perfect in our weakness.

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, thank You for being the God of second chances. I come to You today, laying down my burdens and waywardness. Heal my heart and restore my spirit. Thank You for loving me freely, despite my shortcomings. As I seek You during this fast, fill me with Your presence, and let Your love transform my life. In Jesus’ name Amen.

DAILY SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE

Take time to reflect on any areas in your life where you feel distant from God or burdened by past mistakes. Remember that God is the God of second chances, and He is inviting you to return to Him. During this fast, lay down every burden, every regret, and every mistake at His feet. Allow Him to heal your waywardness and pour His love freely into your heart.

As you fast, journal your thoughts and prayers. Reflect on how God’s grace has met you in the past, and invite Him to reveal His love to you in a deeper way. This is a time of renewal—a time to reconnect with the God who loves you unconditionally and offers endless opportunities for restoration and growth.

DAY 13

I'M SORRY

By Monica Harris

“Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye.”

Colossians 3:13

One of the hardest truths to accept is that some people spend their lives waiting for an apology that may never come. They remain stuck, unable to move forward, because they feel the closure they need hinges on those two words: “I’m sorry.” If this resonates with you, can I apologize on their behalf?

God desires for you to move forward—not aimlessly, but with healing. He does not want your pain to hold you captive. So, let me take this moment to say:

I am sorry for every thing and every person who has ever hurt you.

I am sorry for every person who never showed up for you when you needed them most.

I am sorry for the racism and injustice you experienced.

I am sorry for the verbal abuse that broke your spirit.

I am sorry for the sexual abuse that scarred your soul.

I am sorry for the abandonment you endured.

I am sorry for every moment someone failed to see your worth, to choose you, or to value you.

I am sorry they left. I am sorry they let you go.

I am sorry. I am so deeply sorry.

A CALL TO INVITE GOD INTO YOUR PAIN

But can we invite God into these wounded areas of your heart? Your pain doesn’t have to define you, nor does it have to be a prison. Pain, when surrendered to God, can find purpose. But managing it on your own is exhausting and unfulfilling.

God longs to free you from all the moments where no one encouraged you. He longs to free you from all the things that have been said to you, and all the things not said to you enough. Holding on to that offense, that pain, is sabotaging your future. Holding on to it will only trap you in a cycle of resentment and hurt.

The psalmist reminds us of God’s care for the brokenhearted: “The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit” (Psalm 34:18 NIV). He is not indifferent to your pain. He waits patiently, ready to heal you and bring you freedom.

HEALING THROUGH GIVING

One of the most powerful ways to heal from offense is to take the initiative and become the person you’ve longed for others to be to you. If you’ve been yearning for encouragement, recognition, or appreciation, ask God to lead you to someone who feels discouraged, invisible, and undervalued—and pour into them everything you’ve desired for yourself.

This act of giving—of being a light for others—has a transformative power. Jesus Himself reminds us in Luke 6:38, “Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.”

Choose to encourage others like crazy. Highlight the small, wonderful details about them. Appreciate what others bring to the table. There may be unresolved tension between you and someone you love all because you feel unnoticed, unappreciated, and undervalued by them.

When you encourage others, you will find encouragement springing up in your own life. When you appreciate others, you’ll discover gratitude growing within you.

CHOOSE TO BE FREE

Stop allowing offense to put a wedge between you and those you love. Offense is a poison that seeps into every area of life. It creates wedges between you and those you love, and it warps your ability to see the beauty in relationships. Choose today to stop allowing the offense to dictate your future. Take steps to notice and appreciate others. Value them for who they are and what they bring to the table. Whatever you do, don't live another day of your life stifled by the poison of offense.

This choice is not always easy, but it is worth it. Corrie ten Boom, a Holocaust survivor and remarkable Christian, once shared how she forgave the very prison guard who had tormented her during her time in a Nazi concentration camp. She said, "Forgiveness is the key that unlocks the door of resentment and the handcuffs of hatred. It is a power that breaks the chains of bitterness and the shackles of selfishness."

If she could let go of such unimaginable pain, we, too, can choose freedom over offense. Forgiveness does not excuse the hurt, but it releases you from its grip and allows God to step in as the healer of your wounds.

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, thank You for being a God who sees every wound and knows every pain. Today, I surrender the hurts that have kept me captive. I give You the offenses I've held onto, and I ask for Your healing power to restore my heart. Help me to walk in forgiveness, not because the offender deserves it, but because You desire freedom for me. Teach me to encourage, value, and love others in the same way You love me. Thank You for being close to the brokenhearted and saving those crushed in spirit. In Jesus' name, Amen.

DAILY SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE

Take a moment to journal about the areas of your life where you feel hurt, unseen, or undervalued. Write down the names of people who have caused you pain and bring them before God in prayer, asking for the strength to forgive.

Next, identify someone in your life who may feel discouraged, unnoticed, or unappreciated. Reach out to them this week with words of encouragement or an act of kindness. Let your healing begin by becoming the blessing you've longed to receive.

DAY 14**OUR DADDY LOVES US**

By Dr. Lynette Lewis

"In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins."

1 John 4:9-10 NKJV

The statistics about fatherless homes in our world today are staggering. According to the 2024 Single Mother Guide, there are approximately 10.9 million single-parent homes in the U.S. raising 15.7 million children. Of these homes, 79.5% are headed by mothers. That means nearly 80% of these children are growing up without a father present.

Fathers play a vital role in shaping identity. They give children their family name and instill a sense of belonging and affirmation. When a father is absent, children often grow up unsure of their true identity. I know this from personal experience.

Growing up without my father profoundly impacted how I viewed myself and how I related to men in general. As a young girl, I longed for the affirmation only a father can provide—the reassurance that I was special, beautiful, and unconditionally loved. Without that foundation, I sought validation elsewhere, but it often left me with unmet needs and a gaping hole in my soul. Even with the painful statistics I mentioned earlier, we are still assured that there is hope. That hope is in our Heavenly Father—our *Daddy God*.

THE LOVE OF OUR HEAVENLY FATHER

God's love changes everything. 1 John 4:9-10 reminds us that God's love is not conditional upon our actions. He sent His Son, Jesus Christ, as the ultimate expression of love, demonstrating that we are wanted, chosen, and cherished.

Ephesians 3:14-19 describes the vastness of God's love. Paul prays that we may comprehend "what is the width and length and depth and height" of Christ's love and be filled with the fullness of God. This understanding brings healing and freedom, allowing us to see ourselves as God does—whole and complete in Him.

As Pastor Rick Warren says, "There are no accidental children, only accidental parents." You are not a mistake. God created you with purpose and intention.

HEALING FROM THE PAST

I'll never forget the moment my father, who was married to another woman, visited when I was a teenager. During his visit, I overheard him tell my mother he didn't believe I was his child. His words pierced my heart. In anger, I yelled that I didn't care if he was my father or not since he had never done anything for me anyway. Yet in my heart, I was devastated.

OH, BUT GOD!

Romans 8:15 reminds us that we have received the Spirit of adoption, allowing us to cry, "Abba, Father," or "Daddy God." No matter what we've endured, God is ready to restore us. He wants to heal the wounds left by absent or abusive fathers, broken relationships, and life's disappointments.

Because of things that we have experienced, our lives have been shaped in a certain way. How we see ourselves and how we handle life, in general, was birthed out of things that happened to us in our past. Now that we are born again, it is time to move forward from those experiences and ask God to show us who He created us to be before we were impacted by the pain of:

- Being Molested
- Being Abused
- Being Rejected
- The Abortion
- The Job Loss
- The Divorce
- The Miscarriage
- The Bankruptcy

Only God can show us that person! We need to know that there is a difference between "what happened to us" and who we are! One or several of those things noted above may have happened to you, but that is not who you are! You may still ask yourself, why did that _____ (You fill in the blank) happen to me?

Psalm 34:18 reminds us that "The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit." God's love reaches into the deepest places of our pain to bring healing and hope.

OUR TRUE IDENTITY IN CHRIST

The enemy seeks to use our past to trap us in cycles of shame and despair. He whispers lies to keep us shackled, hoping we will:

- Abort our dreams
- Divorce our future
- Miscarry our vision
- And ultimately, lose faith in God

Think about this: The God of the universe, the one who spoke the earth into existence, put the sun in the sky to give light during the day and a lesser light to give light for the night, who told the sea and land where to meet and not to go any further. He declares that we are fearfully and wonderfully made! (Psalm 139:14)

It is time to let go of the guilt and shame, or pain of our past and who we think we ought to be, and let God show us who we are, giving us our true identity!

But God's truth sets us free. The God who created the universe calls us His children. His love washes away the residue of guilt, shame, and pain, breaking every chain of bondage. We must learn to live for an audience of ONE!

If we peel back all the layers of pain, guilt, shame, frustrations, disappointments, and everything that they said about us - to the essence of the real you - God says, "that woman, that man is worth every drop of blood that was shed by my son, Jesus Christ!"

A verse in a song that speaks volumes to my heart says, "God, You can love me more in a moment than other lovers can in a lifetime." This truth resonates deeply. Knowing that our Daddy loves us provides security, protection, and above all, unconditional love.

When we spend time in God's presence, allowing Him to speak to our hearts, we begin to live for an audience of One. We no longer seek approval from others but rest in the knowledge that we are fully loved and accepted by Him.

PRAYER

Father God, thank You for Your unconditional love. Thank You for healing the wounds of our past and giving us a new identity in You. Help us to see ourselves as You see us—beloved, chosen, and valued. Teach us to walk in the fullness of Your love and to let go of the chains that have held us captive. Thank You for being our Abba Father, our Daddy God. In Jesus' name, Amen.

DAILY SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE

Spend time this week reflecting on your identity in Christ. Write down Scriptures that affirm who God says you are. Meditate on Ephesians 3:14-19 and ask God to reveal the depth of His love for you.

If you are holding onto pain from your past, bring it to God in prayer. Ask Him to heal your heart and help you see yourself through His eyes. Let this truth resonate deeply: *My Daddy Loves Me*.

DAY 15

HE'S WAITING

By Jewell Jackson

“A woman of Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, ‘Give Me a drink.’ Then the woman of Samaria said to Him, ‘How is it that You, being a Jew, ask a drink from me, a Samaritan woman?’ For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.”

John 4:7, 9 NKJV

In John 4, we find a profound encounter between Jesus and a Samaritan woman at the well. This meeting was not a coincidence; it was a divine appointment. Despite cultural and social barriers, Jesus waited intentionally for this woman, fully aware of her past failures, societal shame, and deep thirst for something more. She came to the well at noon, likely to avoid the judging eyes of others, but Jesus' presence was not accidental. He was there to transform her life.

HE KNOWS OUR THIRST

As the woman approached the well, Jesus began their conversation with a simple request: “Give Me a drink.” This seemingly ordinary question crossed significant cultural boundaries. In those times, Jews and Samaritans did not associate with one another, and men rarely addressed women publicly. Yet, Jesus chose to break these barriers, demonstrating that His mission transcends human divisions.

The conversation quickly shifted from physical water to spiritual truths. Jesus offered her “living water,” a symbol of the eternal satisfaction that only He can provide. He promised, “Whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life” (John 4:14 NIV).

This promise of living water is not limited to the woman at the well—it extends to us. How often do we seek fulfillment in temporary things, believing that if we achieve more or change our circumstances, we

will finally find contentment? Like the Samaritan woman, we may misunderstand our true need. But Jesus knows our thirst. He meets us in our struggles, offering grace instead of condemnation. His living water fills the emptiness in our hearts and brings lasting satisfaction.

HE SEES US COMPLETELY

As the conversation deepened, Jesus told the woman to call her husband. When she responded truthfully, admitting that she had no husband, Jesus revealed that He already knew her story: “You have had five husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband” (John 4:18 NKJV).

This moment could have been one of shame, but instead, it became a moment of transformation. Jesus’ response was not judgment but grace. He saw her completely—her past, her pain, and her potential—and still chose to engage with her.

This same grace is extended to us today. Jesus sees us fully, including the struggles we hide and the burdens we carry. He knows every detail of our stories, yet He waits patiently for us, offering not rejection but an invitation to draw closer to Him.

HE INVITES US TO TRUE WORSHIP

As the woman realized she was in the presence of someone extraordinary, she brought up the topic of worship. In her understanding, worship was tied to specific locations and rituals. But Jesus shifted her perspective: “The hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him” (John 4:23 NKJV).

True worship goes beyond external practices. It is about an authentic connection with God, marked by sincerity and truth. This encounter at the well was not just about transforming the Samaritan woman’s life; it was about inviting her into a deeper relationship with God.

In this fasting season, we are reminded to engage in true worship. It’s an opportunity to meet Jesus at the well of our hearts, laying down distractions and allowing Him to fill us with His life-giving presence.

A LESSON FROM HISTORY: GRACE THAT WAITS

This story echoes a truth seen throughout history: God’s grace waits for us, often in the most unexpected places. One such story comes from the

life of John Newton, the former slave trader who penned the deeply loved hymn “Amazing Grace.”

John Newton was a man who lived far from God for much of his early life. Engaging in the inhumane slave trade, he sank into a life of moral depravity and rebellion against God. Yet, in the midst of a violent storm at sea, Newton cried out to God for mercy, convinced his life was about to end. God spared him, and from that moment, Newton began a spiritual transformation.

What is remarkable about Newton’s story is that his full conversion to Christ did not happen instantly. God’s grace was patient, waiting for him to surrender fully. Newton’s journey reminds us that God’s grace meets us where we are—not to leave us there but to transform us. Just as Jesus waited for the Samaritan woman at the well, offering her a new identity and purpose, He waits for us with the same transforming grace.

PRAYER

Lord Jesus, thank You for waiting for me, even when I have been distant. Help me to lay down my burdens and distractions and receive the living water You offer. Open my heart during this fast so that I may worship You in spirit and truth. Thank You for seeing me fully and loving me unconditionally. In Your name, Amen.

DAILY SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE

Take time to reflect on what may be keeping you distant from God. Write down any burdens, distractions, or areas of brokenness that weigh on your heart.

Spend a moment in prayer, asking Jesus to meet you at the well of your life and fill you with His living water. Commit to reading John 4 this week, focusing on how Jesus interacts with the Samaritan woman.

Lastly, engage in a time of worship that goes beyond routine. Whether through singing, journaling, or silent prayer, connect with God in a way that is sincere and honest, allowing His presence to refresh your spirit.

DAY 16

THE ECHO OF GRATITUDE

By Pastor Marlin D. Harris

“The LORD hath done great things for us; whereof we are glad.”

Psalm 126:3 (KJV)

THE WONDERS OF THANKSGIVING

My wife and I celebrated our 20th wedding anniversary in Maui, Hawaii, and I can't begin to tell you how breathtaking that experience was. If you have ever been to Hawaii, you know all about its majestic beaches, lush and captivating rainforests, and its purely divine sunrises. Looking out from our balcony early one morning, the two of us just sat and gazed at the early morning sun greeting the ocean on the landscape of the eastern horizon. The heart-stopping thrill of watching God's work with the one I love more than anything in this earthly world etched this experience on my heart for a lifetime. As the first rays of sunlight stretched across the sky, they created a rainbow of gold, blue, and red light rays, and I remembered thinking that I hadn't seen a display of the greatness of God more grand than the one I was currently beholding that morning. We could hear birds chirping in harmony, creating a symphony of sound and sights that took your mind off the mundane and stressful interruptions of life and caused you to set your thoughts on God. In moments like these, gratitude wells up in hearts without needing to be summoned. We are grateful to be alive; we are grateful for a God so great He would create all of this simply for our enjoyment. As we soaked in the peace that nature afforded us, we were struck with awe and wonder. This expression of beauty and goodness would make even the hardest heart whisper an uncontrollable 'wow.'

But I would like to focus our thoughts on a thought even more solemn than that. It is not a difficult thing to find gratitude in our hearts when we are standing in the midst of wonders that we call 'extraordinary', but how often do we pause to give God thanks for the wonders He has planted in what we call 'ordinary'?

Psalm 126:3 beckons us to live in a state of constant gratitude, being fully cognizant of the great things that God has done for us. Not just for sunrises, majestic waterfalls, and the glories of nature, but for the baby who sleeps in the room next to ours, the meal we enjoyed with good friends, the comfort we feel at the touch of our spouse, and the kindness we are granted in the words of strangers. We see all of the works of God as "great things" He has done. The Psalmist knows that worship and gratitude are not just a gift we offer for the grand moments of life, but it is a gift we offer for the simple pleasures that make our lives fulfilled.

EYES TO SEE

The everyday world around us is a mural of God's majestic handiwork, yet many of us walk through life with our eyes closed to the miracles right at our doorsteps. We overlook the gifts of God tucked into each day. Gifts like a good laugh, a good cry, a good book, a good friend, a good night's rest, and a good family. These 'goodnesses' do not come by accident, nor are they guaranteed, yet we take them for granted as if they are automatic coincidences of life. They are far from automatic. There are veritably millions of people in different parts of the world who know little of the simple pleasures I have just enumerated. They fight and claw to find peace; their homes are ravaged by war and bombs in the night. They are victims of unspeakable acts of violence, and many are lost and forgotten by the societies that surround them. Oh, what love God has bestowed upon us that He would allow us the simple pleasures that so many others long to have. No, these are not coincidences; they are the quiet whispers of the love of God.

And yet, so many struggle to be grateful. The aggravations and annoyances of life have robbed them of their joy. It's a pain that irritates their body, an enemy that opposes their progress, or a luxury that is out of their reach; all of these little things have the power to cheat us out of our gratitude.

THE POWER OF GRATITUDE

Gratitude has built within it two amazing powers. The first is its ability to shift our perspective. When we begin to see all things as gifts from God, that shift in perspective has the power to transform our hearts from breeding grounds of unhappiness to flowing rivers of joy. When we focus

on what we have rather than what we lack, we unlock a deeper sense of peace and fulfillment. James reminds us that “every good and perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variableness, neither shadow of turning” (**James 1:17**). Every time you acknowledge one of these gifts, you are honoring the Father who gave it.

The second power of gratitude is that it is a powerful antidote for the illness of greed and envy. In a world that constantly urges us to strive for more—more money, more power, more friends, more recognition—gratitude teaches us to rest in the sufficiency of what God has already provided. The truth is that you have more than you could imagine, and far more than you could deserve. At the heart of gratitude is the Latin word *gratis*. *Gratis* simply means grace, and grace is a gift that is given that we do not deserve. When you are grateful, you recognize that you possess a treasure that you did not seek. Grateful people are not entitled; they are humbled; they are not demanding; they are appreciative. Gratitude reminds us that we are not defined by what we possess, but rather by Who possesses us.

THE INTENTIONALITY OF GRATITUDE

Gratitude is as much a discipline as it is an emotion. It requires intentionality and purpose if it is to have any real meaning. It involves a conscious effort to shift our focus from what is absent from our life to what is present in our life.

To help you with the ‘intentionality of gratitude’, ask yourself these questions:

- What am I truly grateful for today?
- Have I taken the time to acknowledge God’s hand in my life?
- How can I express my gratitude to Him and others?
- Are there areas where I’ve allowed complaints to blind me from seeing my blessings?

THE ROOT OF GRATITUDE

There is an African proverb that says, “No matter how far the stream flows, it never forgets its source.” Just as the stream cannot exist without the spring that feeds it, we cannot joyfully exist without acknowledging the God who blesses us. Every blessing we receive, every moment of joy we experience, every day of life we are granted—all these flow from the abundant fountains of God’s unconditional and amazing grace.

My prayer is that we never forget our Source. As we step into new opportunities, new relationships, or new seasons of life, may we be constantly driven back to say “thank you” to our Gracious God who has provided for us every good and perfect gift.

PRAYER

Gracious and Kind Father, for every blessing that I have not been able to see, thank You. For every miracle I never stopped long enough to notice, thank You. For every kindness I was too unhappy to recognize, thank You. For every person I was too selfish to appreciate, thank You. For every day I was too preoccupied to enjoy, thank You. May there never again be a blessing, or miracle, or kindness, or person, or day that I don’t pause to say ‘thank You’ for. In Jesus’ name, I pray, Amen.

DAILY SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE

Set aside 10 minutes each evening this week to reflect on the blessings of the day. Write them down in a gratitude journal, no matter how small or ordinary they may seem. At the end of the week, review your list and spend time in prayer, thanking God for His goodness. Consider sharing one of these blessings with a friend or loved one, encouraging them to reflect on their own reasons for gratitude.

DAY 17

REST IN THE LORD SO WE CAN LIVE

By Dr. Lynette Lewis

“Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him.”

Psalm 37:7a (NKJV)

God is on our side! He wants us to rest in Him, trust Him, and live the life He has destined for us. As believers, we must settle in our hearts that God loves us unconditionally. His love isn't earned by our performance, nor is it lost due to our imperfections.

We live in a performance-based society, and it can be difficult to transition from “doing” to simply “being.” Yet, there is rest in being in Christ—a secure place within the family of God. While teachers, bosses, or even some within the church might measure us against others, God doesn't expect us to outperform anyone. He sees us through the lens of Christ, knowing the number of hairs on our heads and loving us individually.

God's desire isn't for us to compete but to walk in obedience to His Word. In doing so, the transformative power of the Holy Spirit helps us reflect Christ more fully in our lives.

IT'S ALL A MATTER OF GRACE

A poignant example of God's grace is found in the story of the prodigal son in Luke 15. Even though the son squandered his inheritance in reckless living, when he returned home, his father ran to meet him with compassion, embracing him in love. The father's love was never lost, and his grace was poured out freely.

Ephesians 2:8-9 reminds us, “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.” Our salvation is secure because of Christ's sacrifice. His finished work on the cross paid our sin debt, granting us access to eternal life. We don't have to labor to earn God's acceptance because His grace has already made us accepted in the Beloved (Ephesians 1:6).

A DIVINE REST

Hebrews 4:9 teaches, “There remains therefore a rest for the people of God.” This rest isn't about inactivity or idleness but peace with God and trust in His sovereignty. It mirrors the rest God took after creation, even as He continues to sustain the universe.

This peace is both present and eternal. In Christ, we find rest for today because we trust Him to complete the work He began in us (Philippians 1:6). We also look forward to the ultimate rest in eternity, when every sin and sorrow will be removed, and creation will be fully restored.

CHOOSING TO REST AND LIVE

To truly live, we must first rest in the Lord. Resting demonstrates faith in His ability to guide us through life's storms while maintaining His peace. Exodus 33:14 promises, “My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.”

We can rest in the knowledge that we are among the beloved, that He will never leave us nor forsake us, and that there is nothing for which we should be anxious or worried about. We're His children and every experience – wins or losses, triumphs or defeats – is being worked together for our good and for His purpose.

Deuteronomy 30:19-20 offers timeless wisdom: “I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore, choose life, that both you and your descendants may live; that you may love the Lord your God, that you may obey His voice, and that you may cling to Him, for He is your life and the length of your days.”

God desires for us to truly “live” and not merely exist—burdened by the cares of this world, anxious about the present and future, or frantically striving for flawless performances and the accumulation of things. How we “rest” in the Lord and “live” also influences our children's ability to embrace a God-ordained life, free from unrealistic expectations of perfection. We set an example for them to follow.

Let us remember and encourage ourselves in the Lord, trusting that our lives are part of His grand design. We can have confidence that He will bring His perfect will to pass in His timing. Therefore, let us choose to “rest in the Lord and wait patiently for Him” so that we may truly live—loving our God, obeying His voice, and clinging to Him, for He is our life and the length of our days!

By resting in the Lord, we model trust and faithfulness for future generations. We set an example that it's not about striving but about abiding in God's presence, loving Him, and obeying His Word.

Let us embrace this rest, trusting in God's perfect design for our lives, and live with confidence in His promises. Resting in the Lord is not idleness—it is an active demonstration of faith and reliance on the One who sustains us.

PRAYER

Father God, in the name of Jesus, we thank You for the rest You provide for Your children as we patiently navigate life's twists and turns. Thank You for leading and guiding us into the life You have ordained in Your perfect timing. We choose to live and walk in obedience to Your Word, trusting that all things are working together for our good. Thank You for allowing us to experience Your peace and rest while fulfilling our purpose. In Jesus' name, Amen.

DAILY SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE

This week, set aside a dedicated time to sit quietly in God's presence without distractions. Use this time to reflect on areas of your life where you feel burdened or anxious. Surrender those concerns to God in prayer, and meditate on His promises, such as Psalm 37:7 and Philippians 1:6. Journal your reflections, and write down specific ways you can practice trusting God more fully in your daily life. Make it a point to choose rest over striving, letting His peace guide your heart and mind.

DAY 18

MASTER CLASS

By Joyce R. Lewis M.D.

“Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.”

1 Corinthians 13:4–7 (NKJV)

“Jesus said to him, ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’”

Matthew 22:37–39 (NKJV)

Have you ever asked God for something, only to find yourself in what feels like a Masterclass? You pray for patience, and suddenly you're raising a child who's always running late. Or perhaps you're working with an employee who needs constant reminders to complete tasks. Maybe you start teaching about boundaries in Sunday school, only to discover the need to create boundaries with your own adult child.

In these scenarios, God often answers our prayers for growth by giving us opportunities to practice what we've asked for. At the heart of every Masterclass, there's a common theme: love.

THE LESSONS OF LOVE

In 1 Corinthians 13, often called the “Love Chapter,” we learn not only what love is but also how it manifests in our lives. Love is patient and kind. It isn't proud, rude, or self-seeking. It bears all things, hopes all things, and endures all things. These qualities challenge us to reflect on how we love those around us, especially when it's difficult.

When we love, we seek the best for others, even when it means navigating disappointment or frustration. Loving your chronically late child might mean helping them discover what's causing their struggle with time management. Loving your employee may mean sitting down to understand how they approach tasks, so you can better guide them.

Love doesn't eliminate feelings of anger, frustration, or disappointment. Instead, it channels them constructively. It might mean asking yourself WWJD, (*What would Jesus do?*) How can I be kind to this person who isn't meeting my expectations?

Sometimes love requires showing someone how to improve. Other times, it means recognizing that they're in the wrong position and gently guiding them toward a better fit. It might even mean saying "no" to your adult children's request, allowing them to learn the lessons God is trying to teach them.

LOVING AS GOD LOVES

God set the ultimate example of love. When humanity sinned, resisted Him, and failed to meet His expectations, He responded not with condemnation but with grace. He sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to show us what love looks like in action.

Jesus was patient with His disciples, even when they struggled to understand His teachings. He was kind to those society deemed unworthy. He bore the guilt of our sins and chose to serve others instead of seeking recognition for Himself. He was a living embodiment of truth, humility, and love.

Consider these words from Martin Luther King Jr.: "Love is the only force capable of transforming an enemy into a friend." Jesus exemplified this transformative love by serving those who opposed Him and offering grace to those who hated him.

If Jesus went through a Masterclass of Love for us, how can we do any less? He calls us to follow His example, to love not only when it's easy but also when it's challenging.

LOVE IN ACTION

Loving someone doesn't always align with our expectations. It often requires sacrifice, humility, and trust in God's plan. True love seeks the best for others, even when it's hard to discern or doesn't match our vision.

This kind of love transforms our relationships. It compels us to act with kindness, even when we're frustrated. It teaches us to listen, guide, and support those who depend on us. Most importantly, it reflects God's love for us.

As you navigate your own Masterclass, remember that God equips us for these moments. He doesn't leave us to figure it out alone. His Spirit guides us, His Word teaches us, and His love sustains us.

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, thank You for being the ultimate Teacher of Love. Lord, we acknowledge our shortcomings in loving others the way You have loved us. Give us strength to bear with one another, to forgive one another, and to seek the best for those You've placed in our lives. When we are frustrated or disappointed, remind us of Jesus. When we are offended and exasperated, remind us of Jesus. When we feel that justified in our anger, and unwilling to show love, in those moments, please remind us of Jesus. In Your name we pray, Amen.

DAILY SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE

Reflect on the relationships in your life where God may be teaching you to love more deeply. Write down one way you can practice patience, kindness, or humility in each relationship.

As you go about your day, ask yourself, *How can I show love in this moment?* Whether through a kind word, a selfless act, or simply listening, commit to embodying the love described in 1 Corinthians 13.



WEEK FOUR
DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

**TRIUMPHANT EVEN IN
TRAGEDY**

DAY 19

WITH ALL...

By Frank Luke

“Jesus said to him, ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’”

Matthew 22:37 NKJV

GIVING IT ALL

There was a time when I thought I wanted to become a firefighter, so I decided to pursue it. As part of my training, I learned not only how to fight fires and save lives but also how to perform CPR and work as an EMT (Emergency Medical Technician). I vividly recall one lesson during CPR training that left a deep impact on me.

Our instructor shared a fascinating insight: babies and toddlers are some of the most resilient people on Earth. He explained that because they don’t yet understand what it means to die, they fight with every fiber of their being to stay alive. They will exhaust every option within themselves before giving up. They simply do not comprehend the concept of surrendering to death.

Wow! That truth stayed with me, sparking two profound reflections.

First, Jesus calls us to follow Him with childlike faith. In Matthew 18:3 (NKJV), He says, *“Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.”* This kind of faith is marked by unwavering persistence, like a toddler’s determination to keep fighting. It doesn’t waver in the face of adversity but clings tenaciously to hope.

Second, I’m reminded of how Jesus, our Savior, gave everything He had to give—His strength, His love, His hope—before surrendering His life on the cross. He held nothing back, pouring Himself out completely so that we might have life in abundance.

LIFE CAN BE HEAVY

We all know that life can weigh us down. The scars and burdens of this broken world make it easy to lose hope, grow weary, and doubt. **But just as a baby or toddler will give their all because they don’t know how to quit, we too, as children of God, can give our all through Christ. He has already paid the price for us, offering His very life so that we could have life in abundance.** His sacrifice challenges us to remember that there is always more in us than we realize.

Isaiah 40:31 reminds us: *“But those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.”* This promise assures us that, as children of God, we have access to divine strength. Like a toddler who fights for life with every ounce of energy, we can rise up and persist, knowing that the One who gave His all for us is working in and through us.

CHILDLIKE FAITH AND SACRIFICE

The beauty of childlike faith lies in its simplicity and resilience. It trusts without hesitation, hopes without doubting, and presses on without quitting. As we face challenges, Jesus invites us to adopt this same posture—to love God with all our heart, soul, and mind. This commandment echoed in Matthew 22:37, is not merely an obligation; it is an invitation to a life of full surrender and abundant joy.

Martin Luther once said, *“I have held many things in my hands, and I have lost them all. But whatever I have placed in God’s hands, that I still possess.”* This statement reminds us that surrendering all to God is not about losing; it is about gaining. When we give Him our all, we receive His strength, His peace, and His purpose in return.

When life feels overwhelming, remember this truth: Jesus gave His all for you. He didn’t hold back His love or His sacrifice. As His followers, we are called to give our all to Him—not in our own strength, but through the strength He provides.

PRAYER

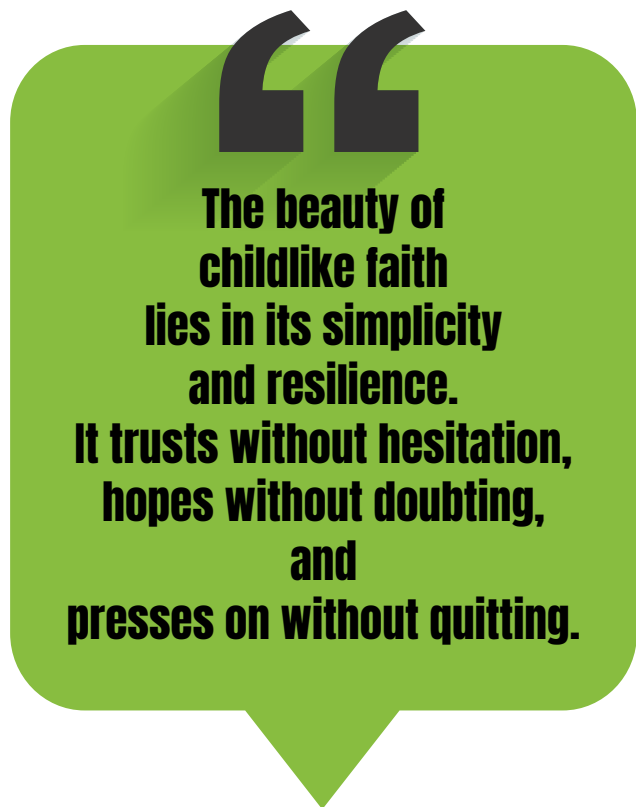
Father, sometimes it feels so hard to give You my all, even though I know You deserve it. Life can be overwhelming, and weariness often clouds my vision. Thank You for being the ultimate example of surrender, showing me how to love with all my heart, all my soul, and all my mind. I pray for

Your strength to keep going when I feel like giving up. Help me to trust in Your promises and to fight the good fight with childlike faith, knowing that I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. In Jesus' name, Amen.

DAILY SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE

Spend time reflecting on areas of your life where you may be holding back from God. Are you fully surrendering your heart, soul, and mind to Him? Write these areas down and ask the Holy Spirit for strength to give them over completely.

As you go about your day, practice persistence in loving God with your whole being. Each time you feel weary, meditate on Isaiah 40:31. Remind yourself that God renews the strength of those who wait on Him and empowers them to rise above every obstacle.



DAY 20

BUT IF HE DOESN'T

By Tapika Howard

“O Nebuchadnezzar; we have no need to answer you in this matter: If that is the case, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us from your hand, O king. But if He doesn't, let it be known to you, O king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up.”

Daniel 3:16-18 NKJV

It is always a humbling experience to stand behind a sacred desk and deliver words of comfort and encouragement to families when their loved one has transitioned from this life. But as I look at this moment and season through the lens of reality and human experience, it is a rather difficult and arduous task when it's your loved one and your family member that you must eulogize.

I have stood at many sacred desks and eulogized many of my family members—those who played a very intricate part in my upbringing. In March 2023, I assumed the position to eulogize and celebrate the life of my bonus dad, Rick. Both my husband and I were humbled to serve God and His people in this capacity. It was truly a celebration of his life as a believer. But little did I know what was coming eight months later.

On November 25, 2023, my heart skipped every beat when my husband of almost 30 years unexpectedly transitioned from this life into the presence of the Lord. He had only been home from a football game for eight minutes before life took this sudden turn. I am a woman of undaunting faith, and my relationship with God means everything to me. But this unexpected turn shook me to the core of my beliefs. In essence, this was not the kind of “long life” for our marriage or our family that I had envisioned. This was not even in alignment with the decrees of victory I would speak out loud daily in prayer regarding our life together.

Like many of you, I have seen God do the miraculous in the lives of so many people. I have seen Him supernaturally heal what doctors said was

terminal and untreatable. I have seen Him cause a heart to beat after sitting next to someone who coded twice in a hospital bed. Even for myself, I have experienced God heal me from barrenness when the doctors told me for 10 years that I would never have children. So, I have seen the undeniable handiwork of God do the impossible. Yet, my expectation of what God would do on that Saturday night was not my reality.

As a matter of transparency, my heart broke into a million pieces. I can even say that I was briefly disappointed, as the way God manifested Himself so many times before seemed to have taken a different turn. Thus, the interrogation of the heart began: “Why my husband?” and “Why now?” These questions flowed like a river. Since I had not broken my fellowship with God, and He spoke to me about everything else, “Why didn’t I get a sign of this abrupt detour?” Could it be that He is just God? Could it be that He is the Creator of all things, from whom all things were made, and He owes me no explanation? Or was He revealing to me a side of Himself that I had not known, let alone paid attention to in times past?

If I were to poll any room filled with people, many of us would say we have asked for healing or a breakthrough in one area of our lives or another—whether physical, emotional, or spiritual. In my almost 53 years of life, I can say I’ve needed and asked God to heal and manifest breakthroughs in all three areas. But I’ve also realized that God’s answer doesn’t always look like my request.

THREE TRUTHS ABOUT GOD’S RESPONSES

I’ve had a lot of time to reflect in the presence of God about the moment my husband transitioned, and the Spirit of the Lord made three things very clear:

1. **There Are Some Things God Does Suddenly.**

The scripture says in Isaiah 48:3, “I have declared the former things from the beginning; they went forth from My mouth, and I caused them to hear it. Suddenly I did them, and they came to pass.” Similarly, Acts 16:26 says, “Suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened, and everyone’s chains were loosed.”

2. **There Are Some Things God Does Eventually.**

In Exodus 5:22-23, Moses cried, “Lord, why have You brought trouble on

this people? Why is it You have sent me? For since I came to Pharaoh to speak in Your name, he has done evil to this people; neither have You delivered Your people at all.” God’s response came later, in Exodus 6:1: “Then the Lord said to Moses, ‘Now you shall see what I will do to Pharaoh. For with a strong hand he will let them go, and with a strong hand he will drive them out of his land.’” In Exodus 7:1. God gave Moses the strength to continue confronting Pharaoh with the word of God. What happened when Moses kept speaking the Word of God? God moved to accomplish what His Word said, and Pharaoh eventually let the children of Israel go. It doesn’t matter if God responds to our request suddenly or eventually; our response is to ALWAYS give Him the glory, because HE IS STILL GOD!

3. **But If He Doesn’t...**

Yes, there are some things God will do for us suddenly. Yes, there are some things that God will do for us eventually. And there are some things that we must painfully and faithfully realize are simply not in the will of God to do; at least not in the way that we expected or desired. This truth became my reality the night my husband transitioned. The three Hebrew boys in Daniel 3:16-18 exemplified unwavering faith: “If that is the case, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace... But if He doesn’t, let it be known... we will not serve your gods, *nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up.*” *These young, captive Israelites coined a prophetic statement that awakened my understanding of God in a new way; they said, “...But if he doesn’t...”* There are some who would like to introduce you to the God who does a thing suddenly or immediately. Others would introduce you to the God who will move in your life eventually. However, I’d love to introduce you to the God who may not answer in the manner of your request but will require another dimension of your faith. Let me introduce you to the God who may not come in the way you would like for Him to. Let me introduce you to the God whose answer often looks nothing like your request. The three Hebrew boys introduced a deeper perspective of faith that says, “... *But if he doesn’t...*”, deliver us - HE IS STILL GOD

HE IS STILL GOD

No matter what season you find yourself in, remember this: God is still able, faithful, and sovereign. Even if He doesn’t answer the way you desire, He is still good. He is still God. Today, shift your perspective and choose not to be mad with God because He won’t let your plan work. The

scripture says in Proverbs 16:9, *“The heart of man plans his way, but the Lord establishes his steps.”*

Their response revealed a faith not dependent on God answering their request as they hoped but rooted in His unchanging nature.

TRUSTING GOD’S HIGHER WAYS

Over the past few months, I’ve learned to trust Isaiah 55:8-9: *“For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways,”* says the Lord. *‘For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts.’*

Jeremiah 29:11 confirms this truth when it says, *“For I know the thoughts that I think toward you,”* says the Lord, *“thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope.”*

It became eternally apparent to me that God didn’t allow my husband’s transition to harm me. His ways are higher, His thoughts are higher, and His plan is always for good and not evil. Though it didn’t feel like it at the time, God was working something exceeding, abundantly above all I could ask or think.

PRAYER

Father God, we have all seen You move in ways unimaginable. You are the same God yesterday, today, and forever. Help us to remain fully persuaded in Your goodness, even in seasons of uncertainty. Strengthen us to trust in Your higher ways and remind us that Your plans for us are always for good. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

DAILY SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE

Spend time reflecting on moments when God’s answers did not align with your requests. Write about these experiences in a journal, focusing on the following questions:

1. How did you initially feel about the outcome? Be honest with your emotions, whether they were disappointment, confusion, or acceptance.
2. What evidence of God’s faithfulness did you see, even if it was not immediately apparent?

3. How has this experience shaped your understanding of God’s character and His higher ways?

Finally, commit to a time of prayer, asking God to strengthen your faith in His plans. As an act of surrender, write out your own “But if He doesn’t” declaration, acknowledging His goodness and sovereignty even when His answers differ from your desires.

By intentionally practicing gratitude and surrender, you will cultivate a deeper trust in God’s plan and a steadfast confidence in His unchanging character.



**You are the same God
yesterday, today, and forever.
Help us to remain
fully persuaded
in Your goodness,
even in seasons
of uncertainty.**

DAY 21

LIONS AND LAMBS

by Frank Luke

“Go your way; behold, I send you out as lambs among wolves.”

Luke 10:3 NKJV

Lions are symbols of strength, courage, and dominance. Their roar commands attention, and their presence demands respect. On the other hand, lambs represent meekness, innocence, and vulnerability. In today’s scripture, Jesus tells us He sends us out as lambs among wolves—a startling image of defenseless creatures in a world filled with danger.

If I’m being honest, my first reaction is to ask God for a healthy dose of lion-like qualities, wouldn’t you? In a world filled with self-serving, manipulative, and ungodly individuals—wolves on the prowl—being a lamb seems counterintuitive. Who willingly chooses to be vulnerable when surrounded by danger?

We’ve all heard the phrase, “Only the strong survive.” But is that really true? Scripture presents a different reality. Jesus tells us, “The meek shall inherit the Earth” (Matthew 5:5). Meekness, in the biblical sense, is not weakness but strength under control. It’s the quality that allows us to navigate the world with humility and trust in God, even among wolves.

In today’s passage, Jesus encourages us not to be intimidated by the wolves around us but to make a difference through humility and service.

LION-LIKE COURAGE AND LAMB-LIKE HUMILITY

God calls us to embody both the lion and the lamb. Jesus Himself is the perfect example. As the Lion of Judah, He reigns supreme—King of Kings, Lord of Lords, Alpha and Omega. His power and authority are unmatched. Yet, He is also the Lamb of God—innocent, blameless, and willingly submissive to the will of the Father.

C.S. Lewis beautifully illustrates this duality in *The Chronicles of Narnia*. When the children first hear the condition of King Aslan, the great lion, they ask if he is safe. Mr. Beaver replies, “Safe? Who said anything about

safe? ‘Course he isn’t safe. But he’s good. He’s the King, I tell you.” Like King Aslan, Jesus is both fierce and gentle, powerful and good.

As followers of Christ, we are called to mirror His example. There are moments when we must be lion-hearted, standing boldly in the face of injustice or spiritual attack. Yet, there are also moments when we are called to be lamb-like, submitting to God’s will, showing gentleness, and serving others with humility.

The key is discernment—knowing when to embody the lion’s courage and when to embrace the lamb’s meekness.

CHOOSING BOTH

So, will you choose to be a lion who seeks only to dominate, lead, and command? Or will you choose to embody both—a lion who knows when to lead and a lamb who knows when to serve and submit? Christ Himself is both, and He calls us to follow His example.

Being both lion and lamb means living a life of balance. It means having the courage to face challenges head-on while maintaining the humility to trust God’s plan, even when it doesn’t align with our own desires.

Remember that being a lamb among wolves doesn’t mean being powerless. Our strength comes from our reliance on God. The Apostle Paul reminds us, “When I am weak, then I am strong” (2 Corinthians 12:10). In our humility and dependence, God’s power is made perfect.

PRAYER

Lord, as we journey through life and face its ups and downs, grant us the courage to stand boldly as lions and the humility to submit as lambs. Teach us to follow Your example as both the Lion of Judah and the Lamb of God. May our lives reflect Your strength, love, and grace, and may we always bring glory to Your name. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

DAILY SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE

Reflect on areas in your life where you are called to be a lion and where you are called to be a lamb. Ask God for discernment to navigate these moments with wisdom.

Consider this week how you can embody both courage and humility. Whether standing firm in your faith or serving someone in need, intentionally live out the balance of being both lion and lamb.

DAY 22

BEAUTY IN THE BROKEN PIECES

By Pastor Marlin D. Harris

“But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive.”

Genesis 50:20 NKJV

THE MOSAIC OF GRACE

Picture a mosaic, each piece seemingly insignificant on its own—shards of glass, fragments of ceramic. Some are jagged, others smooth, some dull, others brilliant. Alone, they appear broken, worthless. Yet, in the hands of a master artisan, these fragments are transformed into a breathtaking masterpiece.

Such is the promise of Genesis 50:20. It whispers to the wounded heart, *“Your brokenness is not the end of your story.”* Like Joseph, betrayed by his own flesh and blood, sold into slavery, and thrown into prison, we too face moments when life feels shattered beyond repair. Yet Joseph’s declaration to his brothers—*“You intended to harm me, but God meant it for good”*—reveals a divine truth: in God’s hands, even the most painful pieces of our lives can become a source of blessing and redemption.

THE REDEMPTION OF JOSEPH

Joseph’s journey was one of unimaginable suffering and ultimate triumph. From the depths of a pit dug by jealous brothers to the heights of power in Pharaoh’s court, his life is a testament to the transformative power of God’s providence. Every betrayal, every moment of despair, became a stepping stone toward the fulfillment of a greater purpose.

But consider the weight of Joseph’s forgiveness. As he stood before the very brothers who were the mastermind behind his suffering, he chose grace over vengeance, redemption over retaliation, love over hate.. In this

act, Joseph became a vessel of God’s love, turning a narrative of harm into a story of salvation for an entire nation.

A LESSON FROM HISTORY: THE LIGHT OF ANNE

Joseph’s story finds echoes in the life of Anne, a young Jewish girl living during the Holocaust. Her story may call to mind the story Anne Frank, whose diary has inspired millions. Before her diary of the horrors, abuses, and terror of the holocaust was penned and published, Anne was simply an anonymous Jewish girl spending countless hours of every day hiding from Nazi soldiers in basements, attics, dark woods, and abandoned homes. Her story is one of resilience that minds that broken shards of glass can still make beautiful stained-glass windows. This is not only the message of Genesis 50:20, “you meant it for evil..., but God meant it for good...”, but it is the enduring and unchanging message of every page in the Scriptures, every word from every Biblical prophet, every line of every Psalms, from cover to cover we are constantly reminded that God brings wondrous things out of broken experiences.

Hiding from the horrors of Nazi persecution, Anne endured the unthinkable. Yet even in the depths of suffering, she clung to her faith, believing that God could bring beauty from ashes. Her courage and compassion brought comfort to others, even in the shadow of death. The same God who redeemed Joseph’s suffering was present in Anne’s story, weaving threads of hope into the fabric of her life.

FROM BROKENNESS TO BEAUTY

Genesis 50:20 is not a promise that life will be free from pain. Rather, it is a declaration that no pain is wasted in the hands of our Creator. Every scar, every tear, every moment of shatteredness can be redeemed for His glory.

God’s purpose is often hidden in the midst of suffering. Like Joseph in the pit or Anne in hiding, we cannot always see the masterpiece being formed. Yet, through faith, we can trust that the pieces of our lives, though broken, are being arranged into something beautiful.

Charles Spurgeon once said, *“God is too good to be unkind and He is too wise to be mistaken. And when we cannot trace His hand, we must trust His heart.”* This trust is the foundation of resilience. It is the assurance that even when the enemy’s intent is to harm, God’s intent is always for good.

LIVING THE PROMISE

How, then, do we live out this truth? The stories of Joseph and Anne Frank invite us to:

1. **Forgive courageously:** Like Joseph, let us choose grace over retaliation, allowing God to use our forgiveness as a tool for redemption.
2. **Hope persistently:** Anne's unwavering faith reminds us that even in the darkest times, God's light can shine through.
3. **Trust deeply:** When life feels like a collection of broken pieces, trust that God is crafting a masterpiece.

In your own life, where are you holding onto hurt? What shards of brokenness need to be surrendered to the Master Artisan? Trust that the God who redeemed Joseph and sustained Anne is at work in you, too.

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, thank You for being the Master Artisan who takes the broken pieces of our lives and transforms them into something beautiful. Forgive us for the times we have doubted Your purpose in our pain. Help us to trust You more deeply, to forgive those who have wronged us, and to hold onto the hope that You are always working for our good. When we cannot see the full picture, remind us to rest in the truth of Your providence. May our lives reflect Your grace and bring glory to Your name. In Jesus' name, Amen.

DAILY SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE

This week, take time to reflect on the broken pieces of your life. Write down specific areas where you've experienced pain or betrayal. Then, prayerfully surrender each one to God, asking Him to reveal His redemptive purpose.

As you reflect, look for ways to extend grace and forgiveness to others. Reach out to someone who has hurt you or someone who is hurting and offer words of encouragement, reflecting the hope and redemption of Genesis 50:20.

DAY 23**THE HIDDEN GIFT OF SUFFERING**

By Pastor Marlin D. Harris

"It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes."

Psalm 119:71 (KJV)

There's something paradoxical about suffering. It's not a friend we welcome or a gift we just can't wait to unwrap, yet the Psalmist boldly declares it "good" to have been afflicted. This declaration challenges the way we perceive pain and hardship. It turns our instincts upside down, inviting us to see suffering not as a curse but as an opportunity—a divine classroom where God reveals Himself in ways we could not otherwise grasp.

THE CLASSROOM OF AFFLICTION

Think back to a time when you faced a deep trial. Perhaps it was an illness that weakened your body or a loss that shattered your heart. Maybe it was a season of failure that shook your confidence or a betrayal that fractured your trust. If you're honest, wasn't that also a time when you prayed most fervently, sought God most earnestly, and clung to His promises most desperately? The question to ask in those sacred seasons of suffering is, 'what lesson is this experience purposefully designed to teach me?'

Suffering is the great equalizer. It strips the rich and the poor alike of their illusions of self-dependence. It dismantles the high, unscalable walls we've built around our lives to protect ourselves from discomfort. In those moments of exposed vulnerability, we discover truths about God—and ourselves—that we may never have encountered unless the we had been give the honor of suffering.

The Psalmist speaks from the depth of this reality, finding purpose in his pain. His affliction became a looking glass, reflecting his utter dependence and need for God. God used his affliction to be a compass, guiding him to

the life-giving strength that is only found in His Word. God calls His Word here in this passage, *statutes*. The Hebrew word used is a word that mimics our word for a medical prescription. The thought the text is attempting to give is that in every life there is a specific amount of suffering that God has prescribed for our personal development and spiritual growth. No athlete ever perfects his craft without a certain amount of discipline, no artist ever masters his art without a certain amount of practice, and no believer ever fulfills his purpose without a certain amount of suffering.

FINDING PURPOSE IN THE PAIN

John Bunyan, the beloved 17th century writer and Puritan minister, understood well what it meant to find purpose in pain. Bunyan was imprisoned for his faith, Bunyan faced the agony of separation from his wife and children, including a blind daughter whom he loved dearly. He could have succumbed to despair, but instead, he turned his suffering into a sacred offering.

From his prison cell, Bunyan wrote the words of the loved fable, Pilgrim's Progress, that have guided millions through their spiritual journeys. His chains gave birth to wisdom, and his affliction became fertile soil for God's purposes to take root and blossom. Reflecting on his suffering, Bunyan once wrote, "It was good for me that I was afflicted, for in that I have found God's presence and truth."

His story reminds us that affliction can be a refining fire. It can burn away our pride and distractions, leaving behind a heart wholly devoted to God.

THE LESSONS IN THE PAIN

When we allow suffering to be our teacher, we unlock lessons that cannot be learned in seasons of ease.

1. **Humility** – Pain reminds us of our limits and draws us closer to the One who is limitless. It teaches us to depend not on our own strength but on God's sustaining grace.
2. **Empathy** – There's a deep connection forged in the fellowship of suffering. When we've walked through pain, we are better equipped to walk with others through theirs. Our own scars become bridges to healing and understanding.

3. **Faith** – Suffering deepens our faith by forcing us to trust God in the unknown. When the answers aren't clear and the road ahead seems dark, we learn to cling to His promises, even when we can't see His hand.
4. **Perseverance** – The trials we endure today build the endurance we need for tomorrow. Suffering shapes us into resilient disciples, prepared to face whatever lies ahead with unwavering confidence in God.

C.S. Lewis once wrote, "God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our consciences, but shouts in our pains: it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world." Pain is a tool in the hands of the Divine Gardener, pruning away the excess, refining our character, and making room for greater growth.

We may not understand why certain trials come our way, but we can trust the heart of our wise and loving God. He will never waste a single tear, nor will he allow one moment of anguish to go unheard. He is a skilled Surgeon, who does not cut where it will not bring healing.

A PERSPECTIVE SHIFT

The promise of Psalm 119:71 is not that suffering will be easy or that we will always understand it, but that it will be meaningful. God uses it to teach us His ways, to draw us closer to His heart, and to prepare us for His purposes.

When we embrace this perspective, we find strength to endure. We learn to see beyond the pain and glimpse the hand of a loving Father at work. Suffering, when surrendered to God, becomes a bridge to deeper intimacy with Him.

PRAYER

Lord, thank You for meeting me in my affliction and using it to teach me Your ways. Help me to trust Your hand, even when I cannot see Your plan. Give me the courage to surrender my pain to You, knowing that You are working all things together for my good and Your glory. Strengthen my faith, deepen my understanding, and let my life be a testament to Your refining love. In Jesus' name, Amen.

DAILY SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE

Set aside 30 minutes to journal about a time when you experienced suffering. Reflect on how that experience shaped your relationship with God. What did you learn about His character? What did you learn about yourself? Ask God to show you how He is working through any current challenges, and commit to trusting Him through the process.



**We may not understand
why certain trials come our way,
but we can trust the heart of our
wise and loving God.
He will never waste
a single tear,
nor will he allow one moment
of anguish to go unheard.**

DAY 24

HOW HAVE THE MIGHTY FALLEN

By Pastor Marlin D. Harris

“The beauty of Israel is slain on your high places! How the mighty have fallen!”

2 Samuel 1:19 NKJV

A LEGACY OF MIGHT

“How the mighty have fallen.” David’s lament over the deaths of Saul and Jonathan is more than a mournful cry; it is a profound recognition of loss. When someone mighty in our lives dies, the void is more than physical—it’s spiritual, emotional, and deeply personal. David’s words echo through the ages, reminding us that greatness, though fleeting in this life, leaves behind an enduring legacy.

For me, these words resonate with the memory of my grandmother, Curtis Cooper Donnelly. She invoked in me the same feelings of honor that embody the words of David as he hears the news of Saul and Jonathan’s death. She raised me, my brother and my sister, and died while we were still children. To me, she embodied the ‘might’ that I understand David to mean by his use of that word. She was strong, wise, and unshakable in her faith. Her life was characterized by consistency, dignity and strength. She was one of the pillars of the black community in our small South Carolinian town, and her name carried with it an earned respect. But for me, she represented something completely different, something endearingly personal – she was the single greatest example in my childhood of what faith and love should look like.

I was missing some critical relationships in those early days of my childhood, but because of my grandmother’s love, I never felt those absences. Her love shielded me from the natural impact of not having a father’s affirmation or a mother’s unconditional love, and her belief in me planted seeds of purpose that still bear fruit in my life today. Not one day did I ever leave for school, or attempt a personal goal, or exercise my yet unproven talents, and not feel deeply and completely loved.

She told me every day that I can remember how special I was. She would clasp her large hands around my tiny face, look in my eyes, and remind me that I was called to be someone special. She would tell me that God had marked me as one of His own and that one day, I would do something great. Those words, spoken daily in my life, became the foundation of my self-worth, my faith, and my future. She taught my brother and I to be better than mediocre, and greater than ordinary. I am a husband, a father, a pastor, and a servant in my community. I have survived rejection, abuse, and regret because her quiet influence left a loud impact on my life. The lesson her life has taught me is that ‘mighty’ people inspire us to do ‘mighty’ things.

She was the rock that my brother and I leaned on for our morals, our sense of honor, and our faith. And then, one day, without time to prepare, she was gone. The rock we leaned on crumbled, and that loss felt insurmountable.

THE GIFTS OF THE MIGHTY

When the mighty fall, they leave behind treasures, not in wealth or possessions, but in the intangible gifts of their lives. The question for me is not simply “How have the mighty fallen?” but “What gifts have the mighty given me from which I am made better?” We all have mighty ones in our lives. They are our parents, our husbands, our wives, our mentors, our teachers, our pastors, and our friends. What can I learn from their successes, and what golden gems can I glean from their failures? Rest assured that our lives are the products of the lives of those who have gone before us. They are not perfect. What makes them mighty is not their perfections, but how they have learned to overcome their flaws. My grandmother was deeply flawed, I have no doubt. But somehow, she was strong enough to battle her flaws and confront – rather than deny – her weaknesses. This is what strength and humility looks like. The mighty are not mighty because they’re perfect, not even because they’re good, but because they are humble, and honest, and sincere.

The question we must all ask ourselves when the mighty fall is, ‘What lessons, virtues, and examples can we learn and pass on to our children? Their struggles become our template for resilience. Their faith becomes our anchor. Their lives continue to forge for us new pathways for our journey.

WHEN THE MIGHTY RISE AGAIN

Yet, there is another Mighty One whose story reminds us that even death

cannot truly claim the mighty. On that fateful day on the outskirts of Jerusalem, on a hill called Calvary, there were many who said that our Savior had fallen. He was nailed to a cross and pierced for our redemption, but make no mistake, He should not be one counted among the ‘fallen’. Though His lifeless body was laid in a borrowed tomb and to every eye that beheld him, it appeared that He had fallen. And while He lay in a grave, angels mourned and demons mocked, but let it be known that He had not fallen in the same manner as other men. At daybreak on that fateful Sunday morning, He arose from the dead in power, with glory and majesty.

The story of His resurrection still causes my heart to sing for joy because it reminds me that He is Mighty still! His resurrection is evidence that the ‘mighty’ who have lived in faith and who died in hope can never truly fall. They move from the battlefield of this life to the banquet hall of the next. They exchange the burdens of earth for the joys of heaven. In many ways, they were too good for this fallen earth. They were citizens of another country journeying through an unfamiliar land. This world was never really their home. They were sent here with a mission to love us unconditionally, ground our faith in Christ, and model godly virtue and honor, and then when they completed their mission, they were simply called home.

HOW THEN SHOULD WE LIVE?

In the wake of their passing, how do we honor the mighty who shaped our lives? We live as they lived—with strength, faith, and purpose. We embrace the lessons they taught us, allowing their struggles to guide us and their virtues to inspire us.

We love as they loved, with unconditional devotion. We strive to be better, to rise above mediocrity, and to reflect the values they instilled in us. And most importantly, we clothe ourselves in the faith that sustained them, trusting in the same God who carried them home.

PRAYER

O God, thank You for the mighty ones You have placed in our lives—the parents, grandparents, mentors, and friends who have shaped us through their love and faith. Help us to honor their memory by living lives of purpose and love. When we face struggles, remind us of their resilience.

When we feel lost, remind us of their guidance. And when we feel weak, remind us of their strength.

Father, thank You for the ultimate Mighty One, Jesus Christ, whose death and resurrection assure us that we, too, will rise. May His victory be our hope, His life our example, and His love our foundation. In Jesus' name, Amen.

DAILY SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE

This week, take time to reflect on someone mighty in your life who has passed on. Write down the lessons they taught you and the values they lived by. Consider how you can embody those lessons in your daily life. Whether it's through acts of kindness, standing firm in faith, or pursuing excellence, let their legacy inspire you to live with purpose.

Lastly, spend time in prayer, thanking God for their influence and asking for His strength to carry forward their legacy.



**The mighty are not mighty
because they're perfect,
not even
because they're good,
but because they are
humble, and honest,
and sincere.**

DAY 25

GOD CAN USE THE AFFLICTION

By Tapika Howard

“Now there arose a new king over Egypt, who did not know Joseph. And he said to his people, ‘Look, the people of the children of Israel are more and mightier than we; come, let us deal shrewdly with them, lest they multiply, and it happen, in the event of war, that they also join our enemies and fight against us, and so go up out of the land.’ Therefore they set taskmasters over them to afflict them with their burdens. And they built for Pharaoh supply cities, Pithom and Raamses. But the more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and grew...”

Exodus 1:8–12 NKJV

In 1994, my life seemed to be on an upward trajectory. I graduated from college and got married in the same year. But little did I know that the sins of my past would follow me into my new life. For ten long years, I endured the affliction of barrenness. Doctors declared, “Never,” “Impossible,” or, “If it happens, the consequences could be severe.”

This affliction seemed relentless—until I began a journey of interceding for other women in similar situations. In that space of prayer, I discovered something profound: God and I wanted different things. I desired a fruitful womb, but He was pursuing a fruitful relationship. God used the pain of barrenness to draw me closer to Him, shaping me through the very affliction I wanted to escape.

THE LESSONS FROM AFFLICTION

The story of the Israelites in Exodus 1 reflects how God uses affliction for His purpose. Generations after Joseph saved Egypt from ruin, the Israelites became so numerous that they were seen as a threat. Fearful and resentful, Pharaoh enslaved them, setting taskmasters over them to afflict them. Yet, the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and grew.

Exodus 1:8–12 demonstrates how God uses affliction to bring growth, fulfill His promises, and shape us into the image of His Son. It reveals that affliction is not a punishment but a tool for His divine purpose.

The Hebrew word for “afflict” (*lachats*) means “to squeeze, press, or oppress.” Affliction often feels like being crushed under the weight of physical or emotional pain. Yet, as with the Israelites, it is in these moments of pressing that God produces growth and fruitfulness in us.

THREE WAYS GOD USES AFFLICTION

1. God Can Use the Affliction as a Teacher

Psalm 119:67, 71 declares, “Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep Your word... It is good for me that I was afflicted, that I might learn Your statutes.” Affliction teaches us obedience and reliance on God.

Even Jesus Christ, our greatest example, endured the affliction of the cross. Through His suffering, many were made righteous. Similarly, 2 Corinthians 1:8–10 reminds us that affliction teaches us to depend on God rather than ourselves. “...That was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead.” In our affliction, we learn to lean on the God who sustains and delivers.

2. God Can Use the Affliction to Lead Us to Repentance

Psalm 25:16–18 pleads, “Turn to me and be gracious to me, for I am lonely and afflicted... Forgive all my sins.” God uses affliction to turn our hearts toward Him, bringing us to a place of repentance and deliverance.

Psalm 34:19 assures us, “Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all.” The goal of affliction is never to destroy us—it is to deliver and restore us.

3. God Can Use the Affliction to Display His Power In Us

2 Corinthians 12:9–10 reveals, “My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.” In our weakest moments, God’s power is displayed most gloriously. The Apostle Paul boasted in his infirmities because they allowed the power of Christ to rest upon him.

Affliction reminds us that we carry a treasure in earthen vessels, as stated in 2 Corinthians 4:7–10. “We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed...” This “light affliction” is working in us a “far more exceeding

and eternal weight of glory.” God uses what seems unbearable to produce eternal significance.

A TESTIMONY OF GOD’S PROMISE

Looking back on my ten years of affliction, I now see how God used that season to develop a deeper relationship with Him. It was through that journey that I witnessed the fulfillment of His promise: the birth of two beautiful daughters.

Whatever affliction you are facing today, know this: it will not hinder God’s promises. In fact, it may be the very means He uses to birth those promises, conforming you to the image of His Son and confirming His redemptive plan in your life. Romans 8:18 reminds us, “...The sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.”

PRAYER

Father God, thank You for using affliction to shape and refine us. Strengthen us as we endure seasons of pressing, and remind us that these are light afflictions preparing us for eternal glory. Help us to rely on Your strength and not our own, knowing You will never leave us nor forsake us. May we walk in obedience and trust, confident that You are working all things for our good. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

DAILY SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE

Reflect on how God has used affliction in your life to bring growth or draw you closer to Him. Meditate on 2 Corinthians 4:16–17 and journal your thoughts.

Post Scriptures in visible places to remind yourself of God’s faithfulness. Trust that He will restore the years, redeem the time, and bring joy even in seasons of hardship.



WEEK FIVE
DEVOTIONAL FOCUS

GROWTH & DISCIPLESHIP

DAY 26

THE COST OF DISCIPLESHIP: PART 1

By Pastor Marlin D. Harris

“Then Jesus said to his disciples, ‘If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.’” (ESV)

Matthew 16:24-25

THE PARADOX OF SURRENDER

These words of Jesus are unsettling, yet they are profoundly transformative. They stand in stark contrast to the messages of self-preservation and personal fulfillment that dominate our world. The call to *deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow Him* sounds counterintuitive, even frightening. Yet within this radical invitation lies a promise of life—true, abundant, and eternal life. This promise holds within it the wonderful grace of discipleship: though it begins with surrender, it ends with the abundant life that only Jesus can give.

CLINGING TO CONTROL

The human heart is naturally inclined to hold on to control. We create plans, establish goals, and build into our lives layers of protection to shield ourselves from any hint of uncertainty. We strive to craft a life that feels safe and predictable; all the while, we are making the unconscious mistake of thinking that self-reliance is actually strength.

But here, Jesus calls us to a deeper, far more vulnerable kind of faith. He asks us to release our hold on the temporary and lean upon Him for the eternal. To be His disciple means to let go of our instinct to save ourselves and to entrust our lives to the One who gave His life for us.

THE BURDEN OF THE CROSS

Imagine what it meant to take up a cross in 1st century Palestine. In our modern vernacular, taking up our cross is merely a metaphor or a symbolic phrase, but to Jesus’ disciples, this was no metaphor. It was a vividly horrifying image of execution, suffering, and ultimately the surrender to death. It was an unmistakable symbol of shame and sacrifice.

Today, our crosses may not be made of wood, and exact upon us physical torture but they are no less real. They take the form of heartbreak, disappointment, rejection, poverty, illness, divorce, and even bereavement and loss of loved ones. Our crosses are the places where God calls us to die to ourselves—our pride, our ambitions, our fears—and live for Him. God makes such a demand because He knows that the only way to life, is to first experience death.

Yet, paradoxically, it is in carrying our cross that we find freedom. Each step of surrender loosens the chains of self-centeredness, freeing us to experience the joy and peace that comes from living for something greater than ourselves.

THE DISCIPLE’S EXAMPLE

Consider the life of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the German theologian and pastor who stood against Hitler’s Nazi regime during World War II. His resistance was not born of hatred but of a profound love for Christ and for his fellow man. In his book, *The Cost of Discipleship*, Bonhoeffer wrote, “*When Christ calls a man, he bids him **come and die.***”

Bonhoeffer’s faithful commitment to Christ led him to imprisonment and ultimately to his death. Yet, his life remains a testimony to the power of surrender. He lost his life for the sake of Christ, and in doing so, he found a legacy that continues to inspire believers around the world.

LIVING FOR HIS SAKE

Jesus’ call is not limited to monumental acts of sacrifice; it is found in the daily choices to put Him first. It is in forgiving someone who has wronged us, even when it’s hard. It is in choosing integrity over convenience, generosity over greed, and faith over fear.

Living for His sake means trusting Him in the valleys as well as on the mountaintops. It means believing that He is at work, even when we

cannot see the outcome. It means finding our identity, not in what we accomplish, but in who we are in Him.

FINDING LIFE IN LOSS

Contrary to what many may feel, the call to discipleship is not a call to misery, but rather it is a call to purpose. Jesus does not ask us to deny ourselves because He gets some divinely sadistic joy in our suffering, but He asks us to surrender because He knows that true life can only be found when we do.

When we are inescapably attached to our own plans and desires, we are like a pregnant seed refusing to be buried. Unless, and until it does so, it will never release the unimaginable potential that it carries. But when we let go, when we allow ourselves to be planted in the soil of God's will, we begin to blossom into the oaks and forests that we were always destined to become.

Always remember that anyone can count the number of seeds in an apple, but only God can count the number of apples in a seed.

PRAYER

Lord, Your call to deny myself and follow You is not an easy, yet I am praying that you would help me to answer that call and obey. Teach me how to trust You with the areas of my life where I am afraid to let go. Teach me to carry my cross with joy, knowing that You carried it first. Strengthen me to live for Your sake, finding my life in You alone. In Jesus' name, Amen.

DAILY SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE

Set aside a moment today to identify your "cross." What is God calling you to surrender? Write it down and pray over it, asking for His strength to release it into His hands. Reflect on how carrying this cross can lead to a deeper relationship with Christ and greater purpose in your life.

DAY 27

THE COST OF DISCIPLESHIP: PART 2

By Pastor Marlin D. Harris

"Then Jesus said to his disciples, 'If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.'" (ESV)

Matthew 16:24-25

FINDING LIFE IN LOSS

The 2nd half of this passage strikes us at the core of our being. This is more than just a call to surrender, this is a call to lose our life for the higher purposes of Christ. The call of Jesus in this passage may appear on the surface to be fatalistic, but rest assured this call does not lead to ruin, but rather it leads to redemption. In a world preoccupied with self-preservation, power, status, and success, Jesus turns this world's cultural paradigm upside down and calls us to "find our life" by giving it away.

Think of a young, talented college graduate, who so happens to be the son of missionaries who serve in the huts and fields of the poorest and most destitute of our world. This young graduate vows not to relegate his life to the hard and meager conditions of the home that he grew up in. He is ready to go out and make his mark on the world. His mind is full of creative ideas, and his heart is pounding with hopes and dreams of a better life than the one he grew up around. Finally, his opportunity to explore the world around him has come and he prepares himself for the promises of the success that it holds.

And then in a dream just mere days before he is to leave the poverty that has characterized his life, he senses the clear and undeniable voice of God calling him to a life of missions work just like the life he is so desperately trying to escape. God offers him no promises, does not guarantee him success, and assures him that his road will be hard and his journey will be filled with sacrifice and uncertainty.

What would you do if you were in his place? I know that I would hesitate and think long and hard about how this call would derail the expectations of what I desired my life to be. If we are honest, most of us would do the same. The thought of surrendering everything, even in a situation such as this, feels overwhelming and maybe even impossible. Yet, it is precisely in this moment of tension that we hear Jesus calling us to lose our life for His sake.

THE FREEDOM OF SURRENDER

Jesus never hid the cost of discipleship. He clearly admits that following Him requires self-denial, a willingness to lose our life, and a commitment to trust Him with our future. But this is not a call to fear and failure. This is a call to freedom and fulfillment.

To deny ourselves is not to lose our identity but to discover it in its truest form. When we loosen our hold on the fleeting, shallow things of this life like our possessions, our ambitions, our illusions of control—we open our hands to receive what is eternal. We step out of the narrow confines of our own self-interest and into the vast array of God’s plans and purposes for our life.

The life we are called to lose is unique to each of us. For some, it may be the burden of forgiveness, the challenge of obedience, or shallow concepts of success. It may mean trusting God with unrealized dreams or relinquishing personal desires that we’ve held on to for years. Whatever it is, losing our the shadow of our old life for the substance of His new one is never done in vain.

THE TRANSFORMATIVE PATH

The story I shared with you earlier points toward the true story of Jim Elliot. Jim Elliot was a young man whose parents were in ministry, and he sensed a call to the mission field. He gave up a promising life in architecture and public speaking to serve the unreached Huaorani people of South America. He pursued the call to missions and gave the ultimate sacrifice when, at the age of 28, he died on the mission field in Ecuador. Elliot died sharing Christ with people who had never had the privilege of hearing His name. In 1956, Life magazine published an article highlighting the enormity of his faith and the cost of his commitment to Christ. Since then, schools, books and documentaries have been established in honor of Elliot’s life. Jim Elliot summed up his life in a preserved note where he

famously wrote, *“He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose.”*

Jim Elliot understood the cost of discipleship and the promise embedded within it. He lived and died with the conviction that surrendering to God’s call was worth more than clinging to earthly safety. We may not be called to physically lose our life, we may simply be called to lose our image, or to lose a few friends, or to lose an opportunity that didn’t align with God’s will for your life. But no matter what part of our lives we are called to sacrifice, we must not see the sacrifice as a loss, but rather we must see it as an offering.

LIFE BEYOND OUR OWN

The Apostle Paul words echo in the chambers of our hearts when he says, “I have been crucified with Christ, and it is no longer I that live but Christ that lives in me; and the life which I now live, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.” (Galatians 2:20) The invitation to lose our lives for Christ’s sake is a call to live a transformed, transcendent life. Our lives are not measured by what we keep, they are measured by what we give away. It is not the height of our accomplishments, but it is the depths of our surrender that leaves a lasting impact in the earth. My prayer is to die empty; to have given out all that I have received for the glory of the One who has called me to the altar of sacrifice. This, and only this, is my reasonable service.

PRAYER

Lord, the call to follow You is one that requires a spirit loaded with courage and heart filled with faith. I confess that often I am too preoccupied by my own plans, my own desires, and my own understanding to heed Your call. Teach me to trust You with every part of my life. Help me to release my hold on what is temporary and to embrace what is eternal. As I surrender to Your will, may I find the life You have promised—a life of purpose, peace, and joy in Your presence. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

DAILY SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE

Identify one area in your life where you’re holding on too tightly—be it a relationship, a career goal, or a personal far. Write it down and pray over it, asking God to help you surrender it to Him. Reflect on how releasing this to God can lead to deeper trust and freedom. Then, take a practical

step of obedience, whether it's forgiving someone, letting go of an unmet expectation, or trusting God with an uncertain future.

Through surrender, we find the strength to live not for ourselves but for the One who gave His all for us. Let this be the legacy of our discipleship: a life lived fully and freely for the glory of God.



**The invitation
to lose our lives
for Christ's sake
is a call to live a transformed,
transcendent life.
Our lives are not measured
by what we keep, they are
measured by what we give way.**

DAY 28

THE SEATED SERVANT

By Nakia Means

“Now it happened as they went that He entered a certain village; and a certain woman named Martha welcomed Him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, who also sat at Jesus’ feet and heard His word. But Martha was distracted with much serving, and she approached Him and said, ‘Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Therefore tell her to help me.’ And Jesus answered and said to her, ‘Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things. But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her.’”

Luke 10:38–42 NKJV

This well-known account of Mary and Martha highlights two ways of interacting with Jesus. Commentaries often focus on applauding Mary for choosing to sit at Jesus’ feet while cautioning against Martha’s distraction with serving. But let’s take a closer look at Martha’s plight. Many of us can relate to her busyness, whether at home, in church, or in the workplace. It’s easy to become consumed by the tasks on our to-do lists - but there’s good news in the gospel for the workaholic. We serve a Savior who wants our hearts before He asks for our hands.

God doesn’t ask us to stop serving; rather, He calls us to reorder our service. He asks us to *sit before we serve*.

SITTING BEFORE SERVING

Sitting with Jesus is not about inactivity; it is about intimacy. The Greek word for “sit” in this text means “to place near.” To sit at His feet is to deliberately place ourselves in His presence, allowing Him to support, equip, and fill us. We provide the position, and God provides the power.

This order—sitting before serving—carries profound wisdom. Jesus isn’t like those who accept service from others without seeking a relationship.

He wants us to sit with Him first so that our service flows from a place of communion with Him. When we prioritize sitting with Jesus, three key things happen:

1. Our intimacy with Him deepens, and we gain a stronger sense of our identity in Him.
2. Our service becomes more effective because it is Spirit-led rather than self-driven.
3. Those we serve encounter the presence of the One we sit with.

These truths remind us of Augustine’s powerful insight: “You have made us for Yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until it finds its rests in You.” Jesus invites us to rest at His feet, to take His easy yoke and light burden (Matthew 11:28–30).

A PRACTICAL APPLICATION

One morning, after rushing into the parking deck at work, I pulled out a pocket devotional and spent five minutes reading and praying in my car. I said, “Lord, I know this isn’t much, but I need these five minutes with You before I walk through those doors.” That brief time with Jesus completely changed the trajectory of my life.

It’s essential to carve out intentional time with God in the secret place, but we should also remember that quality matters more than quantity. Whether it’s five minutes or an hour, God meets us where we are. In seasons of busyness, His grace supplies what we need to sit with Him and serve others well.

THE LEGACY OF SITTING

The call to sit at Jesus’ feet reminds us of a story from Christian history. Susanna Wesley, the mother of John and Charles Wesley, was a mother of ten children who managed a chaotic household. Yet, she found time to pray and sit with the Lord daily. She would throw her apron over her head as a sign to her children that she was in prayer and communion with God. From this simple act of sitting with Jesus, she gained the wisdom and strength to raise two sons who would later transform the Christian world through their ministries.

Susanna Wesley’s legacy reflects the truth of this passage: sitting with Jesus is not wasted time. It is where we are renewed, equipped, and empowered to fulfill the roles and callings God has given us.

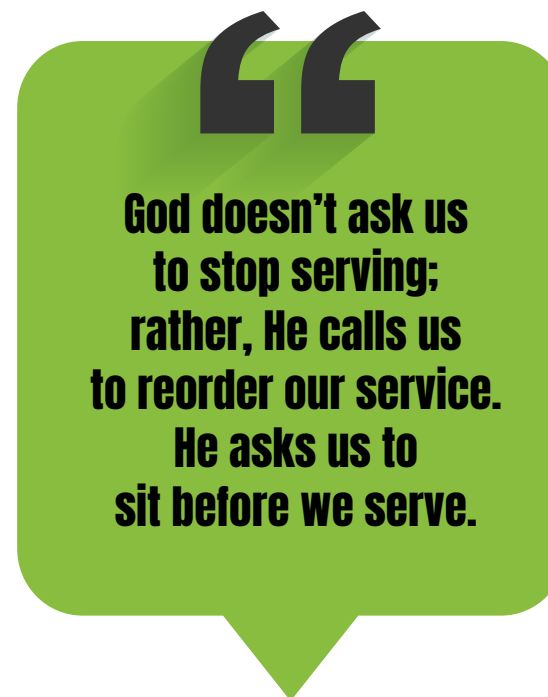
PRAYER

Father, I declare that You are my highest priority. In seasons when time and energy run thin, help me to run to Your feet in faith. I trust that when I seek You first, everything else will fall into its proper place. Teach me to balance sitting with serving, and may my service flow from intimacy with You. Thank You for the grace that meets me in every season and for Your love that invites me to rest in Your presence. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

DAILY SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE

Reflect on your current season of life. Are you leaning more toward sitting with Jesus, serving others, or a balance of both? Take a moment to pray and ask the Lord about any adjustments you believe need to be made.

As you seek Him, consider incorporating intentional pauses throughout your day to reconnect with His presence. Write down one Scripture that reminds you of the importance of rest in Him, and keep it visible as a reminder to prioritize sitting at His feet.



DAY 29

SALT OF THE EARTH

By Dr. Lynette Lewis

“You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people’s feet.”

MATTHEW 6:32

In Matthew 5, Jesus covers several topics while instructing His disciples on the character and conduct He expects of them—and all believers who would follow. This teaching, known as the “Sermon on the Mount,” includes lessons on the Beatitudes, being salt and light, Christ’s fulfillment of the Law, and practical guidance on anger, lust, divorce, oaths, retaliation, and loving one’s enemies.

Nestled right after the Beatitudes, verse 13 presents a metaphor about salt to illustrate the impact Jesus expects His followers to have on the world. Even in the face of persecution, revilement, and false accusations for righteousness’ sake (v. 10-11), disciples are still expected to be “the salt of the earth,” making a lasting difference in the lives of others.

Salt serves as a preservative and adds flavor to food. Once it’s added, food is forever changed. However, if salt loses its quality—its ability to preserve or enhance flavor—it becomes useless and is discarded.

Albert Barnes, a 19th-century theologian and Presbyterian minister, commented on this passage, noting that salt in Eastern countries was often impure, mixed with vegetable and earthly substances. This mixture could lose its saltiness entirely. The flavorless salt was then repurposed as a material for pathways or walkways, similar to how we use gravel (as noted in *Believer’s Bible Commentary* by William MacDonald).

Jesus’ metaphor captures this truth vividly: salt that loses its taste is no longer useful, fit only to be trampled underfoot.

HOW DOES THIS APPLY TO US?

As believers, we are called to be the salt of the earth. When someone tastes something salty, it causes thirst. Spiritually, our conduct should inspire others to thirst for the living water of Jesus Christ.

Jesus said, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink” (John 7:37). He offers water that quenches thirst forever (John 4:10, 14). Rivers of living water flow from those who believe in Him (John 7:38).

Our lives, as followers of Christ, should reflect His love so powerfully that people are drawn to Him. Like salt, our actions and character should preserve others from spiritual decay and lead them to eternal life through Jesus.

Jesus promised in John 4:14: “But whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”

ARE WE SALTY ENOUGH?

It’s worth asking ourselves: Are the people around us thirsty for the living water of Jesus Christ because of our example? Or has our salt lost its flavor?

We lose our saltiness when we prioritize the fleeting focuses of society—worldly success, possessions, fame, or even our personal “brand.” When we neglect our relationship with God, our ability to influence others spiritually diminishes.

But when we make God our priority, study His Word, and allow the Holy Spirit to transform us from within, we become salty again. Our conduct and character draw others toward the rivers of living water flowing from us, leading them to Jesus.

Saints, let us embrace our role as salt. Let’s preserve those around us from eternal separation from God, sprinkling them with love, kindness, and godly character so that they, too, may thirst for the living water of Jesus Christ.

PRAYER

Father God, in the name of Jesus, we thank You for Your grace, love, and mercy. We acknowledge You as the great I AM, whom we can trust with every part of our lives. Forgive us for the times we have not made You our priority, allowing jobs, possessions, and worldly desires to take Your place.

Lord, we cry out to You, knowing that You are all we need. Help us to love humanity as You do, sowing seeds of grace, service, and purpose. Stir up the gifts within us, and use us to draw others closer to You. May our lives inspire a deep thirst for Your living water. In Jesus' name, Amen.

DAILY SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE

Take time to reflect on your spiritual influence. Are you living as salt in your community? Identify one action you can take this week to draw others closer to Jesus through your conduct and character. Pray for opportunities to serve as a positive, godly example in the lives of those around you.



**Help us to love
humanity as You do,
sowing seeds of grace,
service, and purpose.
Stir up the gifts within us,
and use us to draw others
closer to You.**

DAY 30

A VESSEL FOR THE LORD

By Dana L. Mann

“If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the master’s use, and prepared unto every good work.”

2 Timothy 2:21 NKJV

When asked to define the word *vessel*, many might describe a container, a ship, or perhaps a bowl or basin. But for the next few minutes, let’s think of the word *vessel* in anatomical terms. A blood vessel—an artery, vein, or channel—is a vital structure designed to receive and deliver life-sustaining substances throughout the body.

Now, let’s consider this metaphor spiritually. The Apostle Paul, in his letter to Timothy, speaks of believers as vessels. He challenges us to be vessels of honor, set apart for God’s purposes and prepared for every good work. But what does this mean in practical terms?

VESSELS OF HONOR VS. DISHONOR

In today’s world, the term *influencer* has taken on significant meaning, particularly among Generation Z. Once merely a descriptor for someone who inspires others, it has evolved into a lucrative career for those who captivate audiences with their charisma, style, or message. Yet many influencers focus solely on feeding the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life. They chase after likes, followers, money, and notoriety—only to find that these pursuits often lead to emptiness, loneliness, and despair.

This stands in stark contrast to Paul’s vision of a vessel of honor. In 2 Timothy 2, Paul explains the difference between vessels of honor and dishonor. A vessel of honor stands on the solid foundation of God, departing from iniquity (v. 19). It is sanctified, set apart, and prepared for

God's work (v. 21). A dishonorable vessel, on the other hand, is mired in sin, unfit for the Master's use.

Paul paints a picture of the Church as a great house filled with vessels of varying types—gold, silver, wood, and clay. Some are honorable, and others are not. The type of vessel we become is not determined by our outward appearance or abilities, but by our willingness to be cleansed, sanctified, and used for God's purposes.

BECOMING A VESSEL FOR THE LORD

Becoming a vessel for the Lord requires intentionality. It involves purging ourselves of anything dishonorable and allowing the Word of God to transform us. Paul provides a roadmap for this transformation in 2 Timothy 2:

- **Depart from iniquity:** Set your affections on things above, not earthly pursuits (v. 19).
- **Flee youthful lusts:** Pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace with a pure heart (v. 22).
- **Avoid foolish disputes:** Resist quarrels and strife, choosing instead to speak truth in love (v. 23).
- **Be gentle and humble:** Correct others with patience, praying for their repentance (v. 24–25).
- **Study God's Word:** Be diligent to present yourself approved, rightly dividing the Word of Truth (v. 15).

Ask yourself: Is God's Word flowing in and out of my life like a healthy blood vessel? Am I discipling others and allowing myself to be disciplined? Is there anything in my heart or habits blocking God's work in me?

LIVING FOR LIKES OR FOR LOVE?

In an age dominated by social media, it's easy to live for likes, thumbs ups, and followers. But as vessels of the Lord, our focus must be on love—love for God and love for others. Jesus calls us to deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow Him (Matthew 16:24). This selfless life contrasts sharply with the "selfie culture" that prioritizes personal gain over godly purpose.

Consider this: Is your life marked by selfless service, or are you consumed by worldly pursuits? Are you building others up, or are you seeking validation from the world?

The great missionary Hudson Taylor once said, "*God uses men who are weak and feeble enough to lean on Him.*" A vessel of honor acknowledges his dependence on God, allowing His Spirit to flow freely through him and bring life to others.

PRAYER

Dear Heavenly Father, thank You for calling me to be a vessel for Your glory. Forgive me for the times I have allowed dishonorable things to fill my heart. Cleanse me, Lord, and sanctify me so that I may be fit for Your use. Thank You for Your faithfulness, even when I fall short. Help me to remain steadfast, unmovable, and always abounding in Your work. Teach me to set my affections on things above and to live a life that glorifies You. Thank You for the grace to endure, the strength to persevere, and the privilege to serve. In Jesus' name, Amen.

DAILY SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE

Take time to read and meditate on 2 Timothy 2 in its entirety. Create a list of characteristics that define a vessel of honor, as outlined in the chapter.

Then, reflect on your own life. Examine your social media presence, lifestyle, thoughts, appetites, dreams, actions, and conversations. Are you living as a vessel for the Lord or for the world? Write down any areas where you feel convicted, and ask God to help you align them with His purpose.

Lastly, commit to living each day as a vessel of honor, allowing God's Word and Spirit to flow through you to bring life to others.

DAY 31

UP TO THE MOUNTAINTOP

Taken from, *Streams in the Desert*, and Authored by L.B. Cowman

*He went up on a mountain apart to pray:
and when the evening was come, he was there alone.*

Matthew 14:23 (NKJV)

One of the blessings of the old-time Sabbath day was the calmness, restfulness, and holy peace that came from having a time of quiet solitude away from the world. There is a special strength that is born in solitude. Crows travel in flocks, and wolves in packs, but the lion and the eagle are usually found alone.

Strength is found not in busyness and noise but in quietness. For a lake to reflect the heavens on its surface, it must be calm. Our Lord loved the people who flocked to Him, but there are numerous accounts in the Scriptures of His going away from them for a brief period of time. On occasion He would withdraw from the crowd and quite often would spend His evenings alone in the hills. Most of His ministry was performed in the towns and cities by the seashore, but He loved the hills more and at nightfall would frequently seclude Himself in their peaceful heights.

The one thing we need today more than anything else is to spend time alone with our Lord, sitting at His feet in the sacred privacy of His blessed presence. Oh, how we need to reclaim the lost art of meditation! Oh, how we need “the secret place” (Psalm 91:1 *KJV*) as part of our lifestyle! Oh, how we need the power that comes from waiting upon God!

*It is good to live in the valley sweet,
Where the work of the world is done,
Where the reapers sing in the fields of wheat,
And work till the setting sun.
But beyond the meadows, the hills I see
Where the noise of traffic cease,*

*And I follow a Voice who calls out to me
From the hilltop space of peace.
Yes, to live is sweet in the valley fair,
And work till the setting sun;
But my spirit yearns for the hilltop's air
When the day and its work are done.
For a Presence breathes o'er the silent hills,
And its sweetness is living yet;
The same deep calm and the hillside fills,
As breathed over Olivet.*

Every life that desires to be strong must have its “Most Holy Place” (Exodus 26:33) into which only God enters.¹

ENDING THOUGHTS

Pastor Marlin D. Harris

That last phrase of Madam Cowman’s devotional, “Every life that desires to be strong must have its own “Holy Place” (Exodus 26:33) into which only God enters” is perhaps the greatest, but most unheeded, spiritual truth of all of Christian experience. Every Christian longs for power, victory and Divine blessedness, but so few realize that such power is only borne out of regular and extended time in the ‘mountaintop’. This sacred space is not a physical location, but it is a condition of the heart, and becomes the unique source of our spiritual vitality. When you make it to this mountaintop, as Jesus did many late evenings, and many early mornings, you will find that your life takes on a holy glow; an aura that comes from quiet communion with God. There is a holy boldness that accompanies the life that is spent in the presence of God. What great power have you and I forfeited because we have failed to climb the mountain and spend the morning with God.

We live in a world filled with distractions that constantly demand our attention, pulling us in every direction and leaving us tired, worn, and

¹ Cowman, L. B. E. *Streams in the Desert Morning and Evening: 365-Day Devotional*. Zondervan, 2017.

weary. Do we not hear the invitation being extended for us to come to the “hilltop of peace”? I know you have a day filled with responsibilities that demand your attention. I know you have a family that needs your near constant care. I know the clock ticks with unforgiving rapidity and yet another day is lost to the tyrannical rule of time. But, none of these are reasons why you shouldn’t retreat to the mountaintop; actually, these are all the reasons why you ‘must’! You have too much on your plate to not operate in the power you get from the “Holy Place”. You are in too great a demand to attempt to go it alone without God. A quick prayer, won’t do for the kind of challenges you face and the kind of dilemmas you must constantly confront. You need the mountaintop. I assure you, you are not more busy than Jesus, and you are certainly not in as much demand as He was. And if He made time for the mountaintop, then so must you, and so must I. As Isaiah 30:15 reminds us, “In returning and rest you shall be saved; in quietness and confidence shall be your strength.”

So, let us not neglect the sacred art of retreating to the Holy Place. Go! Run to the hills where your help comes from, and cast our cares upon the Lord. When you return, you will have the fragrance of His presence over your life, and those you encounter will take note that you “have been with Jesus”.

PRAYER

Gracious Father, I want you to know that I realize how much I need my time with You. Your guiding words, Your empowering Spirit, Your calming voice is so desperately needed in my loud and demanding life. Forgive me for neglecting to meet you on the mountaintop of my soul. I renew my commitment to turn from those things that have robbed me of my time with You. Teach me the value of not facing my day, until I have sat with You and received Your heart the day ahead. In Jesus name, Amen.

DAILY SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE

Creating Your Sacred Space

Set aside intentional time this week to retreat into solitude with God. Identify a specific place where you can be alone—whether it’s a quiet corner in your home, a park bench, or a nearby hilltop. Make it your “Most Holy Place,” a sanctuary where you can meet with God without distractions.

1. **Preparation:** Bring a Bible, journal, or a favorite devotional book with you.
2. **Meditation:** Begin by meditating on the life of Jesus, who often withdrew to the hills to be alone with the Father.
3. **Prayer:** Open your heart in prayer. Speak to God about your life, your struggles, your joys, and your desires. Then, allow space for silence.
4. **Reflection:** Use your journal to record what you sense God is revealing to you in the stillness. Write down any insights, prayers, or scriptures that come to mind.
5. **Commitment:** As you leave your sacred space, commit to creating this rhythm regularly. Let the calm and strength you receive in these moments influence how you approach the demands of daily life.

As you practice this discipline, remember that strength is found not in busyness, but in quietness. Let God renew you in the sacred solitude of His presence.

