

# WHAT I WISH I KNEW...

*single. dating. married.*

DAILY DEVOTIONAL



In today's fast-paced world, relationships often get relegated to the background amidst our busy schedules. Yet, the Bible teaches us that relationships are central to our faith and witness to the world. Over these next few weeks, we'll explore key themes that God has laid out for us in His Word to deepen our understanding and practice of relationships as followers of Christ, whether we're married or single.

This devotional is not just about acquiring knowledge but about experiencing transformation. Together, let's commit to growing in love, respect and spiritual maturity, making sure to keep Jesus at the center of our relationships.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a large, stylized 'B' followed by a horizontal line and a cursive 'J'.

Bryan Jones, Senior Pastor

## DAILY PRAYER AND REFLECTION QUESTIONS

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*"... Our Father in heaven..."*

**Matthew 6:9b (NLT)**

- **What do You want to say to me today as my Father?**

*"... may Your name be kept holy."*

**Matthew 6:9c (NLT)**

- **What do You want to reveal to me about Your power today?**

*"May Your Kingdom come soon."*

**Matthew 6:10a (NLT)**

- **Help me make Your priorities my priorities today.**

*"Give us today the food we need,"*

**Matthew 6:11 (NLT)**

- **Is there anything specific You want me to do with my time or the people I'm around today?**

*"and forgive us our sins, as we have forgiven those who sin against us"*

**Matthew 6:12 (NLT)**

- **Reveal to me anyone I need to forgive or ask for forgiveness.**

*"And don't let us yield to temptation..."*

**Matthew 6:13a (NLT)**

- **Is there anywhere I'm vulnerable to temptation?**

## CREATED FOR COMMUNITY

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*Then the LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper who is just right for him." So the LORD God formed from the ground all the wild animals and all the birds of the sky. He brought them to the man to see what he would call them, and the man chose a name for each one. He gave names to all the livestock, all the birds of the sky, and all the wild animals. But still there was no helper just right for him. So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep. While the man slept, the LORD God took out one of the man's ribs and closed up the opening. Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib, and He brought her to the man. "At last!" the man exclaimed. "This one is bone from my bone, and flesh from my flesh! She will be called 'woman,' because she was taken from 'man.'" This explains why a man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife, and the two are united into one.*

**Genesis 2:18-24 (NLT)**

It's a common misconception that the first thing ever proclaimed to be not good is found in Genesis 3. It's there that we see Adam and Eve disobey God, break fellowship with Him, and ultimately introduce sin and death to humanity. Certainly not good, but not the first thing deemed so.

It's in Genesis 2:18 that we first see something proclaimed to be not good. This starkly contrasts with God declaring after every day of creation that everything He beheld was good. But it's here that we see Adam's isolation acknowledged. While he's surrounded by animals that he got to name, there's no one like him. He lacks community and companionship. So, God intervenes and creates Eve.

You are created for community and companionship. Think about this—solitary confinement is one of the most extreme forms of punishment that we see in prisons. And yet, so much of the time, we self-isolate, believing that we're better off alone. The stark reality is you're not. God Himself said so.

It must be noted that, of course, Adam and Eve were more than just companions. If you're married, then hopefully, your spouse is your most cherished companion, the one with whom you share all the ups and downs of life. But even if you're not married (and maybe never plan to be), you're still created for community. I encourage you to pursue intentional relationships that will encourage you in your walk with Christ.

**APPLICATION:** In what ways are you isolated or alone? Who are you sharing your life with? Who speaks into your blind spots? Who can you confide in when you're struggling? Ask God to help you take a step into a Christ-centered community.

**PRAYER:** God, thank You for the gift of community. Thank You for those that You've placed in my life. Help me to love as You love and live as Your Spirit directs. In Jesus' name, amen.

## WE NEED OTHERS

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*Two people are better off than one, for they can help each other succeed. If one person falls, the other can reach out and help. But someone who falls alone is in real trouble. Likewise, two people lying close together can keep each other warm. But how can one be warm alone? A person standing alone can be attacked and defeated, but two can stand back-to-back and conquer. Three are even better, for a triple-braided cord is not easily broken.*

**Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 (NLT)**

I don't like needing others.

Yes—I'm publicly confessing that, to this day, I wrestle with pride. As a pastor, I love being there for others. It's not just my job; it's my calling. And I don't even mind sharing my life with others. But when I cross that threshold into needing someone else...I confess that I still struggle with it.

The last time we moved, I didn't ask any of my friends for help (let's be honest; most people aren't ecstatic at being asked anyway). So, I just rented the truck, used a dolly, and did it all by myself. It was hard, labor-intensive, time-consuming work, but I just didn't want to need anyone else.

Like the song says, *everybody needs somebody sometimes*. The writer of Ecclesiastes, who we believe to be Solomon (the wisest man who ever lived), takes it a step further. He points out that when we fall alone, we're in big trouble. But if we fall while together, the other can reach out and help. All of us are going to fall at some point. When that moment comes, we must be willing to accept the love and help of those around us. Don't be stubborn like me—embrace the community God has given you!

Your community will look different at different stages of life. When you're younger, unmarried, and perhaps relocating for the first time, it can be a lonely journey. You'll need to be that much more intentional in finding a community of like-minded believers to share the journey with. If you're married, you may have couples that you're close with as you move through the various stages of life. Wherever or whenever you find yourself, be willing to embrace your need for others.

**APPLICATION:** Is pride robbing you of the fullness of Christian community? Pride is a subtle but destructive force in our lives. Ask God to show you where you might be missing the mark.

**PRAYER:** Father, take my pride away. Help me embrace the community You've placed around me. Help me be there for others. Give me a greater awareness of how I can make an impact for You. In Jesus' name, amen.

## THE GIFT OF SINGLENES

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*But I wish everyone were single, just as I am. Yet each person has a special gift from God, of one kind or another. So I say to those who aren't married and to widows—it's better to stay unmarried, just as I am. But if they can't control themselves, they should go ahead and marry. It's better to marry than to burn with lust.*

**1 Corinthians 7:7-9 (NLT)**

Have you ever heard someone speak of the *gift of singleness*? It's become a somewhat common term, especially in church circles. If someone isn't married, they just have the gift of singleness. But to the person in that season, it might feel like anything but a gift. They're desperately longing for someone they can share their life with. I remember being in my early twenties and wanting to find a wife. I went on blind dates, constantly put myself in social situations where I could meet women, and even tried online dating. The gift of singleness wasn't one I wanted.

However, looking back with some perspective, I see God used that season to form me. I wasn't ready to be a husband yet—I was still much too immature and unfocused. Had I gotten married then, I would have unfairly looked to my spouse to complete me in some way. But in truth, only God can speak into the depths of our souls. He alone is the source of our identity.

In the passage above, Paul communicates that he wishes everyone were single like he was, not out of pettiness or jealousy, but out of an ability to more clearly focus on advancing the Kingdom (see 1 Corinthians 7:32-35 for more). It's good, right and healthy to focus on your spouse if you're married. We're not called to neglect them for the Kingdom! But the reality is when you're rightfully devoting time and energy to your spouse (and kids), you're unable to have as singular a focus. So, if you're in a season of singleness—make the most of that season for the Kingdom. If you're married, love and honor your spouse well, but don't take marriage as a pass for advancing the Kingdom.

**APPLICATION:** What season of life are you in currently? How can you be working to advance the Kingdom? What practical opportunities has God placed before you, perhaps uniquely, that you cannot ignore? Ask the Holy Spirit to guide you.

**PRAYER:** Father, thank You for Your faithfulness in the various seasons of life. Help me to keep my eyes on You in the ebbs and flows of each season. Grow within me a desire to be an active ambassador for Your Kingdom. In Jesus' name, amen.

## ETERNAL LOVE

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Then Jesus was approached by some Sadducees—religious leaders who say there is no resurrection from the dead. They posed this question: "Teacher, Moses gave us a law that if a man dies, leaving a wife without children, his brother should marry the widow and have a child who will carry on the brother's name. Well, suppose there were seven brothers. The oldest one married and then died without children. So the second brother married the widow, but he also died without children. Then the third brother married her. This continued with all seven of them, and still there were no children. Last of all, the woman also died. So tell us, whose wife will she be in the resurrection? For all seven were married to her." Jesus replied, "Your mistake is that you don't know the Scriptures, and you don't know the power of God. For when the dead rise, they will neither marry nor be given in marriage. In this respect they will be like the angels in heaven. **Mark 12:18-25 (NLT)**

*'Til death do us part.* You've probably heard this at a wedding. If you're married, you've perhaps even made this verbatim promise to love your spouse every day for the rest of your life. Some days are certainly more trying than others, but we nevertheless endure in our love as *long as we both shall live*. While it may sound more romantic to say forever, the truth is marriage will not ensure into the next life.

One takeaway from this truth is that our love for Jesus should outweigh our love even for our spouse. To be clear, there's no human being that you should love more. Ephesians 5 speaks of mutual submission to one another. It's a unique relationship, one that is rich and satisfying. But your spouse didn't die to save your soul. Jesus did; therefore, our love for Him should be greater than our love for our spouse.

When we leave this life, we'll be present with God. To stand in His presence and behold His beauty and grandeur will cause all else to pale in comparison. As much as I love my wife, I know that one day, I'll be face-to-face with Jesus, and the rest of my eternity will be fixated and focused on Him to the exclusion of all else. I hope my wife and I will be friends in eternity, but Jesus eclipses all others—wife, kids, extended family, friends, etc.

One other note from the passage above—Mark 12:25 says that our lack of marriage is one way we'll be *like the angels*. But we do not become angels. We will be given resurrection bodies (see 2 Corinthians 5). To my knowledge, those bodies won't feature wings. We're not to become angels—our relationship with God is so much more special.

**APPLICATION:** How can you live in light of what is to come in eternity? How are your day-to-day actions impacted as you consider the brevity of this life? What is God placing on your heart?

**PRAYER:** Lord, thank You for the blessings You bestow in this life. Help me every day to be thankful for Your grace. Please help me to live in light of eternity. In Jesus' name, amen.



## THE TEMPLE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

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*Don't you realize that your bodies are actually parts of Christ? Should a man take his body, which is part of Christ, and join it to a prostitute? Never! And don't you realize that if a man joins himself to a prostitute, he becomes one body with her? For the Scriptures say, "The two are united into one." But the person who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with him. Run from sexual sin! No other sin so clearly affects the body as this one does. For sexual immorality is a sin against your own body. Don't you realize that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who lives in you and was given to you by God? You do not belong to yourself, for God bought you with a high price. So you must honor God with your body.*

**1 Corinthians 6:15-20 (NLT)**

God gets to say what is out of bounds when it comes to sexual ethics.

We live in a time when that statement might seem controversial. Certainly, many today believe that what they do with their body is their choice. After all, no one is getting hurt, right? Wrong. When we walk outside the prescribed parameters of God in any area of our lives, we are certainly opening ourselves up to a whole world of hurt. But when it comes to sexual ethics, it's that much more serious; as Paul tells us above, *no other sin so clearly affects the body*.

If we claim to follow Christ, we don't belong to ourselves. God has purchased our freedom with the precious lifeblood of His one and only Son. This means we honor Him with our thoughts, words and actions in every facet of our lives. The Gospel is transformative for this life here and now—not just in the next life.

The shifting sands of cultural position are no excuse for those who are surrendered and submitted to the Lordship of Christ to take sinful liberties with their bodies. Sex is meant to be between one man and one woman in a lifelong covenant marriage. Anything outside of those boundaries is sinful. If you're married—remain faithful. If you're single—pursue purity. Either way—we're called to honor God with our bodies.

**APPLICATION:** Have you stopped to consider that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit? Thank God for this now! Ask Him to reveal to you anything that might be causing you to stumble into sexual sin. Commit to His way!

**PRAYER:** Father, You are sovereign. You made us, and You get to establish the boundaries of what is permitted and what is not. Help us to bring our lives more fully under Your Lordship day by day. In Jesus' name, amen.

## ABOVE ALL ELSE

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*"Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and He will give you everything you need."*  
**Matthew 6:33 (NLT)**

The most important thing about you is not your marital status. In the same vein, the most important thing about you is not whether you have children or not. There's nothing wrong with wanting those things. But they're not the end-all-be-all of your life.

Your life is meant to bring glory to God. We're to be about His Kingdom, not our own. When we focus on climbing the corporate ladder, the size of our bank account, or even our family status, we miss out on what's truly best. We're invited into the beauty of the Kingdom. We're to advance it day by day. But what does that look like? How does one seek the Kingdom?

Simply put, it means bringing Him into every area of our lives. Our relationships. Our finances. Our decisions. Everything is done to bring Him glory. We talk so much about getting to God one day when we move into the afterlife. But in truth, we're to bring Him into our lives here and now. Earlier in Matthew 6, Jesus teaches people how to pray. *"Your Kingdom come, Your will be done."* Ask yourself this—*are you doing the will of the Father?* Again, you may wonder—*how can I know His will?* Study His Word. In your time of praying, ask Him to reveal Himself to you. Seek the wisdom of a Christ-centered community. Fix your eyes on Him.

As we do this, He will give us all we need. Maybe not all you want. And maybe not exactly when you want it. But in the nearly twenty years I've been following Jesus, I've seen His provision time and again. His fingerprints of grace are all over my life. I've not followed Him perfectly, but as I've endeavored to make Him my first priority, He has certainly always been there for me.

**APPLICATION:** Ask yourself the hard question—*am I seeking the Kingdom above all else?* If yes—wonderful! Keep going! If your answer is no—what is getting in the way? What changes might you need to make? What would prevent you from making those changes? Ask the Holy Spirit to grant you clarity and conviction.

**PRAYER:** Lord—help me not to simply call You Lord without it actually being true—rule and reign in every area of my life. Be glorified and magnified in every part of who I am and what I do. Thank You for meeting my every need. In Jesus' name, amen.

# FIRST LOVE

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*We love because He first loved us.*

**1 John 4:19 (NIV)**

I have shared it before, but on the airplane, it always feels selfish to me when they say the first thing you should do in case of an emergency is put your mask on before helping someone else with theirs. This feels like the antithesis of how Jesus lived. He was always loving and serving others. The key difference, though, is that He always found time to break away and experience the love of the Father. We must learn this simple principle: *you cannot love others when you are empty*. It's not spiritual to run yourself into the ground and then try to love your spouse or others. We must first pick up the promises of God, put them to our faces and drink deep so we are filled with the fresh power of the Spirit. Everything, and I mean everything, has to be built around this principle.

Henri Nouwen speaks about two types of love. He speaks about *first love* and *second love*. First love, he says, is from God because it will never leave us, never hurt us, never forsake us. As John says above, *He first loved us*. The second type of love is the love of a spouse, friend, job or family member. As great as these are, they can hurt us, leave us (in life or death), and they aren't perfect. You cannot build your life on a solid foundation if you've built your life on second loves. The most selfless thing you can do each day is draw near to the first love, even if you only have a few minutes. I would contend Jesus was one of the busiest men on planet Earth, but He always found time for the Father's love. He always found time for His first love. We must be no different if we want the life of Jesus flowing through us. We live in a culture that has a motto of *try harder or keep pushing*. Jesus' motto was "*Come to Me all who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.*" (See Matthew 11:28.) Notice, He will give us rest. He will give us rest, recharge us with His love, and allow us to love others through His strength, not ours. This is the only way to truly love your spouse, your family and your friends. You cannot bear the burden of everything on your own. You need the supernatural first love of God pumping through your veins. Make it a habit to break away each morning, afternoon or night and draw near to God's love. He is faithful, and He is for you!

**APPLICATION:** Don't try harder. Draw near to Jesus today.

**PRAYER:** Ask God to help you create a rhythm or schedule where you can break away a few minutes each day, or several times a day, and just sit in the Father's love. Try it for a week and see what it does in your soul. Spend time praying and asking God to direct you.

## LIVING FOR AN AUDIENCE OF ONE

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*Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord.* **Ephesians 5:21-22 (NIV)**

How do you honor, or better yet stay faithful, to a boss who isn't the best, a spouse who isn't pulling their weight, a friend who hasn't been there, or a bad neighbor? What I've learned is that God doesn't want to give you a new spouse, and He usually doesn't want to give you a new job or new friend. Sure, sometimes He does, but more often, He wants to give you a greater sense of purpose inside the marriage, job or friendship! How do you do that? Your aim has to shift from having a great job, a great marriage, or a great neighbor to serving the Lord. It's good and noble to want and strive for those things, but our chief pursuit must be honoring God. This has shifted how I live my life and, honestly, the amount of joy I have. When I commit each day to serve God and honor Him, I'm never disappointed; however, when I look to get things from other people, often I'm disappointed. Most people will say *well, they need to change*, but often, what God is changing is us. He's making us more like Him. He's making us more loving, kind—more selfless. Only those fully committed to Jesus can live like this, and here's the irony: those people are honestly the happiest around. Why? Because they are free to love and don't have so many agendas, demands, and expectations of others.

If everyone's looking for others to meet their needs, then no one has the capacity to rise up and truly love and serve; their love is conditional. This is easy, but it's very hard to live out. That's why Paul doesn't say in the verse about submitting *if you have a great husband*. He's showing us the Christian's life is one of surrender and sacrifice, but it's one where we ironically find joy in doing so. The selfish people I know are some of the most miserable people. However, those committed to serving everyone to honor Christ are some of the most joyful. The way of the Kingdom is to live upside down. We go from death to life. While those trying to find life in this world never do. Live for an audience of One.

**APPLICATION:** Live for an audience of One.

**PRAYER:** Ask God how you can serve and love those around you. Ask the Spirit to show you how He has loved and served you first. Ask Him if there is anyone that you are struggling with. Forgive them and ask for the power to love and serve them well!

## SELFISH OR SELFLESS

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*Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.*

**1 Corinthians 13:4-7 (NIV)**

One of the signs of maturity isn't self-awareness; it's self-forgetfulness. It's been said: *Pride isn't thinking little of yourself; it's thinking of yourself less.* We live in a time, culture and place that highlights self, it seems more than ever. Everything today can be customized to your wants, preferences and desires. The problem is that it can condition us to think life is all about us when the correct order should be God, others, then ourselves. I confess I'm okay with the God first part, but the others first is something I struggle with. I'm a big believer in counseling. It has changed so much in my life. However, be leery of counseling that gets you to focus solely on yourself. I learned that I need to be aware, grieve and heal up so I can truly love others. In some ways, the counseling goal was to allow me to live with a self-forgetfulness. I needed to be aware of some things, focus on some pains, and process some feelings to get healthy so that my life could be poured out as a drink offering.

Marriage, dating, and even relationships can be selfish or selfless. The goal isn't to meet your needs; it's to love and serve others. If everyone lived like this, it would be transformative. You focus on the needs of your friends, family and spouse, and others focus on yours. The problem is that for some people, you are the only one living selflessly, and that is something to be grieved. Remember, though, you are not alone. This is exactly what Jesus did; even in the greatest act of love, people were mocking Him, and He still chose a selfless love. Also, remember you are loved by the most humble and selfless God, really loved. Those who pour out selfless love and don't get it in return have a solidarity with Jesus that others don't. Rest assured, when the final seconds of your life on earth end, you won't regret one minute of selfless love you poured out. Live and love like Jesus.

**APPLICATION:** The goal is a self-forgetfulness that allows us to truly love others.

**PRAYER:** Ask the Spirit to help you truly love others. Ask Him to help you pour yourself out toward others. Ask Him for practical ways you can do that today with your family, friends, neighbors or co-workers. Thank Him for His love towards you!

## LOVE, BUT DON'T IDOLIZE!

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*It was in the year King Uzziah died that I saw the Lord. He was sitting on a lofty throne, and the train of His robe filled the Temple.* **Isaiah 6:1 (NLT)**

I have heard it said that an idol is making a good thing an ultimate thing. Most things that move our hearts away from God are good things placed in the wrong position. Throughout the years, people have made spouses, kids, pastors, leaders or celebrities into idols. Idols give us a sense of hope for the future; they also secure our identity. The problem is that no idol can fulfill all that.

In the verse above, the people had made Uzziah an idol. He was a king who secured peace, led the people to prosperity, and was beloved by his people. The problem is people were putting their trust in this king and not the King of Kings. Notice what happens: when the king dies, all of the sudden, Isaiah sees God. Oftentimes, God will take away the things that we put too much trust in. He wants us to trust in Him fully. He must kill the idols of our hearts so that He can live and reign freely in our lives. Don't idolize your spouse, pastor, leader or kid. The problem is most people aren't aware they do this. *We think if I had this spouse, if I was married, or if my spouse was different, then things would be great.* Nothing will be great in life if Jesus isn't the center of your heart. Sometimes spiritually, we depend on others so much we can elevate them above God Himself, not intentionally, but we listen and look to them more than we do Jesus. We should love those around us but make sure we don't idolize them. Don't take a good thing and make it an ultimate thing. God is the only one who can fulfill and reign over our hearts.

**APPLICATION:** Don't let a good thing become an ultimate thing today.

**PRAYER:** Ask God to help you keep Him at the center of your life! Ask for power to believe the truth: *if you have Jesus, you have everything.* Ask the Spirit to reveal if anyone's voice has become louder or more important than God's.

## A LOVE THAT NEVER GIVES UP

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*Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.*

**Ephesians 4:2 (NIV)**

Following Jesus is not based on a feeling; it's based on a commitment. People are often surprised to hear me say this when talking. A little while ago, someone shared the guilt they felt for not wanting to be obedient or spend time with God. I thanked them for their honesty, and I said, *do you think Jesus felt like dying for the sins of the world?* We see in the garden Jesus asking for any other way, but He stays faithful. Being faithful has little to do with feelings; sometimes, it means not letting our feelings guide our decisions. There are two dangerous extremes we can have.

One is legalism, where we detach our hearts and inner world from God's love. The other, and maybe more dangerous in this generation, is a liberalism that trusts our feelings over our commitments. If I chose to be a dad when I felt like it, I wouldn't be a dad all that often. There are times when I feel like following Jesus, and there are times I don't. But I know He is worth it, and I've committed to Him.

I'm surprised when Christians approach a covenant of marriage that they have made to God, and the reason they give for divorce is they don't feel it. The reason people make a vow isn't about feelings; it's about commitment. No one gets divorced on their wedding day. Why? Because they feel it! It's after, when things are difficult. The starting point to a biblical marriage is to understand it's based on a commitment, not a feeling. The reason some people remarry multiple times is they keep searching for the feelings, and after those go away, they move on. This isn't God's picture of marriage. God doesn't hate divorced people. He hates divorce, and part of the reason is because a commitment is broken. God gives abandonment and adultery as the only two reasons for divorce, but it's never about feelings. May we have a commitment and love for our spouse that God has for us. That may be easy or difficult, depending on the season or the person you are married to. I can't say everything will have a picture-perfect ending, but what I can say is God will give you the strength and bless you when you choose to honor the commitment you've made. Remember, He is good.

**APPLICATION:** Marriage isn't based on a feeling; it's based on a commitment.

**PRAYER:** Ask the Spirit to help you stay committed to your spouse. Be honest about the problems you are facing and invite God in. Ask the Spirit to change your heart and love for them.

## THE PURPOSE OF LOVE

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*Jesus answered, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind." This is the greatest and the most important commandment. The second most important commandment is like it: "Love your neighbor as much as you love yourself."* **Matthew 22:37-39 (GNT)**

The phrase *I thirst* was the life verse and the theme of Mother Teresa, who founded the Order of the Missionaries of Charity and Mother Teresa's Home for the Dying. In every Home for the Dying around the world, where they take in the poorest of the poor, there is a picture of Jesus hanging on the cross and underneath the words *I thirst*, because Mother Teresa said that is our duty—to quench the thirst of Christ by helping those in need. Jesus came to love and serve others. He modeled love in action. He showed us that love isn't a feeling; it's an action. Love moves us to get out of our sight and be with those who are hurting or in need.

God has placed you in your family, community or job, and you are His plan to change and love that place. Everyone talks about bringing change, but what does that look like? It's all about loving God first, then practically loving others by meeting their physical, emotional and spiritual needs! I like how Rick Warren says: *Have you ever wondered why God didn't just take you to heaven when he created you? Why did he put you on Earth? You're only here for 100 years at most, and then you're going to live for eternity in heaven or hell. Why didn't God just take everybody to heaven? The Bible is very clear that God put you here on Earth to do two things: to learn to love God and to learn to love other people.*

**APPLICATION:** God has called you to love those around you by serving and meeting their needs!

**PRAYER:** Ask the Spirit to help you love and serve those around you! Ask Him who you can love today and how you can love them. Ask the Spirit to help you prioritize living for Him and loving others.



## SEASONS OF LIFE

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*For everything there is a season, a time for every activity under heaven. A time to be born and a time to die. A time to plant and a time to harvest. A time to kill and a time to heal. A time to tear down and a time to build up. A time to cry and a time to laugh. A time to grieve and a time to dance. A time to scatter stones and a time to gather stones. A time to embrace and a time to turn away. A time to search and a time to quit searching. A time to keep and a time to throw away. A time to tear and a time to mend. A time to be quiet and a time to speak. A time to love and a time to hate. A time for war and a time for peace.*

**Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 (NLT)**

Life is full of seasons. Sometimes, the seasons are joyous and full of blessings. Other times, they're difficult and full of hardship. In every season, God remains sovereign and good.

What season of life are you in right now?

Are you in a season of needing to press forward? You feel like you have to find a way to take that next step right now. There are obstacles and challenges along the way, but you know where God has directed you, and you know you need to move. Then, in the name of Jesus—move to the glory of God.

Are you in a season of needing to slow down? Maybe even stop? Do you need to create some space to be still, silent and seek God in solitude? Perhaps you're coming out of a season of pressing forward, and know that God is leading you to simply abide in Him. Then, in the name of Jesus—stop to the glory of God.

May we never, in our arrogance, sprint ahead of God. May we never, in our laziness, lag behind Him. Let us move at His speed. Consider what the author of Ecclesiastes says just a few verses down from our main passage (Ecclesiastes 3:11 NLT):

*Yet God has made everything beautiful for its own time. He has planted eternity in the human heart, but even so, people cannot see the whole scope of God's work from beginning to end.*

No matter your season—remember that He is sovereign and good.

**APPLICATION:** Ask God to give you clarity about the season you're in and what steps you should take in accordance with that.

**PRAYER:** God, thank You for various seasons of life. Help me to seek You always, acknowledging Your provision and graciousness. In Jesus' name, amen.

## BE PRESENT

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"So don't worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring its own worries. Today's trouble is enough for today."  
**Matthew 6:34 (NLT)**

Anxiety is seemingly everywhere today. The American Psychological Association categorizes anxiety as a future-oriented emotion marked by feelings of tension, worried thoughts and sometimes, even physical changes like increased blood pressure. Simply stated, people are deeply concerned about the unknown and what is to come. Our social media fixation, coupled with a 24/7 news cycle, likely does nothing to alleviate these future-facing fears. If you're not careful, it's easy to spiral into a very negative head space.

These words from Jesus have been transformational for me as I consider the future. Yes—there are tons of negative outcomes that are possible for me, my loved ones, and the world in general. But there are also tons of opportunities for God to bless and demonstrate His grace. Instead of getting tied up in knots over what might happen, I choose to focus on today. Certainly, there are enough troubles to consider and conquer today!

I believe that come what may, God is still good. He is still sovereign. Hebrews 13:8 (NLT) says this: *Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.*

That means the same Jesus who conquered the grave two thousand years ago rules and reigns today. When He said *all authority in heaven and on earth* was His (Matthew 28:18), that was a promise we could find comfort in for all time. Nothing has ever caught Him off guard, and nothing ever will. He knows every detail of every day that you and I will ever experience. Simply stopping to reflect on this can be such a helpful step in combating anxiety over what's to come.

**APPLICATION:** What does God want you to know *right now*? Not necessarily about what's coming down the line but about where you're at right now. Ask God to help you trust Him for tomorrow and to focus on His faithfulness in the past and present.

**PRAYER:** Father, I'm thankful that You are trustworthy and sovereign. Because of who You are and what You've done, I can have peace in the face of trials and tribulations. Help my faith to grow in every season of my life. In Jesus' name, amen.

## REST IN CHRIST

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*Then Jesus said, "Come to Me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you. Let Me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy to bear, and the burden I give you is light."*

**Matthew 11:28-30 (NLT)**

All of us go through valleys. No matter how strong you are, at some point, you will be brought low because life is full of trials and tribulations. While we want to project strength and confidence to our family and friends, the reality is each of us, at times, can feel worn down and weary. Perhaps right now, in this particular season, you're hanging on by a thread. You're struggling to see a way forward, and the sorrow can feel suffocating.

The good news of the Gospel is that Jesus offers a better way. Salvation is about more than just going to heaven when you die. Jesus said He came to give eternal, abundant life (see John 10:10). That starts here and now. We can walk in His ways and find rest for our souls. Stop and think about where you turn when you're in those difficult seasons. Are you looking for your friends and family to give you peace? Your success or bank account? A new adventure or toy? None of those things can offer what Jesus alone brings.

You might be a relatively new believer or have followed Jesus for most of your life. Either way, you must make resting and abiding in Him a priority. What an incredible invitation to do so!

**APPLICATION:** It's easy to say we should rest in Him—but how? Set up a time today to be completely distraction-free. No spouse or children. No technological interruptions. Turn your devices off or, at the very least, leave them in another room. Get alone—out for a walk or sitting still in a room or whatever works for you. Concentrate on just being with God. Ask Him to make Himself known to you. Implore the Spirit to stir within you and guide you. You may be thinking you don't have time to do this. And while an hour or two would be nice, start with what you've got, even if it's only five minutes!

**PRAYER:** God, thank You for the rest that can be found in You alone. Help me to abide in You always, no matter the circumstances. Draw near to me as I draw near to You, Lord. In Jesus' name, amen.

## CONTENTMENT IN CHRIST

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*Not that I was ever in need, for I have learned how to be content with whatever I have. I know how to live on almost nothing or with everything. I have learned the secret of living in every situation, whether it is with a full stomach or empty, with plenty or little. For I can do everything through Christ, who gives me strength.*

**Philippians 4:11-13 (NLT)**

Philippians 4:13 is one of the most often quoted verses in the Bible. Unfortunately, it's also one of the most misunderstood. It doesn't mean you can hit all the home runs or score all the touchdowns. It doesn't mean you can achieve any dream you put your mind to. It's not some pie-in-the-sky, feel-good assurance of being able to hit every goal you ever set in life. To understand what this verse really means, we must understand the context.

Paul is writing his letter to the church in Philippi while in prison. He's not on the mountaintop; rather, he's in the valley. In verse 11, he speaks of learning to be content with whatever he has. What a mentality to have in a society that encourages us to climb, grasp and seek more. The problem with a *more* mentality is that you can never have enough—you'll always want more.

He goes on to say that he has learned how to live with little or with an excess. The secret, according to Paul, is acknowledging that Christ can sustain you in any season. When you're up, and everything is going your way—God is with you and is good. When you're down and nothing is going your way—God is still with you and remains good.

**APPLICATION:** Are you drawing your strength from Christ? Are you content in Him no matter the season of life you find yourself in? One way to set your eyes on Him is to reflect upon His blessings in your life. Make a list of at least ten things you're thankful for. Acknowledge His hand in blessing you so abundantly. Then go to Him in prayer, thank Him and ask Him to help you remain resolute in every circumstance.

**PRAYER:** Lord, You are so good to me. No matter my current circumstances, You are with me and are always good. Help me to draw my strength from You, the Author and Finisher of my faith. In Jesus' name, amen.

## ETERNAL ENDURANCE

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*Have you never heard? Have you never understood? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of all the earth. He never grows weak or weary. No one can measure the depths of His understanding. He gives power to the weak and strength to the powerless. Even youths will become weak and tired, and young men will fall in exhaustion. But those who trust in the LORD will find new strength. They will soar high on wings like eagles. They will run and not grow weary. They will walk and not faint.*

**Isaiah 40:28-31 (NLT)**

I've heard it said that everyone has faith but that it's the object of that faith that really matters. Even the staunchest agnostic or atheist actually has faith in their worldview. But what is their faith built upon? For that matter, do we, as Christ-followers, understand what our faith is built upon? Or who our faith is built upon?

The good news is that our faith is not in ourselves or our efforts. If it were, we'd all be in trouble, no matter how moral you may be. We all sin and fall short of the glory of God (see Romans 3:23). And the wages of sin is death (see Romans 6:23). But God, in His rich mercy and grace, settled our sin debt and purchased our freedom with the precious lifeblood of his Son Jesus. Jesus, who lived a perfect life, willingly sacrificed it and then rose from the dead three days later. He is bodily resurrected and promises to return one day to establish His everlasting Kingdom. This is the Good News!

Isaiah, writing long before Jesus would come to earth, had a strong understanding of who God is and the significance of placing our faith in Him. It's a beautiful juxtaposition of God's never-ending strength with our own fallibility. When we are powerless, we can find new strength in Him. God will enable us to run the race set before us with endurance if we only fix our eyes on Him (see Hebrews 12:1-2).

**APPLICATION:** Where are you finding your strength? In the gym? Your mental fortitude? Your position at work? Where are you placing your faith? In your bank account? Your closest friends and family? Your morality? Take a moment to stop and acknowledge who God is. Then, ask Him to help you grow in your dependence on Him.

**PRAYER:** Almighty God, help me to never forget who You are and what You've done. You're my Creator, the Alpha and the Omega. Help my faith and dependence on You to grow daily. Humble me that I might stay more connected to You. In Jesus' name, amen.

## SABBATH

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*"Remember to observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. You have six days each week for your ordinary work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath day of rest dedicated to the LORD your God. On that day no one in your household may do any work. This includes you, your sons and daughters, your male and female servants, your livestock, and any foreigners living among you. For in six days the LORD made the heavens, the earth, the sea, and everything in them; but on the seventh day He rested. That is why the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and set it apart as holy."*

**Exodus 20:8-11 (NLT)**

How do you Sabbath?

First, let me set your mind at ease—this was a commandment in the Old Testament (fourth of the big ten). We are no longer bound by the Law, as Jesus has come to fulfill it. So, Sabbath is not a commandment that we are obligated to. However, there is still wisdom in the Law, and Sabbath remains a gracious invitation we get to be part of.

Now I know what you're thinking—*I don't have time to do nothing and just focus on Jesus all day, prostrate on the ground in prayer.* If you're like me, too much time with your eyes closed might lead to falling asleep anyway! You're thinking *I'm too busy, and I can't afford to slow down. Maybe if there was another day in the week then I could slow down and have a day to just worship through pausing and reflecting and meditating on His word and goodness.* Can I tell you what I think? Even if there were another day in the week, we'd find a way to fill it with more tasks. We're not a people who are great at simply slowing down. I have long loved this quote from Dallas Willard, who said: *You must ruthlessly eliminate hurry from your life.*

This quote was given in response to being asked what must be done to be spiritually healthy. Upon being pressed for further insight, Willard indicated that there was nothing else. Hurry is the great enemy of our very souls. Think about your own life. I'd be willing to bet that many, if not most, of your worst moments come when you're in a hurry.

What if God knew what He was doing from the very beginning? Wild thought, right? We know His power is inexhaustible. He didn't require rest on the seventh day. So why did He do it? I believe that He was modeling for us, from the very beginning, the value of rest. Of Sabbath. I know that we live in an age that worships **more** and **faster**. But what if God wants us to simply slow down and focus on Him?

**APPLICATION:** How can you Sabbath? How can you counterculturally set up your schedule and your life to make more room—to simply abide with and worship God? Do some research on Sabbath—talk with some fellow believers and ask God to show you how you can establish rhythms of rest and Sabbath.

**PRAYER:** God help me to focus on You. You're worth it. In Jesus' name, amen.

## EMOTIONAL INTIMACY

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*The heartfelt counsel of a friend is as sweet as perfume and incense.*

**Proverbs 27:9 (NLT)**

Emotional intimacy is crucial for healthy and stable relationships. This kind of intimacy often leads to growth in other areas, such as physical, intellectual and spiritual intimacy.

Many couples start their relationships without knowing how to develop a strong emotional connection. If this has been a challenge in your relationships, you might be tempted to make big changes all at once, but that approach usually isn't effective or sustainable.

It's better to build an emotional connection gradually through small, consistent actions. Here are some practical ways to do this: share stories with each other, laugh together, enjoy shared activities, intentionally be bad at something together (like when you first got married!), communicate openly, and listen to each other with respect.

By practicing these habits daily, you'll strengthen the bond with your spouse, making it resilient against the challenges marriages often face.

**APPLICATION:** Talk with your spouse about what a daily opportunity to build a connection would look like. It doesn't have to be extravagant—just consistent and meaningful for both of you.

**PRAYER:** God, thank You for the gift of marriage. I ask that You would help us to develop intimacy in the way that You dreamed up when You imagined marriage. Give us the wisdom to love one another well. Amen.

# FUN

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*Let your fountain be blessed, and rejoice in the wife of your youth,*  
**Proverbs 5:18 (ESV)**

Often, when I think of marriage books, resources and materials, especially those from Christian sources, one topic that often gets minimized is how a healthy and thriving marriage relationship centered on Christ should be fun!

Think about it: God gave us a person to share life with, and we're commanded to rejoice in and with them. Having fun and enjoying your relationship with your spouse is one of the main goals in Scripture's teaching on marriage.

This fun and rejoicing comes from a lot of work—sometimes it's enjoyable, like a great date night, and other times it's tough, like working through disagreements. But through it all, you're building a stronger bond with your spouse, someone you learn to appreciate more deeply as the years go by. To achieve this, you need to make an effort to build an emotional connection with your spouse.

**APPLICATION:** Think of one or two activities you and your spouse enjoy doing together. Maybe it's hiking, watching a game, or having a fun date night. Plan to do that activity this week or even today. If you're single, find a buddy from church to hang out with and enjoy some fellowship. Rejoice in the blessing of close relationships centered on Christ.

**PRAYER:** Heavenly Father, would You help me find ways to enjoy the relationships that You have blessed me with more fully? Help me not only receive the joy of a deep and meaningful relationship but also guide me to contribute to it in a way that satisfies. Amen.



## HEALING

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*He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds. Psalm 147:3 (ESV)*

In Psalm 147, the author goes back and forth between praising two of God's characteristics: His power as the Creator of the world and His relational nature as the God of Israel. In our relationship with God, some of us might struggle to see just how intimate and personal He is to each one of us.

God is described as providing healing to the brokenhearted. As a husband who might not be as emotionally intuitive as my wife, I often struggle just to be present and listen to her heart. My instinct is to jump in and fix things. But in my well-intentioned desire to help, I can sometimes leave her feeling disconnected when all she wants is to share her struggles with me.

While I might be one of the least touchy-feely guys I know, it's crucial for us to take the time to share and listen to each other. So, here's a challenge: share one thing you feel today with your spouse or with a friend if you're not married. Then, ask them to share their heart with you. It might initially feel awkward, especially if this isn't your strong suit. But trust that God wants to use your weaknesses to show His power!

**APPLICATION:** Share one thing you are feeling today with your spouse and ask them to share in return. Listen to them intently. Let the conversation flow as the Lord leads you.

**PRAYER:** Lord, thank You for being attentive to what I really need! Thank You that You are never in a hurry to end a conversation with me. Please help me be more attentive to those in my path today, especially those closest to me. Amen.

# VULNERABILITY

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*Each time He said, "My grace is all you need. My power works best in weakness." So now I am glad to boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ can work through me. That's why I take pleasure in my weaknesses, and in the insults, hardships, persecutions, and troubles that I suffer for Christ. For when I am weak, then I am strong.*

**2 Corinthians 12:9-10 (NLT)**

There is something unique about weakness for Christians. This concept is one that I, and many other men, struggle with. Everyone around us, and probably ourselves too, grew up with a desire to be strong. But Paul is telling us that the power of Christ is not only connected to our weakness but actually works best in our weakness! While I admire Paul's discovery, I'm unsure if I'll ever get to the place of truly boasting about my weaknesses.

In our relationships, especially in our marriages, the idea of vulnerability is a powerful way to see Paul's teaching in action. Have you ever shared a failure or weakness with your spouse and been met with divine love and grace? There's nothing more powerful than being loved just as a human being despite our failures.

A commitment to vulnerability can be scary and intimidating, but we are promised that God's power works best in this way!

**APPLICATION:** Be brave and share an area where you are experiencing challenges in your life. Be vulnerable with your spouse. Really listen to each other and find ways to show love in the midst of this vulnerability.

**PRAYER:** God, thank You for working in our lives not only in spite of our weaknesses, but best in our weaknesses. Help us to keep from avoiding being honest about who we are as humans and to recognize Your great love for us! Amen.

## SHARED SUFFERING

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*For His anger lasts only a moment, but His favor lasts a lifetime! Weeping may last through the night, but joy comes with the morning.* **Psalm 30:5 (NLT)**

Often, in our marriages, we encounter difficulty together. This could look like a diagnosis, caring for aging parents or loved ones, or even infertility. It's crucial to remember that when we face these difficulties, we need to cling to each other and, together, cling to Christ.

My wife and I struggled with infertility in our marriage. It was one of the greatest sources of heartbreak we had to experience. Health problems, broken dreams and a dim future consumed our thoughts so much that it became difficult to even rejoice for others who were experiencing the blessing of a new child. While I wish we had never gone through that struggle, the growth in our character and our relationship is something I wouldn't trade. God became our source of joy in that season despite our circumstances.

When one of you struggles in marriage, both of you struggle. We need to lean on each other during tough times and lean into God together. Wait on Him for favor and joy—they're waiting to reveal themselves through Him!

**APPLICATION:** Take a moment to reflect on the suffering you have endured as a couple. How was God faithful in that season? Thank Him for His faithfulness, even amid the mourning you may have experienced.

**PRAYER:** God, You are always there, even when we are experiencing great difficulty. Help us see You in our struggles and find joy in where You are leading us. Thanks for Your presence, comfort, and healing. Amen.

## SHARED SERVICE

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*All praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is our merciful Father and the source of all comfort. He comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort others. When they are troubled, we will be able to give them the same comfort God has given us.*

**2 Corinthians 1:3-4 (NLT)**

The journey we've shared as a couple offers us unique opportunities to serve God by sharing our experiences and insights with others. Ministering together as a couple is incredibly fruitful and life-giving. But many couples don't take the time to reflect and find where God truly wants to use their lives and stories for His glory.

Marriage itself is a testimony to God's love. Faithful love between a husband and wife is meant to mirror Christ's love for the church and our humble submission to His rule. What a unique opportunity we have to show this love to the world.

If I could challenge couples with one thing, it would be to find an area where you can serve God's purposes together. This will give you chances to pray, laugh, sacrifice and love others together. There are few things that build emotional intimacy like shared ministry.

**APPLICATION:** Talk with your spouse and identify one area of the church where you could serve as a couple. Reach out to those ministry leaders and get involved today. If you are already serving together, take a moment to reflect on how God has moved in your ministry.

**PRAYER:** God, thank You for dreaming up marriage as a way to show Your love to the world. Please help us as a couple not to take our assignment lightly. Reveal ways that You have uniquely positioned us to participate in Your work at Brookwood. We love You! Amen.

## FOCUS

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*When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.*

**Genesis 3:6-7 (NIV)**

When God created man, He placed Adam in a garden called Eden, where God provided all kinds of trees with fruit that was pleasing to the eye and good for food (Genesis 2:9). God told Adam he could eat from any tree in the garden except for one tree—the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, because if Adam were to eat from it, then he would die (Genesis 2:16-17).

The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil was not only pleasing to the eye and good for food, but according to the serpent who spoke with Eve, the fruit of the forbidden tree would make her like God, able to distinguish between good and evil. Could it be that they thought the fruit of the forbidden tree could make them smarter?!

The thing Adam and Eve got right in this passage is they were together. Verse 6 tells us that Adam was with Eve when she ate the forbidden fruit. However, one thing that contributed to their downfall was their FOCUS. They were focused on the creation rather than the Creator. They were focused on what they could gain from the creation apart from God rather than on appreciating God for the creation.

All the trees in the garden were good for food and pleasing to the eye. It's okay to enjoy good food and appreciate the beauty of the earth. But when our focus turns to gaining wisdom apart from God and seeking to live without dependence on God, our perspective of what we see and want is distorted. If we try to satisfy ourselves with the things of this world apart from a relationship with God, we'll never get enough. Shame and frustration will be the results we find.

When we get together with our spouse or friends, we'll find more fulfillment when we focus on the Creator in appreciation of the creation rather than what the creation can give us. When we seek and depend on God to provide our ultimate satisfaction, then we'll see created things from a proper perspective and enjoy God's peace as a result.

*You will keep in perfect peace all who trust in You, all whose thoughts are fixed on You!*

**Isaiah 26:3 (NLT)**

**APPLICATION:** Get together with your spouse or a friend and share one characteristic you appreciate about God that is displayed in His creation.

**PRAYER:** Thank You, Father, for Your care of us and for providing what we need for life. Build our trust in You for guidance, wisdom, and anything else we need in this life.

## WHERE ARE YOU

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*Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as He was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden. But the LORD God called to the man, "Where are you?"*

**Genesis 3:8-9 (NIV)**

When Adam and Eve ate the fruit from the one tree in the garden that God said they were not to eat from, then they recognized their condition of disobedience and separation from God. As they heard God approaching, they hid from Him because they were ashamed of themselves and what they had done.

Haven't we all been there? Wanting to disappear, not be seen, because we're ashamed of something we've said or done? We may feel like we can't even approach God because we think we've gone past the reach of His forgiveness, wanting to avoid disappointing our heavenly Father at all costs. But God, in His kindness, called out to Adam and Eve, saying, "*Where are you?*" I love this! Of course, God knew where they were. So why did He ask?

Just my opinion, but I think God wanted Adam and Eve to know He still wanted to be in relationship with them. God was reaching out to them to let them know He was still there, still longing for their walks together in the cool of the day. I believe one of the messages behind God's *Where are you* is *I'm still here*. I also think God wanted Adam and Eve to hear His voice. More than just the words God was saying, I believe God wanted them to hear the tone of love in His words. A message in God's *Where are you* also includes, *I still love you*. The third message I think God was communicating to Adam and Eve was *Tell me about it*. Tell me what's going on. No matter how bad it is, God wants to hear about it from you and wants to walk alongside you.

God knew that the eating of the forbidden fruit would bring terrible consequences for Adam and Eve, including hardship and death. Not only the eventual physical death of Adam and Eve but also the death of some of the animals in the garden and the eventual death of everyone. Even though Adam and Eve had made some coverings for their bodies out of fig leaves to cover their nakedness, God showed His care for them by making some garments of animal skins to provide something better, meaning some animals had to die as part of the consequences of Adam and Eve's sin.

*The LORD God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them.*

**Genesis 3:21 (NIV)**

God also knew that He would send His only Son, Jesus, to die to provide ultimate forgiveness for Adam and Eve's sins, as well as our sins. I believe God's *Where are You* also means *Let me come alongside you and provide something better for you because I love you*.

**APPLICATION:** Listen for God's *Where are you* today. Tell Him what you're thinking and feeling. Listen for thoughts He puts in your mind. Seek what He wants to say to you in Scripture. Share what you find with your spouse or a friend.

**PRAYER:** Father, thank You for providing a way for me to be forgiven. I trust that You want to hear from me. Here's what I'm thinking and feeling . . .

## IN EVERYTHING

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*Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank Him for all He has done. Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.* **Philippians 4:6-7 (NLT)**

We hardly saw the white coat he was wearing or the stethoscope around his neck. All we saw was the concerned, sad, and stressed look in his eyes. We knew something was wrong, but as the doctor spoke the words, *You are going to lose this baby*, our worst fears had just been realized.

Don't worry about anything? Really? Life and marriage can overwhelm us with worry because as we live in this fallen and broken world, we face both physical and emotional pain. If something has the potential to cause great pain, we are likely to be distressed about it. Mark 14:33 tells us Jesus was praying the night before His crucifixion and was *deeply troubled and distressed*. In fact, His soul was *crushed with grief*.... Paul said there were times he and his companions were *crushed and overwhelmed beyond our ability to endure* (2 Corinthians 1:8).

Although I can't always tell where the line is between godly distress, feeling overwhelmed and sinful worry, there is a difference. One involves trusting God through the trial, while worry begins to question God's goodness and faithfulness. When difficulties arise, Paul invites us to pour our energy into prayer rather than worry. We can take our concerns and fears and tell God exactly what we feel and need. When we also bathe those prayers with prayers of remembrance and thanksgiving, Paul promises that we'll experience a supernatural peace that transcends our circumstances.

For couples, applying this Scripture involves making prayer a foundational practice in your marriage. Setting aside time to pray with your spouse or a friend strengthens the spiritual bond of the relationship. It allows you to present your requests to God as a unified front and to seek His guidance together. Additionally, regularly and verbally expressing gratitude for each other and for God's faithfulness can cultivate a positive atmosphere in the home. This practice will not only help reduce worry and complaining but also reinforces your reliance on God's provision and protection.

**APPLICATION:** Try establishing a routine of prayer and thanksgiving with your spouse or a friend. If you're married, try praying together each night before you fall asleep, bringing your concerns and needs to God. Be honest and open in your prayers, sharing both your individual and shared concerns. Following each prayer, thank God for His blessings, focusing on the positive aspects of your relationship and life.

**PRAYER:** Thank You, Lord, that we can bring everything to You and that You offer us a peace that exceeds anything we can understand.

## DEVOTED TO PRAYER

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*Devote yourselves to prayer with an alert mind and a thankful heart.*

**Colossians 4:2 (NLT)**

To devote yourself to something means you must focus and make a conscious effort. It is work. None of the Olympic athletes we've seen compete just showed up at the time of the competition. They all devoted years to their sport because it mattered to them, and they wanted to be the best they could be. A while back, a husband wrote that he was frustrated with his wife because she wanted a great marriage. He admitted that he was so busy with his career, kids and life that he simply did not have the time or emotional energy to devote toward building a healthy marriage. He thought she was being idealistic and unrealistic. Mediocre was good enough for him. I don't think he fully understood the ramifications of that attitude.

Likely, the greatest gift a couple can give to their kids is a great marriage. But that will not happen just by working on everything that needs to be addressed in the marriage—it will require devoting ourselves to prayer. Why? Any marriage needs supernatural help. Not just because my spouse is a sinner; I am too!

Paul first emphasizes praying with an alert mind, not just going through the motions. Saying the same rote prayer at the dinner table or night is not praying with an alert mind. I believe praying with an alert mind simply includes recognizing God's presence, noticing the needs of those around us, and being sensitive to the thoughts God places in our minds. It includes focusing on God and being genuine with Him about what's going on in your life. If something is wrong, or you don't understand what's happening, ask God to give you insight. Seek His divine wisdom, which He promises to those who ask Him (James 1:5). Don't just sweep problems under the rug.

Regardless of what's going on, ask God to show you what you can be thankful for. This causes us to look for and trust how God works in any given circumstance.

Devoting ourselves to focused and transparent time with God while thanking Him for what He's done can strengthen our relationship with Him and our trust in Him. Praying like this with a spouse or a friend can also benefit that relationship.

**APPLICATION:** Cultivate an alert mind by being attentive to the needs of those around you, especially your spouse. Discuss openly with your spouse or a friend the areas where you need God's guidance and intervention, and pray specifically for those needs. Thank God for the benefits this brings to your relationship or marriage.

**PRAYER:** Lord, please help me be more devoted to praying with my spouse or someone I trust. Please instill in me a spirit of gratitude for all You have given us.



## GOD'S WILL

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*Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.* **1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 (NIV)**

I've often been asked, *How can I find God's will for my life? School? Job? Marriage?* Yes, Scripture tells us that God will never leave us nor forsake us and that we can come to Him for wisdom anytime (James 1:5). In fact, He tells us not to make plans about the future without checking with Him first (James 4:13-17). Most of Scripture, however, describes God's will in terms we don't have to wonder about because it is spelled out clearly. When making day-to-day choices, God makes clear He often uses those decisions and circumstances to give us the direction we seek and need. For example, the Ten Commandments tell us part of God's will. It's God's will that I love God and people, including my spouse. It's God's will that I become like Christ and walk in the Spirit. It's God's will that I make disciples. While not as well known, in these short verses, Paul gives us three astonishingly powerful and life-changing commands, yet many of us seem to look past these verses. These instructions hold immense power, especially when applied to the covenant of marriage. As noted earlier, a dynamic marriage requires devotion and work, and these verses provide a framework for navigating a lifetime journey together.

**Rejoice always.** I remember a couple who appeared to be committed Christians and were confident they *had their theology right*. However, the wife continually complained about her husband, and the husband disrespected his wife regularly. This was evidence that they were looking for the negative aspects in each other rather than highlighting the positive which brought negative results to their relationship. Rejoicing always involves looking for the positive. Striving to notice what God has done or how He can work in any situation or relationship can help us view things more from God's perspective. We can be honest about our frustrations and still choose to rejoice in who God is and all He has given us, which draws us closer to Him and those with whom we have relationship.

**Pray continually.** There is no substitute for continually praying and being connected to Christ moment by moment as we go through our days. This practice demonstrates what *walking in the Spirit* and *abiding in Christ* is all about.

**Give thanks in all circumstances.** This doesn't necessarily mean I thank God FOR bad circumstances and pain, but I can thank him IN the midst of all circumstances and for how He will bring good from these circumstances (Romans 8:28). Expressing gratitude continually to the Lord and your spouse can transform your relationship.

**APPLICATION:** Ask God how you can rejoice, pray, and give thanks today for your spouse or a friend. Focus more on the things you're grateful for in someone else than the things that frustrate you.

**PRAYER:** Father, help me put into practice these life-changing habits to experience You more.

## CONFESS AND PRAY

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*Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and produces wonderful results.*

**James 5:16 (NLT)**

Any marriage counselor or pastor can tell you how important and tricky these verses are in marriage or any significant relationship. James is speaking here to the entire church family so they can apply these truths in their close relationships, especially marriages. Confession, forgiveness and prayer are essential to any healthy marriage or close relationship. They are necessary because we've all sinned and messed up, and the one we hurt the most is often our spouse or someone close to us. If we haven't recently had to apologize or confess something to our spouse or a friend, it's likely not because we're so right that it's not needed. It's more likely that we're blind to our faults or pride, or maybe we're afraid our confession will be used against us in the next argument.

Confession is an act of vulnerability and humility. Most of us may find this difficult. Too often, a marriage relationship is not a safe place to be vulnerable. Many of us are more concerned about being right than humbling ourselves and building a healthy marriage. Marriage requires this kind of hard work, but many don't realize it before they get married. We often don't recognize when we are being selfish, and we may resent it when our spouse or a friend brings it up. Seeing things from another person's viewpoint is usually extremely difficult.

There are many pitfalls here. Some try to confess some major offenses, like lying, cheating, or giving into some addiction, with a one-time, *I've confessed that now, so let's move on* attitude. This type of superficial confession doesn't deal with the underlying deep issues, and trust must be rebuilt. Others of us glibly confess the same thing over and over with no intention of changing. That only builds resentment and discouragement in our spouse or friends. That's not genuine remorse and confession.

In a healthy marriage or any close relationship, confessing my shortcomings fosters an atmosphere of transparency and trust. It breaks down walls of pride and defensiveness, paving the way for genuine communication and understanding. When loving, healthy couples are open about their struggles and mistakes, they create a safe space for growth and reconciliation. This mutual humility and honesty can strengthen the emotional and spiritual connection, allowing both partners to support each other in their journey toward wholeness. This is a part of what it means to *submit to one another out of reverence for Christ* (Ephesians 5:21).

**APPLICATION:** With humility and grace, set aside some time to share your struggles, weaknesses, and mistakes with your spouse or someone important to you. Use this as a time to love, forgive, and grow your relationship. Then, pray for and over each other and watch God begin to heal you and your relationship. Remember, this is a process that requires patience, sacrifice, mercy and the bearing of one another's burdens over a lifetime.

**PRAYER:** Lord, please bring to my mind what I need to confess to You and someone I trust. Lead us toward forgiveness and trust of one another.

## NEW LIFE

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*This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!* **2 Corinthians 5:17 (NLT)**

I'm so thankful that we are given a fresh start in Christ. When I think back on who I used to be, I realize it's easy to go to a place of fear and shame. I lived a horribly selfish life, thinking primarily of myself, rarely of others, and never of God. I was on a path of destruction even though I didn't see it. But God, in His mercy, stepped in and rescued me. I didn't earn salvation—it was a free gift that God granted me. The Holy Spirit stirred within and transformed me into a new person.

I've been set free—this is cause for celebration! It doesn't mean I was immediately freed from the consequences of my previous actions. It doesn't mean that I don't, at times, feel a draw back to my old ways. But I know I am no longer compelled to obey my sinful nature. I'm to put on my new nature that Christ has given me. See what Paul says in Ephesians 4:21-24 (NLT): *Since you have heard about Jesus and have learned the truth that comes from Him, throw off your old sinful nature and your former way of life, which is corrupted by lust and deception. Instead, let the Spirit renew your thoughts and attitudes. Put on your new nature, created to be like God—truly righteous and holy.*

Now, every day, I consciously seek to live in surrender and submission to the Spirit. Walking with Christ is a daily journey—not a one-time decision I can set and forget. I get to walk in daily renewal, made righteous and holy by the work of Jesus.

**APPLICATION:** When was the last time you thanked God for saving you? Take time to do so now! If you're struggling with shame from who you used to be, or perhaps you're even considering going back to your old ways, take that to God. He knows you intimately and loves you! Ask His Spirit to be with you in a tangible way.

**PRAYER:** Father, thank You for the gift of new life. Thank You for making me brand new. Help me as I endeavor to walk more fully in tune with Your Spirit. Be glorified in my thoughts, words, and deeds. In Jesus' name, amen.

## WHO'S IN CHARGE?

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*My old self has been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. So I live in this earthly body by trusting in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.* **Galatians 2:20 (NLT)**

Christian. Born again. Believer. Asked Jesus into your heart. Christ follower. Disciple. We have a lot of ways of referring to those who have passed from death to life. Whatever language you use, the truth is the same: you were dead in your sin, and Christ has raised you to new life. You're no longer calling the shots for your own life—Christ is Lord. We live our lives surrendered and submitted to His authority.

Consider what Paul says in Romans 6:14-18 (NLT): *Sin is no longer your master, for you no longer live under the requirements of the law. Instead, you live under the freedom of God's grace. Well then, since God's grace has set us free from the law, does that mean we can go on sinning? Of course not! Don't you realize that you become the slave of whatever you choose to obey? You can be a slave to sin, which leads to death, or you can choose to obey God, which leads to righteous living. Thank God! Once you were slaves of sin, but now you wholeheartedly obey this teaching we have given you. Now you are free from your slavery to sin, and you have become slaves to righteous living.*

Christ loved you and gave His life for you. In turn, we're called to love Him and lay down our lives daily for Him. He's not just the Savior for our afterlife, but the Lord and Master of our lives here and now. Prior to your salvation, you lived under obligation to your sinful nature. Now you're free in Him! So, let us wholeheartedly obey His ways.

**APPLICATION:** Who is calling the shots in your day-to-day life? You? Or Jesus? Are you seeking His will? What area of your life needs to be brought more fully under his authority? Reflect. Repent. Be renewed in the Spirit.

**PRAYER:** Lord, I pray that You will help me fall more in love with You every day. I thank You that it is no longer I that live but Your Son in me. Thank You for Your radical grace and mercy. In Jesus' name, amen.

## GUARDING YOUR HEART AND MIND

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*Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect.*

**Romans 12:2 (NLT)**

There's a constant war waging for the space between your ears. What you think and believe will ultimately impact what you do and how you live. You know this—just consider the algorithm of your devices. They listen to you and monitor your online presence. At this point, we've all talked about buying something only to be overrun with ads for that very thing. You might think this is just a war for your wallet, but I think it's more than that. The nebulous algorithm that drives our online interactions with social media controls much of what you see. It can incite you to see those you disagree with. Or it can lead you to an echo chamber of like-minded individuals to help you grow even further cemented in your way of thinking.

Why do I bring up all of this? Because your thought life matters significantly. And as a chronically online society, we're being shaped and molded by all that we consume. But God, speaking through Paul, tells us He wants to change how we think. When we can do this, we can begin to discern His will for our lives.

So, we must be on guard as we seek to live our transformed lives. In 2 Corinthians 10:5 (NLT), Paul says: *We destroy every proud obstacle that keeps people from knowing God. We capture their rebellious thoughts and teach them to obey Christ.*

Another translation says that we should take every thought captive. How disciplined are you in your thought life? Are you being transformed by the renewing of your mind, or are you allowing the filth and divisiveness of the world to send you careening out of control?

**APPLICATION:** What dominates your thoughts? How are you guarding your mind? Is there anything you need to change in your life—perhaps unplugging from constant media or social media engagement? Reconsidering those that you grant such close access to you? Ask God to show you how to guard your heart (Proverbs 4:23) and mind.

**PRAYER:** God, help me to keep my eyes on You. Thank You for the gift of new life. Help me to not copy the ways of this world but live as Your ambassador of light in an age of darkness. Help me to guard my heart and mind. In Jesus' name, amen.

## PROGRESS, NOT PERFECTION

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*And I am certain that God, who began the good work within you, will continue His work until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns.*

**Philippians 1:6 (NLT)**

Have you ever watched someone give up on something when it grew too difficult? I see this in my young children sometimes. They want to be able to do things that are perhaps beyond their current abilities. Those recommended ages for toys are often ignored, and inevitably, frustration settles in. Half-assembled Lego sets or puzzles litter the tables and floors of our home. And lest you think I'm just tattling on my kids, I have a number of abandoned house projects that I could point to that are fully mine to own. Sometimes, no amount of YouTube videos can help this not-so-handy man. So, I give up and move on.

Do you ever worry that God might give up on you and move on?

After all, you get a lot wrong. You seem to mess up as much as you get it right. The shame settles in, and you can begin to believe that you're just not worth it. The enemy loves to attack us this way! I'm sure you've heard his whispers just like I have. *You haven't really changed. You're the same old person. God couldn't possibly want to continue to put up with you.*

Hear me: what God began in you, He is faithful to see through to the end.

He knew you weren't perfect when He chose you. Every sin you have ever committed and will ever commit was fully known to Him BEFORE Jesus went to the cross. And still, He went. And still, He loves you. No, you don't deserve it. But that's the very definition of grace: getting something you don't deserve.

You will never be perfect this side of eternity. Sanctification is a lifelong process. Your journey with Jesus may not seem linear—two steps forward, then five steps back. But we persevere. We continue to pursue Him. And we know that as we draw near to Him, He will draw near to us (James 4:8).

**APPLICATION:** Ask God to help you see yourself as He does. Often, the hardest person to forgive is yourself. Meditate on the thought that God is faithful to finish what He has begun in you.

**PRAYER:** Father, You are gracious to me in so many ways. Thank You for Your love demonstrated in Your Son Jesus on the cross. Strengthen me through the power of Your Holy Spirit as I seek to walk with you daily. In Jesus' name, amen.

## A LOYAL SPIRIT

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*Create in me a clean heart, O God. Renew a loyal spirit within me. Do not banish me from Your presence, and don't take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, and make me willing to obey You.*

**Psalm 51:10-12 (NLT)**

Psalm 51 is both powerful and poignant. Several years ago, I decided to commit the entire chapter to memory so that in my failures and falls, I'd have this passage to go to immediately. The context of this Psalm is vital to understanding the impact. David, a man described as being after God's own heart, is arguably the most well-known King in the entirety of the Old Testament. His victory over Goliath is certainly his most famous deed. However, perhaps his second most notable act was his gross abuse of power with Bathsheba. She was married to another man (who actually was one of David's mightiest soldiers), but that didn't stop David from taking her into his bed. When she became pregnant, David had her husband killed and covered up the whole affair. He thought he got away with it, but God sent a prophet to confront David, which led to his repentance and this Psalm.

At some point, you will fail or fall. We're imperfect people living in a fallen world with an enemy who tempts and tries us at seemingly every turn. When you're confronted with your sin and failure, don't go into a spiral. How easy is it when you've fallen once to just continue to choose a poor course of action? Instead, when confronted with your sin, repent and trust God anew!

I love that twice in the verses above, David asks God to help him walk in obedience. I didn't even know that was something you could ask God for! But you can, and I do—regularly. I want to have a loyal spirit toward God. I want to enjoy following God's ways, not out of dutiful obligation but from a place of joyous obedience.

**APPLICATION:** Is there an area of your life you've been keeping from God? Maybe you've been living 98% surrendered to Him, but what about that last 2%? Ask God to point out anything in you that is offensive to Him (see Psalm 139:23-24). Repent. Confess. Spend time with the totality of Psalm 51, perhaps repeatedly. Maybe even consider memorizing it!

**PRAYER:** God, I thank You that when I stumble You still love me. Your love for me is not based on how good I am. You simply love me because You made me. Help me to walk in Your ways. Renew a loyal spirit within me. Make me willing to obey You. In Jesus' name, amen.

## YOUR TESTIMONY

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*Instead, you must worship Christ as Lord of your life. And if someone asks about your hope as a believer, always be ready to explain it.*

**1 Peter 3:15 (NLT)**

What is your testimony?

If you were called on this Sunday at church to come up on stage, take the microphone, and share your testimony, could you do it? I know what you're thinking: *that's a lot of pressure in front of a lot of people. I could never do that!* Rest easy—none of the pastors will impromptu call you to the stage this week. It can be nerve-wracking to stand in front of so many and share so vulnerably. (We're always looking for people willing to do so, though!)

But are you even confident enough to share your testimony one-on-one? When was the last time you did? Can you articulate how the Gospel has transformed your life? We are called and compelled to share the Good News. Matthew 28:19-20 contains the Great Commission, a call to make disciples. Acts 1:8 promises that as we seek to do this that the Holy Spirit of God will empower us. Mercifully, we don't have to carry out this task in our own power—what a disaster that would be!

As we seek to celebrate who God is and what He has done, one of the best places to start is in your own life—sharing your story of transformation. You might not be able to differentiate between a major or minor prophet. You might not know what eschatology is. You might not have read through your whole Bible in a year (it gets tough somewhere around Numbers). But you can share your story. I think of the man born blind that we read about in John 9. He is repeatedly pressed for details about Jesus by the religious leaders. He confesses that he doesn't know everything, but he knows what his experience with Jesus was (see John 9:25).

So again, I ask—what is your testimony?

**APPLICATION:** Commit to sitting down and writing out your testimony. It can feel daunting at first, but this is a helpful exercise as you seek to grow in your ability to share your story. Consider these three lynchpin points: 1. Who you were before you met Christ 2. How you met Him, and 3. How He has transformed your life. Ask someone you know well if you can share it with them. From there, look for opportunities to share regularly!

**PRAYER:** Lord, thank You for how You've transformed my life. Help me to grow in confidence that You'll give me the words to share about Your grace and mercy. Help me to walk in Your Holy Spirit power as Your ambassador. In Jesus' name, amen.



## KEEP IN STEP WITH THE SPIRIT: LOVE

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But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: **love...**

**Galatians 5:22 (NLT)**

*So I say, let the Holy Spirit guide your lives. Then you won't be doing what your sinful nature craves. The sinful nature wants to do evil, which is just the opposite of what the Spirit wants. And the Spirit gives us desires that are the opposite of what the sinful nature desires.*

**Galatians 5:16-17b (NLT)**

Today's Scriptures guide us in the way of love. As we make room for the Holy Spirit, He fills us with a love that's powerful enough to overcome our sinful nature and fill us with the very desires of God.

I remember when I first opened my heart to Jesus. We hadn't had any conversations about God or Christianity when I was growing up. I never learned that Jesus died a cruel death to pay the penalty for my sin and that He rose from the dead to give me new life. All I knew was that my life was falling apart, and I needed help. Soon after I became a follower of Christ, I celebrated my first real Christmas. Up to that point, Christmas had been all about putting up a tree with tinsel and colorful lights and getting new toys (sometimes I got socks, which felt like a rip-off!). But this first Christmas was different. I'll never forget the pastor reading John 1:29, "*Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!*" At that moment, I felt the weight of guilt and shame rush away from my body. For the first time, I was overwhelmed by the love and acceptance of God.

The reality is that when we experience God's love, it changes us. It purifies and often replaces our deepest desires. God's love guides us in how we see ourselves and enables us to truly love others. God's love changes our decisions and keeps us anchored during times of hardship and trial.

When was the last time you truly felt God's love?

Today, may you be overwhelmed by God's love in new and beautiful ways that change your life forever.

**APPLICATION:** Consider these questions throughout the day: What past failures are you projecting into new situations that are robbing you of God's love? In what ways are you trying to make God happy with you rather than relying on the work of Jesus as a basis for how God feels about you?

**PRAYER:** God, I believe You love me. I trust this is true, and I pray You'll help me experience Your love more now than ever before. I ask You to break down any walls or obstacles in the way and fill me with Your love. Amen.

## KEEP IN STEP WITH THE SPIRIT: JOY

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*But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy...*

**Galatians 5:22 (NLT)**

*I pray that God, the source of hope, will fill you completely with joy and peace because you trust in Him. Then you will overflow with confident hope through the power of the Holy Spirit.*

**Romans 15:13 (NLT)**

It was one of those seasons you really can't prepare for. My father had been sick for quite some time, so his passing wasn't a shock. We'd seen him struggle and decline for years, and in a way, his death was a relief—to him and to us. But even though we were sort of ready, the pain and grief were overwhelming.

What we weren't expecting, however, came very soon after he died: joy—joy in a way I don't have words to describe. My sister and I were headed home, a couple of hours away, and suddenly, we began laughing. It was the kind of laughing we had never experienced together, and definitely not during those final days with our dad. We began sharing stories of our childhood. We were flooded with memories.

All I can say is that it felt like the joy of the Holy Spirit. The burden and tension I'd been feeling were being replaced with a deep sense that everything was right in the world, even though it wasn't. Remembering that season has helped me see that joy is big enough to wrap its arms around both the good times and the bad. The joy of God helps us experience celebration and at the same time, is powerful enough to hold us up during times of pain and suffering. In the words of C.S. Lewis,

*Into the void of silence,  
into the empty space of nothing,  
the joy of life is unfurled.*

**APPLICATION:** Re-read today's Scriptures and underline a word or phrase that stands out. Write this down and remember it often.

**PRAYER:** God, thank You for joy. Thank You that joy goes deeper than all my worries and troubling life circumstances. I long to keep in step with the Holy Spirit today that I may experience and share with others the joy You've made freely available. Amen.

## KEEP IN STEP WITH THE SPIRIT: PEACE

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*But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, **peace**...*  
**Galatians 5:22 (NLT)**

*"Humans can reproduce only human life, but the Holy Spirit gives birth to spiritual life. So don't be surprised when I say, You must be born again. The wind blows wherever it wants. Just as you can hear the wind but can't tell where it comes from or where it is going, so you can't explain how people are born of the Spirit."*  
**John 3:6-8 (NLT)**

Years ago, I met a man who told me a story about how he used to be overwhelmed with anxiety and fear. His wife had been very supportive. She tried everything she could to help him. She prayed for him. He wanted to experience God's peace, but they were at a loss about how to get there.

One morning, he got in a car accident and ended up in the hospital. It was then that God began to do a new work in his life. Laying there, unable to be in his usual routine and environment, God began filling him with a peace he had never known. He didn't have to worry about what other people thought of him. He didn't have to worry about performing. All he could do was lay there and heal. Little did he know that God was also healing his soul.

Today's Scripture reminds us not only of the *power* of the Holy Spirit but also speaks to the *timing* of the Holy Spirit. God sends His Spirit to blow wherever He wants and whenever He wants. We can't make it happen, and often, we can't see it happen until after it happens.

The man and I have now become friends and remind each other often that God's peace goes beyond our circumstances and is a fruit in our lives that only the Holy Spirit can produce. Meeting this man was such a gift.

**APPLICATION:** Prioritize your day (or week) to make room to experience God's peace. Slow down. Spend time in quiet in order to allow your heart and mind to stop racing. Take in a deep breath and fill your lungs with air. As you breathe out, release your cares and worries to God. Ask Him to fill you with peace.

**PRAYER:** God, I long to know the peace that goes beyond what I can understand. I know I can't make this kind of peace happen in my heart, but I know You can. I surrender all my attempts to fix my life and ask You to fill me with peace. Amen.

## KEEP IN STEP WITH THE SPIRIT: PATIENCE

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*But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience...*  
**Galatians 5:22 (NLT)**

*"And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Advocate, who will never leave you. He is the Holy Spirit, who leads into all truth. The world cannot receive Him, because it isn't looking for Him and doesn't recognize Him. But you know Him, because He lives with you now and later will be in you."*

**John 14:16-17 (NLT)**

I remember a professor who told our class a hilarious story. One of his friends told him he must have a lot of patience. Our professor admitted he was feeling really good about himself until his friend finished his sentence. He said *You must have a lot of patience because I never see you use any.* We all laughed! Unfortunately, I could relate. God revealed to me that when it came to patience, I had some room to grow. I don't always live with a Holy Spirit kind of patience. Sometimes I'm impatient with people. I find myself impatient when I have to wait for something. I can grit my teeth and do my best, but God desires that patience become central to who I am.

Today's passages remind us that the Holy Spirit is *in* us (which means patience is always available). He is our Advocate (He fights for us, so we don't have to fight for or defend ourselves). And He will never leave us (so patience is an unlimited commodity). I'm really starting to like today's Scriptures!

How patient are you?

I wish I could snap my fingers and become patient. I wish there were some magical formula to make it happen. That's obviously not the case, or we'd all be doing it! Thankfully, there is hope for impatient people like us. Thankfully, it's not something we have to work at on our own. Instead, the Holy Spirit cultivates patience in us. As we're honest with ourselves and God about our lack of patience, God's Spirit changes us from the inside out.

**APPLICATION:** Be honest with yourself and with God about your lack of patience. Consider people and situations that trigger your impatience. Ask God for a greater awareness of what's going on inside you during those times, and consider your true motives. When you feel impatience beginning to surface, stop. Breathe. Then, wait 60 seconds before you respond. Cultivating this practice could be a great rescue!

**PRAYER:** Father, thank You for being patient with me. Thank You that You never give up on me. I pray You'll develop patience in me that grows day by day and lasts forever. I yield to the work of the Spirit. Amen.

## KEEP IN STEP WITH THE SPIRIT: KINDNESS AND GOODNESS

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*But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, **kindness, goodness...*** **Galatians 5:22 (NLT)**

*And the Holy Spirit helps us in our weakness. For example, we don't know what God wants us to pray for. But the Holy Spirit prays for us with groanings that cannot be expressed in words. And the Father who knows all hearts knows what the Spirit is saying, for the Spirit pleads for us believers in harmony with God's own will.* **Romans 8:26-27 (NLT)**

Sometimes, when I think about God, I think about how big He is. I think about how He created the heavens and the earth (Hebrews 11:3), that He holds everything in His hands (Colossians 1:16-17), and that His power is like thunder (Job 26:14). But today, I'm reminded of the personal nature of God. He's closer than I often realize. He not only commands the universe to stay in motion but also pursues me with a kindness and goodness that can only come from Him.

Today's Scripture teaches that God wants to instill that same kindness and goodness in us. We can offer these same attributes of God to the people around us (in fact, the fruit of the Spirit is mainly expressed when other people are around!). God's Spirit is at work, overcoming our weakness, praying for us, and aligning us to walk in harmony with God.

**APPLICATION:** One way to cultivate a heart of kindness and goodness is to focus on the needs and cares of others. Write down the names of three people and spend time praying for them throughout the day. Slow down to consider their unique life situation, then ask God to send His angels to help them. Reach out to them with the kindness and goodness of God as the Spirit fills you and leads you.

**PRAYER:** Father, thank You for the ways You've shown me Your kindness and goodness. Holy Spirit, I say yes to Your work in my life and pray You will reveal who You are through my life today. Amen.

## KEEP IN STEP WITH THE SPIRIT: FAITHFULNESS

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*But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, **faithfulness**...* **Galatians 5:22 (NLT)**

*"I am telling you these things now while I am still with you. But when the Father sends the Advocate as My representative—that is, the Holy Spirit—He will teach you everything and will remind you of everything I have told you."*

**John 14:25-26 (NLT)**

Years ago, I had a coach who took a special interest in me. He trained me and spent extra hours on the field with me. However, one of the things I remember most about him was how he taught me about life and growing up as a man. My father wasn't around much, so he became like a dad to me.

One of the things I'll never forget that he said was *if you're going to make it far in life, you're going to need to learn how to serve others*. This helped me become a better player with the team. His words have proven true in my marriage. As I think about it, that's what God does with us. He teaches us in the Bible and through experiences. Then, when it matters most, He reminds us of what He said. He brings to mind what He's shown us in the past. God is faithful. He always fulfills His promises. He does what He says He'll do.

Today's passages remind us of God's faithfulness and teach us that as we deepen our walk with God, we naturally (supernaturally) become faithful like Him. It's His faithfulness to us that allows us to be faithful in our relationship with Him and others.

**APPLICATION:** As you seek to be faithful today, remember with all your heart the faithfulness of God. Write down several things God has taught you, and thank Him for teaching and guiding you.

**PRAYER:** God, I trust You and believe You always do what You say. Even when I don't understand what's happening, I know I can completely rely on You and Your promises. I pray You'll develop in me the character and integrity that allows me to be faithful. I open my heart to the work of Your Spirit. Amen.

## KEEP IN STEP WITH THE SPIRIT: GENTLENESS AND SELF-CONTROL

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*But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, **gentleness and self-control.***

**Galatians 5:22-23 (NLT)**

*"And I will give you a new heart, and I will put a new spirit in you. I will take out your stony, stubborn heart and give you a tender, responsive heart. And I will put My Spirit in you so that you will follow My decrees and be careful to obey My regulations."*

**Ezekiel 36:26-28 (NLT)**

My wife and I have recently been watching a lot of nature documentaries. We love it and have been having a blast! Did you know that Dalmatians are born without spots, a newborn kangaroo is the size of a lima bean, and hummingbirds are the only birds that can fly backward? Fascinating, for sure. This isn't a nature devotional, but one particular fact got my attention: sea otters often hold hands when they sleep so they don't drift apart. You might be saying *aww, isn't that adorable*. This reminds me of the gentleness of God. Sometimes, He fights for us as a warrior (Exodus 15:3). Other times, He rescues us (Psalm 18:19). But Scripture also makes it clear that He also treats us with gentleness. As David declares, *He will carry the lambs in His arms* (Isaiah 40:11b NLT). In other words, God often holds us so we don't drift apart.

Gentleness is also a fruit of God's work in our lives. As Paul instructs Timothy, *Always be humble and gentle* (Ephesians 4:2a NLT). May God's gentleness flow through our lives as we live with humility and express genuine care for others.

This week's devotionals have centered around the Fruit of the Spirit. These are attributes that only become a part of who we are when we yield to the work of God's Spirit.

If you think about it... if we're filled with love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness and gentleness, we'll have all we need so that self-control (the last fruit listed in Galatians 5:23) will come naturally. When we're full of the life of God, we won't need sheer willpower to stop doing things we shouldn't be doing. Rather, we'll be controlled by the same Spirit who has filled us with all we need. How amazing is that!

**APPLICATION:** Meditate on today's Scriptures. Ask God what He wants you to know and spend time in quiet listening for Him to speak.

**PRAYER:** God, thank You for giving me a new heart. I say yes to all the ways You want to change me, and I pray for more of the Fruit of the Spirit in my life. Amen.



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