

the
30-DAY
CHALLENGE

DEEPEN YOUR FAITH
IN 30 DAYS





First of all, we're so excited you picked up this book. We genuinely believe you were created to be in a relationship with the God of the universe - that He wants you to know who He is. This 30-day challenge is one way of learning more about Him, and His plan for your life.

THERE'S JUST A FEW THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW BEFORE GETTING STARTED.

First, there's nothing especially amazing about this actual book - it's just an introduction. Imagine you're being set up on a blind date and you have a friend who tells you some details about the person. While your friend's information is definitely helpful, it's the actual date that's the fun part. In the same way this book will hopefully be like that friend, telling you some interesting stuff about who God is; however, the point is for you to meet God for yourself.

Because of that, don't feel like you have to follow this devotional book to the letter. If you're reading a Bible passage one morning and decide you want to keep on reading the Bible instead of the devotional, that's great!

At the end of each day there's some prompts for talking with God - we're hoping those help kick-start a conversation with Him based on what you just read. If that morning something else comes to mind and you want to talk with Him about that instead, then go for it! Also, each day has an extra passage or two that's connected to that day's topic - the hope is that you'll dig in more on your own.

One unique concept we wanted to do with this devotional is give you some days off. Every Sunday we'd love for you to take a break from doing the next devotional and instead enjoy a day of rest. To help we've provided some ideas in the back of the book - each Sunday you can flip back there to get some ideas on how to rest/focus on God.

All of this is designed to promote one idea: we believe God is ready and waiting to talk to you ... we just hope this book gets the conversation started. The only thing you'll need each day is a Bible - you can get one from the Bible carts at the church or you can download one of several Bible apps onto your smart phone or tablet.

Lastly, we hope this book will be great for everyone, but if you're brand new to Christianity this devotional is especially for you. Day 1 is about the very beginning of the story - God creating the universe - and it goes from there. So if you don't know much about the Bible or who God is, this devotional will be perfect!

THANKS AGAIN FOR TAKING THIS 30-DAY CHALLENGE - WE CAN'T WAIT TO HEAR HOW GOD CHANGES YOUR LIFE!





DAY 1:

"in the beginning, God"

TODAY'S READING: Genesis 1:1-5

On the surface, the first verses of the Bible don't seem like a big deal. But think about what "in the beginning, God ..." means. It means that before anything else existed, God was already there. Before there was vegetation, or animals, or humans, or staff meetings, school plays, bills in the mail, or any of that other stuff ... there was God.

The point of this verse is that we aren't the main players in the drama of existence. If all of our universe's history was some epic play, then in the beginning, when the lights have gone dark and the crowd is sitting in quiet anticipation, the curtain rises and the only thing on stage is God - this is HIS story.

But it's easy to forget that! Our lives are filled with to-do lists, past regrets, future worries, or just being busybusybusy that we forget how tiny our lifespan is. Someday we'll be gone and what we did here will barely be remembered. This is because we're not the lead character in the play. The existence of this world isn't about us.

However, this verse also means that God wants us to KNOW Him. In the first sentence God is "I'm here!" He doesn't want us wandering this earth blind to His existence, completely unaware of Him. We may not be the lead characters in the play, but we are absolutely loved. The God of the universe exists, and cares about YOU.

NOW WHAT:

So today, spend some time thinking about the God who created this universe and who WANTS you to know Him.

Maybe you've never really talked with God - the good news is that He is ready and available to meet you where you're at. Tell Him that you want to get to know Him more and ask Him to show Himself to you.

If you are stressed or overwhelmed, ask the God who created everything for help. If you need patience, peace, or anything else, ask Him! Also, let God know that you're going to try - as best you can - to remember that this is HIS world and that you are living out HIS story.

WANT MORE? Psalm 104





DAY 2:

"...created everything and called it good."

TODAY'S READING: Genesis 1:3-12

"Don't run around in here, this is the LORD'S HOUSE!"

If you grew up in church as a child there's a good chance you heard this at least once. Running in church was disrespectful for some reason. Apparently God doesn't like speed.

To be fair, the intentions behind this were probably good - people who say these things genuinely want to honor God. However they also make us think that the church is this sacred, holy space and - more importantly - the rest of the world is not!

Today's Bible reading tells a different story. On the surface it seems simple: God is creating all the different parts of human existence - the earth, the stars in the sky, oceans and animals and everything else. But the point of this passage is that God creates them and declares them "good." He declares them to be important, significant, MEANINGFUL to Him. In other words, God is interested in more than just the "holy" places. He's interested in everything! Or to say it even better "EVERYTHING is meant to be holy."

Do you think of God as being interested in ALL of your life, or just the "spiritual" stuff? Is being religious a one-day-a-week thing? What if God is interested in every single part of who you are? And what if His plan is for all of your life to be "good" - to be the best possible version it can be?

NOW WHAT:

Spend some time talking to God, inviting Him in to every part of your day. Are you struggling with a co-worker, or a family problem? Maybe it's stress about the future or pain from the past. Invite God into your worries and ask for His help.

Sometimes we keep God out of areas of our life because we're either ashamed, or we want to do things our way. Would you be willing to invite God in to the messy areas of your life? If so, spend a couple minutes telling Him that, as best as you know how, you're inviting Him in to ALL of your life.

WANT MORE? Psalm 139





DAY 3:

"Created in His image"

TODAY'S READING: Genesis 1:26-27

You are created in the image of God.

Think about that.

[fill in your name here] are created in God's image. You. Do you see yourself that way?

Think of the most beautiful thing you've seen in nature: rolling hills covered in a blanket of autumn leaves, the sun peaking over the ocean's horizon at dawn, a peaceful river at sunset. Think of the eye-popping pictures we've seen of the earth from space, or of entire galaxies. None of those objects can say they were created in the image of God. Only you can do that.

This means your value as a human doesn't come from how attractive, smart, ambitious, or successful you are. It means no other person can add or subtract one bit from your importance. You are created Imago Dei - in the image of God. Because of this, you matter. You are significant. You are created for a purpose.

It also means this purpose can only be found in God. The longer we live the more we realize our goals - to get that promotion, marry that person, move into that house - don't satisfy us like we thought. The reason is that we are made to be satisfied by God, and God only. Since we're created in His image, He's the only one big enough to fulfill us.

NOW WHAT:

Do you believe that you matter? Do you struggle with insecurity, fear or loneliness? Talk to God about that and ask to see yourself the way HE sees you. Read the extra passages below and realize this is what God's saying to you.

Do you spend most of your time seeking validation through the approval, promotions, and compliments of people around you? In your conversation with God today, tell Him that you want to live only for HIS approval today.

If God created you in His image, it means He wants to spend time with you. Spend a few minutes talking to Him about whatever is on your mind today.

WANT MORE? Psalm 8; Ephesians 3:14-19





DAY 4:

“to rule over the earth”

TODAY'S READING: Genesis 1:28-30

The entire first chapter of Genesis explains the purpose of things. God creates the stars and animals and oceans and gives them a job. So what's the job of humans? To rule over all of it. God has given us this world and said “here, you're in charge of this.” Keep in mind this is the same world that God just created and called “good.”

This means everything we have belongs to Him and He cares about it - not just the physical earth, but all the stuff we've made from it. Everything we have is a gift signed “from God to your name” - our job, families, possessions ... our money. All of it is a gift from God and He's telling us “use this well - rule over it responsibly.” Unfortunately our possessions tend to rule us instead: we stress over paying off things we own, we constantly chase after the next big purchase, we become addicted to a bigger bank account, or the things we buy with that bank account.

How would your view of life change if you realized every possession you own is a gift from God? We tend to think “how much of my stuff should I give to God” but a more accurate question is “how much of God's stuff should I keep?”

NOW WHAT:

Do you feel “ruled” by your possessions? What would it take to be free of that? Spend time talking to God and surrendering those possessions to Him.

God has given us everything - what's one thing this week you could give back to Him? It could be your money, possessions, time, or relationships. What's one area of your life you want to give to God and say “I want to use this for You?” Ask God to help you know how to do that.

Make a list of all the blessings you have in life (your health, finances, family, gifts ... just being born in this country is a huge blessing!). Thank God for the good gifts He's given you.

WANT MORE? Luke 19:1-10 (notice how Zacchaeus responds to Jesus's acceptance)
Romans 12:1-2





DAY 5:

“the enemy”

TODAY'S READING: Genesis 3:1-5

Have you noticed that every good story has both a hero and a villain? It's the only way a narrative can work - the hero is striving to get the girl/the gold/his freedom but there's a roadblock in the way. A story that doesn't have a good antagonist isn't believable and audiences don't respond to it - something deep inside us knows ALL stories, to be relevant to our life, involve conflict against an enemy. Today's Bible reading tells us why we're that way.

Genesis 3 calls this enemy “the serpent” but the rest of the Bible tells us a little more. His name is “Satan” which literally means “the accuser.” We're told that he was an angel who rebelled against God and was cast out of heaven. We're also told that he is like “a roaring lion” and that he prowls this earth trying to unleash hell.

Satan only has one goal - to separate us from God. Notice what he does in those verses - he comes and questions God's command. He tells Eve “God doesn't know what He's talking about. He's holding out on you. He doesn't want you to be happy.”

Have you ever felt like following God means giving up something that makes you happy? Do you ever find yourself thinking that God is mean/uncaring/uninterested? Are there moments when you're tempted to do something you know as wrong and think “God doesn't really care THAT much about this.”

This is all the influence of “the accuser.” He's the antagonist in our story, and each day we're battling him.

NOW WHAT:

Do you find yourself struggling to trust God? Spend time talking with Him about that. He already knows you feel that way so just be honest! One of the most honest prayers we can pray is “God I want to believe - help me with my unbelief.”

Do you feel like your life is a war zone right now? Like life is a living hell and God is a million miles away? Admit how much your struggling, and ask Him for help.

Spend time talking with God about whatever else is on your mind - don't worry about how “spiritual” it is. Know that God is interested in you - He **LIKES** you. Talk to Him assuming that is true.

WANT MORE? Ephesians 6:10-17





DAY 6:

“Temptation”

TODAY’S READING: Genesis 3:1-7

To really understand this passage, you have to remember what happened before it. God created the whole world and declared it “good” - perfect in every possible way. He then told Adam and Eve in essence “go - enjoy it. Rule over it well. Use this world the way I intended.” The only exception was “but don’t eat from that one tree.” What Satan did then was turn Adam and Eve’s attention away from the God who gave them a world full of good gifts and said “you can’t really trust God. He’s holding out on you.”

This is how we’re tempted today as well. We have been born into one of the most prosperous, opportunity-laden countries on earth, we have freedom of religion, we are in the wealthiest 5% of the entire human population, and yet we walk around unsatisfied. We want more. And we get angry when God doesn’t come through for us.

This is the lie behind adultery and affairs - “if I only was with THAT person, then I’d be happy.” It’s the lie behind materialism - “THAT object would make my life better.” It’s the lie behind financial security - “if my bank account just had THAT dollar amount in it I’d feel safe.” We are all happiness junkies, looking for a fix that never lasts.

In it all we’re forgetting the truth - that we were created in the Imago Dei like we talked about before. GOD is the only source of lasting happiness. Anytime we look for satisfaction outside of Him it leads to pain.

NOW WHAT:

Is there a temptation in your life that you know is wrong, but you want it anyway? It could be something you know will hurt you, those around you, or your closeness with God. Talk to God about that struggle. Be honest about why you’re really chasing after that temptation. Ask God to help you find freedom from it.

If you’re up for it, write down the most honest reasons you can find for why you’re chasing that temptation. If it’s sexual temptation is there loneliness or a need to feel powerful involved? If it’s financial, is there a fear of the future and need for control? If it’s relational, is there a sense of insecurity involved? Talk to God about what you’re REALLY needing, and ask Him to meet those needs for you.

WANT MORE? Psalm 141





DAY 7:

"the curse - humans and God"

TODAY'S READING: Genesis 3:6-11

The saddest part of this story is the implication that it was normal for God to "walk about in the garden." What the author is trying to convey here is that - up to this point - there was no obstacle between God and humanity. Adam and Eve could interact with Him in a relational, intimate, real way. But the moment Adam and Eve disobey God something enters this world that was never intended to be - shame.

Have you ever seen a child who is confident, comfortable, and adventurous ... until they wander too far from their parent? In the orbit of their mom or dad there's confidence, but when they realize mom and dad are too far away, insecurity sets in. The safety net is gone. This is exactly what happened to us.

All of us, every single human from Adam and Eve on, has chosen to do things our way instead of God's. Like a rebellious teenager we've walked away from God and said "I'm doing this on my own." But we can't, and we know it, and so we live our lives ashamed. Like Adam and Eve we hide in embarrassment from God.

NOW WHAT:

Do you have shame in your life - either between you and God or you and others? Be honest with God about that. For reasons we'll cover soon, God has made it so we can talk with Him and not be ashamed.

Also, who are three people in your life that you could be praying for today. What needs do they have in their lives? Ask God to show up in their lives and do amazing things. Be open to God prompting YOU to help these people in some way. He may or may not, just be open to the idea.

WANT MORE? Psalm 139:1-18





DAY 8:

*"the curse -
between us and others"*

TODAY'S READING: Genesis 3:8-12

God shows up in the garden and says "why are you so ashamed?" The awareness of Adam and Eve's nakedness shows their self-consciousness. Where once they were able to be physical, emotional and relationally vulnerable before themselves and God, now there is shame.

And this shame leads to the very first husband/wife fight. God asks "why did you eat the fruit" and Adam says "well SHE'S the one that did it. It's all her fault." This is not Adam's best moment. Not only was Adam passively sitting by watching Eve eat the fruit (it says Eve turns to Adam right after she eats it), but now he sells out his wife to God.

Remember the illustration of the kid who wandered too far away from his parent? Well now both Adam and Eve have wandered away from God, and out of their fear and uncertainty they're fighting each other. We live in fear of being seen as naked so we make a co-worker look bad, snap at our spouse for no good reason, gossip about our roommate, criticize our kids when they remind us too much of ourselves.

Have you ever wondered why families seem to produce the most hurt? It's because by turning away from God, we've lost our ability to love each other well.

NOW WHAT:

Is there someone in your life who is IMPOSSIBLE to love/is driving you crazy? Pray for that person today. Ask God to give you patience and to help you see that person the way He does. There's a good chance that person is living in a lot of fear/shame - pray that this person would experience God's love in a way that would free them from that.

Have you wronged someone else and not dealt with it? Ask God for forgiveness first and then - if appropriate - ask that person for forgiveness too.

The love we WANT to have for others comes only from God. Ask to experience God's love today so that you can pass it on to others.

WANT MORE? Matthew 18:21-35





DAY 9:

*“the curse -
between us and the earth”*

TODAY'S READING: Genesis 3:16-19

One of the most repeated questions humanity asks is “if God exists, why is there so much pain?” Today's passage is the answer. We saw what happened when Adam and Eve turned away from God - they became insecure and lashed out at each other. In this passage we see that their rebellion affected the earth as well. Not only does God say there is going to be conflict between men and women (notice that the end of v. 16 is a product of the fall, a power struggle between the sexes. God never intended this), it says that our actual bodies and the earth we live in are cursed as well.

This is something that's often overlooked in Christianity: we are profoundly connected to the universe we live in. There is a relationship between us and our planet, and it was just as damaged by our choice to rebel against God as we were.

This is why we struggle to work in harmony with the earth. It's why we tend to be ecologically irresponsible. And it's the explanation for why there are floods and tsunamis and earthquakes - as the Bible says elsewhere “creation itself groans for redemption.”

This means two things: 1) we understand that we now live in a world where our bodies and this earth don't work the way God initially intended. 2) We should still treat them responsibly.

NOW WHAT:

Are you, or is someone you know, suffering from illness or injury? Spend time praying for you or that person today, that God will heal the body, but also that He would provide comfort and hope in the middle of that pain.

If you have time, find a spot out in nature. If not, think about one of your favorite places in nature to visit. Even though this world is broken, God's beauty is still in it. Spend time thanking God for the gift that is this planet. What does the beauty of that spot show about God's character (for example, his artistry, his love of order, his “bigness”)?

In the Psalms it says we are “fearfully and wonderfully made.” God created you and delights in you. Who you are - body and soul - is God's cherished creation. As you think about that, talk to God knowing that He cares about you.

WANT MORE? Romans 8:18-30





DAY 10:

“The Sacrifice”

TODAY'S READING: Genesis 3:6-8, 21-24

The moment Adam and Eve turned from God they tried to cover their nakedness with leaves. We do this still. Deep inside we realize we're not as nice as we pretend, more angry than we admit, more insecure than we show. We are all secretly worshipping ourselves, but we hide that truth behind doing nice things, believing we're mostly a good person, or going to church regularly.

But to Adam and Eve and to us God says “that's not good enough.” God sees the leaves Adam and Eve made and in response clothes them in animal skins. God covers the shame and rebellion of Adam and Eve by shedding innocent blood - an animal who has done nothing wrong has to die.

And even then it's not enough, because God kicks Adam and Eve out of the garden. The symbolism here is that humanity can no longer be in the direct presence of God. Our rebellion, what the Bible calls sin, has placed a wedge between us and Him.

This is important for us to understand: our over-inflated sense of moral goodness is not enough. All our attempts to be a “nice person” are just fig leaves covering up our nakedness. According to the Bible “good people” don't go to heaven and “bad people” to hell ... ALL of humanity has been cast out of the garden. And just like innocent blood was shed for Adam and Eve's sins, innocent blood will have to be shed for our sin too ...

NOW WHAT:

Have you ever had a moment when you realized that no matter how good you are, it still wouldn't be good enough to stand before a perfect God? It's important for us to realize that our hope for salvation doesn't come from us doing a bunch of good deeds. Spend some time acknowledging to God your own brokenness. If there is stuff in your life your ashamed of - something in your past, a current addiction, a specific struggle - spend time being honest about that before God.

When we admit our helplessness before God, He meets us in that moment and helps us. As you pray today, don't get stuck in shame, guilt or inadequacy. Ask God to meet you in your sin and help you. God is not a vindictive parent or uncaring judge - He is a good, loving, concerned Father. Ask Him to give you the power and strength you need for today.

WANT MORE? Romans 3:9-20





DAY 11:

“The Promise”

TODAY'S READING: Genesis 3:13-15

Yesterday's devotional ended in a dark place - Adam and Eve and all of humanity had sinned, and there was nothing we could do to make it right. But there is hope, and it's found in today's reading ...

The snake, you might remember, is evil personified. Satan. The Accuser. And at this point in the story he's reveling at successfully driving a wedge between humans and God. Then God humiliates him, saying from now on he will crawl, groveling in the dust - the ultimate sign of submission. God follows this up with a very cryptic, confusing statement: sometime in the future there will be a war between the woman's offspring (the literal word is seed) and Satan's offspring. Satan's offspring will bite the heel of the woman's seed, but He will crush Satan's head.

This statement isn't just for Satan to hear, it's for Adam and Eve and us too. God is saying "Eve, one day you're going to bear a son and this son is going to destroy this snake, this deceiver, once and for all." This is the first hint we get in the Bible that God has a plan to make our rebellion right - that the problem of evil is going to be dealt with.

What this plan IS comes later - it's a mystery to Adam and Eve at the moment. After they leave the garden Adam and Eve have two sons named Cain and Abel, but the brokenness of humanity runs deep, and Cain kills Abel out of jealousy. Heartbroken and longing for the deliverer who will make things right, Adam and Eve have a third son and name him Seth - or in the original Hebrew, "seed." Adam and Eve are hoping that somehow God will use this child to make things right again.

NOW WHAT:

Is there an area in your life so broken it seems impossible to fix? Maybe it's a shattered relationship, a past mistake, or a financial concern. Wherever the brokenness runs deepest in your life, talk to God about that area. Ask Him to help you believe that, even if you can't see how, He has a plan to fix it.

The core message of the Bible is one of hope - to be a follower of God is to be a believer that God is bigger than the worst this world has to offer. Ask God to help you show that hope to others: at work, school, with your kids, or even with strangers.

WANT MORE? Psalm 27; Romans 5:12-21





DAY 12:

Jesus: fully human

TODAY'S READING: John 1:1-14

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. But in today's reading we learn that in the beginning was someone called "The Word." We're told that this Word was WITH God when He created the Universe, but also WAS God (it's okay if you found this reading confusing because - well- it IS confusing!). John then says this Word became human and made His home among us.

God became a human. Think about that. The same God who breathed the earth into existence with just a thought became a defenseless baby. In Philippians we're told that this Word "emptied himself" of His divine powers and became a human in every possible way.

Thousands of years ago God told Adam and Eve "someone's coming someday, and He's going to crush evil's head." Jesus, the Word, is that someone. Because sin was humanity's problem, Jesus became human to deal with that problem (more on that later). Beyond that, because Jesus was fully human the Bible tells us that he was tempted in every way that we've been tempted.

This means that when you pray to God, you are praying to a God who understands. He knows what it's like to lose a loved one. He knows how frail our human bodies are. God didn't just sit back and sympathize, He got up close and personal with our pain. And he did this for one reason - because He loves us. Jesus loves us. He loves YOU.

NOW WHAT:

Often when we pray we imagine we're praying to some God up in the heavens that we can't really imagine. He feels distant and far away. How would you pray differently if you knew you were talking to Jesus, who lived on this earth and understands? If you often feel like God is disappointed in your failures, what if instead you viewed him as understanding them.

Before, the hope God offered was distant and vague. But by becoming human and being WITH us we see how deep God's love for us really is. Our belief in God's goodness is based on the reality of Jesus. Do you struggle to believe that God is good, or that He genuinely loves you? Admit that to Him, and ask Him to help you understand His love for you.

WANT MORE? Colossians 1:15-23; Philippians 2:1-11





DAY 13:

Jesus: fully God

TODAY'S READING: John 18:1-7

Thousands of years before the events from today's reading, a man named Moses was told by God to lead the Hebrew people out of Egypt. Moses was nervous no one would believe him so he asked God "who do I say sent me?" Or to put it another way "God what is your name? What do I call you? Who do I tell these people I represent?" God's reply: "tell them 'Yahweh has sent me'."

The name God chose for Himself literally means "I AM who I AM." It's almost like God is saying "no words in your language are big enough to explain me." This name was considered so holy in Hebrew culture it wasn't supposed to be spoken out loud. Legend has it when a Hebrew writer would make copies of the Torah, He would use a new stylus to write the name Yahweh, then throw it away after. This name was special.

Now go back to Jesus in the garden. He's about to be arrested, the soldiers ask Him "are you Jesus" and His answer is ... I AM. Yahweh. The name for a God so big language can't contain Him. And yet Jesus, in this moment and many others, claims to be the God too big for words, revealed in a human body. In Hebrews 1 we're told that Jesus was "the perfect representation of God."

Have you ever wondered what God is like? Look at Jesus. Have you ever wondered if God really cares for you? Look at Jesus. Have you ever wondered how to talk to God? Look at Jesus. Have you ever needed to have a God that understood you? Look at Jesus. He's the "I AM" perfectly displayed in human flesh.

NOW WHAT:

Imagine the idea of meeting Jesus - actually getting to have a conversation with Him. What would you say? This same Jesus is the one the Bible tells us we can pray to at any time. Today, pray about whatever is on your mind but focus on praying to Jesus - God made human.

WANT MORE? Hebrews 1:1-4; John 14:6-14





DAY 14:

Reading the Bible pt. 1

TODAY'S READING: Romans 8:5-11.

A huge part of learning to follow Jesus, is listening for His voice as we read the Bible. The first step toward this is ASKING God to speak, so before you read any farther today stop and ask God to open your heart to whatever He has to say.

Once you've done that, open your Bible to the passage below. Read it all the way through once. After that read it through again, and underline one sentence or thought that stands out to you. Once you've done that, read it one more time and circle one word that resonates.

NOW WHAT:

Why does that one sentence or thought stand out to you? What does it say that you need or want? However that thought affected you, talk with God about it. The Bible is His message to you, so let that thought be a conversation starter.

Why did you circle that word? Is it something you need from God? Ask for it. Is it something you wish you were? Ask God to bring that out in you?

However you respond, let the Bible be a way of turning your heart toward Him.



DAY 15: *Jesus: the perfect sacrifice*

TODAY'S READING: John 19:17-30

Jesus has been falsely accused, convicted, beaten severely, nailed to a cross, mocked relentlessly and left to die. This seems like a scene of defeat. Whoever Jesus claimed to be and whatever He came to accomplish, it looks like He's failed. Even Jesus' last words - "it is finished" - sound like giving up. But there's more to this story ...

In the other eyewitness accounts of Jesus's life - the books Matthew, Mark and Luke - we're told that Jesus's last words were a loud yell. Many scholars believe that "loud yell" was Jesus screaming the words John mentions here: "It is finished!" In other words, Jesus doesn't whimper them in failure, He yells them in victory.

So what was finished? On days 11-12 we learned that innocent blood had to be shed to cover humanity's sins, and that God said a "seed of Eve" would one day crush evil's power. Ever since then, in Jewish culture, regular sacrifices of animals took place as a religious cleansing ritual. An animal would be slaughtered by the priest as the family offering the sacrifice watched, knowing that animal's blood was spilt for their sins.

And then came Jesus. We're told he lived a sinless life - he was the perfect sacrifice. And because the price of sin is death, Jesus died on the cross. But right before He died He screamed "it is finished!" What is finished? The separation between us and God, and the need for innocent blood to be shed. Through Jesus sin was paid for once and for all. He did it so that we could have a relationship with God again - so we could "walk in the garden" with Him and not be ashamed.

NOW WHAT:

Jesus died so we could be in relationship with God. If you've never done it before, talk to God and say something like this "God, I get that you became a human and died for me. I get that you paid the price for my sin. Thank you for doing that - if you love me that much, then from now on I want to live my life for you." The Bible says that when you give your life to God, all of your sins - past, present and future - are paid for. Not only that, but you are able to be in right relationship with God, with no shame or guilt.

WANT MORE? Philippians 2:5-11; John 3:16-17





DAY 16:

Jesus: the Resurrection

TODAY'S READING: Matthew 28:1-10

One of the things that makes Christianity unique is the claim that our “enlightened teacher” didn’t just die ... He rose again. In Islam, the prophet Mohammed eventually died. So did Scientology’s L. Ron Hubbard, Mormonism’s Joseph Smith or the Buddha. Each of these men was seen as a wise guru whose spiritual teachings should be followed, but Christianity takes this one step farther.

If the end of the Christian story was Jesus’s death on a cross, being a Christian would mean following the teachings of Jesus in the same way a Buddhist follows the teachings of Buddha. Instead, Christianity says we follow a living Savior who conquered death. This means we are not following a set of rules, we’re living every day in relationship with a God who became human, defeated death, and now says (in Romans 8) that the same power that conquered the grave is at work in us! Think about that: the same power that brought Jesus back to life is available for you and me. Right now. In any situation!

NOW WHAT:

If you have time, check out the extra reading below. Imagine the hardest challenge you’re facing; at work, at home, with a family member, or a friend. If the same power that raised Jesus from the dead is at work in you through Jesus, then ask Him to bring “resurrection” in that area - to bring good out of evil, healing out of hurt, peace out of fighting.

WANT MORE? Romans 8:11-16





DAY 17:

Jesus: the Ascension

TODAY'S READING: Acts 1:6-9

Jesus has ascended into heaven and the disciples are standing still with their necks craned toward the sky, wondering when Jesus would come back down. They stand there so long that some angels have to show up and say "what are you standing around for. Go do what Jesus just told you!"

Right before this, Jesus had said "you're going to go into the world and tell them all about me." This is the mission of anyone who is a follower of Jesus - that in how we live our lives, do our work, love our neighbors, and serve our God we show other people who Jesus is.

We do this because, as the the angels told the disciples, Jesus is coming back again one day. There will come a time when this chapter of the story - the one humanity's been part of since Adam and Eve sinned - will end. Our job as followers of Jesus is to tell everyone "there's this guy named Jesus, and because of Him my life has changed." The Bible says that Jesus is now sitting at God's "right hand" (the seat of power). It also says anyone who has chosen to be a follower of Jesus is an adopted son and daughter of God and that we can come before Him at any time.

This is the message then that we tell the rest of the world: through Jesus's death and resurrection, you can be an adopted child of God! And like the disciples, it's time for us to go!

NOW WHAT:

Who are some people you know who need to hear the message of Jesus? Start praying for them today. Ask God to show them His love and kindness, and to use you to be a part of that.

WANT MORE? John 14:1-14; Colossians 3:1-4





DAY 18:

The Holy Spirit

TODAY'S READING: John 14:15-18 & 16:12-15

The common theme in these passages is that even though Jesus is about to leave (which we saw him do yesterday), His followers won't be left alone. The idea here is that even though Jesus isn't physically, tangibly with us, His presence – known as the Holy Spirit – now lives in us. And not only does He live IN those who are followers of Jesus, He “guides us into truth.”

Over the next couple days we'll talk more about how this works, but for today let's just rest in this thought: God's presence lives in anyone who is a follower of Jesus. This means that wherever we go we are never alone. God is not just with us in the sense that He's everywhere, but He literally dwells with us, inside of us.

This means that as we interact with God, we experience and understand Him in three different ways: He is God our Father, who rules over all things. Jesus, who became human and died for us and now lives in heaven. And the Holy Spirit, the active presence of God who lives inside of us. God is simultaneously one God, and yet three at the same time (if that makes your brain shut down trying to process it, that's okay. If God created space, time, and quantum physics, it makes sense there'd be things about Him we can't fully understand).

To know God is to know Him as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This is what's known as “The Trinity.”

NOW WHAT:

When praying, have you ever thought that God's Spirit dwells inside of you? As you pray for your day, your family, friends, or whatever concerns you have, be aware that you are praying to the Spirit of God inside of you!

Check out the verses below – how do they help you think differently about prayer? Pay specific attention to Rom. 8:26. Think about this verse, and what it could mean, throughout your day today.

WANT MORE? Romans 8:15-16; Romans 8:26





DAY 19:

The Fruit of the Spirit

TODAY'S READING: Galatians 5:16-26

Have you ever felt like there's this self-sabotaging monster inside of you, causing you to do things you don't want to do? You love your kids ... but get angry at them in an instant. You want to be confident in who you are ... but feel insecure at the slightest sense of rejection. You want to be easygoing ... but the moment you think about the future, you get stressed out. We want to be better than we know we are.

This is why today's passage is such good news! Being a follower of Jesus doesn't just mean going to heaven when you die, it means that right now, in every moment, God meets us and changes us and helps us to become more like the person He created us to be. Verses 19-21 are a list of everything we're not supposed to be, and every one of us can identify with at least one thing on that list. Those are the areas where we sabotage our selves. That's where the brokenness is.

As followers of Jesus though, we can celebrate that our character is being changed. Every day we surrender our sin to Jesus, and what this passage says is that His Spirit works inside of us and replaces our failures with "love, joy, peace, patience, goodness, kindness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control."

This doesn't come from us trying really hard to be better - we've done that before and failed. It comes from us asking God "would you bring the fruits of Your Spirit alive in me."

NOW WHAT:

What are 2-3 negative personality traits in your life you wish were gone? It could be insecurity, fear, anxiety, anger, lustfulness, jealousy, apathy, or a dozen other things. Don't beat yourself up, just honestly assess areas that need improving. Talk to God about these areas. Admit that you're broken and ask God for healing.

Look at that list of the "fruit of the Spirit" again. Which characteristics from that list would you want to replace the negative stuff (ex: peace in place of anxiety, gentleness in place of anger). Ask the Holy Spirit living inside you to bring His fruit alive in your life.

If you're up for it, write down the traits you're praying for God to work in you. Today, whenever you are struggling, pull out that card and quickly pray for God to bring those fruits alive in your life. Check out the verses below - how do they help you think differently about prayer? Pay specific attention to Rom. 8:26. Think about this verse, and what it could mean, throughout your day today.

WANT MORE? Colossians 3:1-15





DAY 20:

The Fruit of the Spirit

TODAY'S READING: John 16:12-15

We've read this passage before, but there's something Jesus said that's worth looking at: "When the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all truth."

This is one of those times where it's tempting to rush past that statement or dumb it down; but what if Jesus really meant this? Jesus says it's a good thing He leaves the disciples (which is a crazy statement itself!) because when the Holy Spirit arrives He'll live inside them and constantly guide them.

This is true for us too. Because God's Spirit lives inside us we can go through our day knowing that He's guiding our decisions, choices, and conflicts. The more open we are to listening, the more we hear God speak.

Like most things in life, this is a habit we build over time: it's like one of those old radios, where you have to turn the knob millimeters at a time to connect with the radio signal. In the same way we have to learn to calibrate our souls to hear God speaking. And just like when a radio signal gets fuzzy because it's competing with other signals, God's voice inside of us gets easily drowned out by the noise in our life.

But the comforting thing to know is this: in the craziness of our life God is speaking ... and He wants us to hear.

NOW WHAT:

One of the best ways to practice hearing God's voice is to get in complete silence. For some people this is near impossible, but try to find a place where you can get 10 minutes of completely uninterrupted stillness (or as close as you can get). Spend 3-5 minutes slowing down, silencing your mind, letting your heart rate relax. Then, as you feel yourself getting still start talking to God about whatever is on your mind. Don't expect any huge revelations - this is just a way of centering in that radio dial so you can hear God throughout your day.

WANT MORE? Psalm 25:1-10





DAY 21:

Reading the Bible pt. 2

TODAY'S READING: James 1:2-8

God says He wants to speak to us through His word, so before you read any farther today stop and ask God to speak to you. If there are any problems, obstacles or emotions that will make hearing from God tough, talk to Him about it and ask for His help!

Once you've done that, open your Bible to the passage below. Read it all the way through once. After that read it through again, and underline one sentence or thought that stands out to you. Once you've done that, read it one more time and circle one word that resonates.

NOW WHAT:

Why does that one sentence or thought stand out to you? What does it say that you need or want? However that thought affected you, talk with God about it. The Bible is His message to you, so let that thought be a conversation starter.

Why did you circle that word? Is it something you need from God? Ask for it. Is it something you wish you were? Ask God to bring that out in you?

However you respond, let the Bible be a way of turning your heart toward Him.





DAY 22:

Reading the Bible pt. 3

TODAY'S READING: James 1:12-18

God says He wants to speak to us through His word, so before you read any further today stop and ask God to speak to you. If there are any problems, obstacles or emotions that will make hearing from God tough, talk to Him about it and ask for His help!

Once you've done that, open your Bible to the passage below. Read it all the way through once. After that, read it through again and underline one sentence or thought that stands out to you. Once you've done that, read it one more time and circle one word that resonates.

NOW WHAT:

Why does that one sentence or thought stand out to you? What does it say that you need or want? However that thought affected you, talk with God about it. The Bible is His message to you, so let that thought be a conversation starter.

Why did you circle that word? Is it something you need from God? Ask for it. Is it something you wish you were? Ask God to bring that out in you?

However you respond, let the Bible be a way of turning your heart toward Him.





DAY 23:

“come, follow me” Pt.1

TODAY'S READING: Luke 5:1-11

I love this story because of its simplicity. Jesus (by this point a famous teacher/minor-celebrity in the area) tells a bunch of career fishermen how to do their jobs. These guys are worn out, in a bad mood, and I'm sure wondering who Jesus is to be telling them how to fish. But they do it anyway, and the fish come pouring in, and Peter falls on His face and says "I'm too sinful to be around you ..." In response Jesus says "I accept you, come follow me."

This is what it means to be a Christian. Going to church, tithing, reading your Bible, not doing all the "bad things" - all of that is good, but it's not what it means to be a Christian. A Christian is simply someone who has looked at their own life and said "I'm too messed up to do this" ... and Jesus in response says "I accept you, come follow me."

Our lives, then, are about doing the same - dropping everything to follow Jesus. A Christian follows Jesus - by the leading of the Holy Spirit - always listening for His voice. A Christian's identity is not defined by a career, or financial statement, or even by a family. A Christian is simply a follower of Jesus. That's it.

NOW WHAT:

Today, tell Jesus you'll try to follow Him wherever He leads. Think through obstacles that may come from that commitment: where will following Him be hard? Pray in advance for courage/wisdom in those areas.

Also, remember that Jesus cares about your needs. Spend time today asking Him for whatever is on your mind.

WANT MORE? Galatians 2:20





DAY 24:

“come, follow me” Pt.2

TODAY'S READING: Luke 18:18-30

Yesterday Jesus called a bunch of poor, tired fisherman to come follow Him, and they dropped everything. Today Jesus gives the same offer to a rich man, but the rich man walks away sad - He doesn't know how to let go of his wealth.

It's important to understand that most of us are the rich man in this story. By being born in America we are in the wealthiest 5% of all humans (and probably higher). Most of us, even when things are tough, don't worry about where food will come from tomorrow. We are - comparatively - comfortable.

The problem is that comfort and following Christ don't mix. Jesus cares for the poor, He spends time with the unwanted, and He's not concerned - not even a little - about financial security. To follow Jesus doesn't mean giving away all your money - but it does mean realizing the money isn't yours. Following Jesus doesn't necessarily mean surrendering your career path or life goals - but it does mean holding them up to God and saying “do what you want with them.”

The rich ruler's problem in this story is not that he's wealthy, but that he's practicing a comfortable version of spirituality where he follows most of the rules, and in turn expects God to bless his life. But he knows something is missing, so he comes to Jesus saying “what else do I need to do?” And in response Jesus says “stop thinking you can barter with God or only give him part of your life. Let go of control and come follow me.”

NOW WHAT:

Is there an area of your life - a relationship, a life goal, a destructive habit, or a safety blanket - you don't want to give to Jesus? If so, realizing that is a huge first step. While the process of letting go takes a long time, start today by praying something like this: “Jesus, I don't know how to let go of this area of my life, but I want to learn. As best as I know how I give this to you.”

WANT MORE? re-read Luke 18:29-30. When you struggle to let go, return to this promise.





DAY 25:

The Lord's Prayer

TODAY'S READING: Matthew 6:5-13

For those who have ever wondered “what is a ‘good’ prayer supposed to be,” today’s passage is one of the most helpful in the Bible. We learn that prayer ISN’T supposed to be about impressing other people, or trying to say the right series of words to get God to do what we want. If we think of Christianity in terms of being in relationship with God, this makes sense.

Imagine if when talking to a spouse or close friend you were constantly trying to impress people who were listening nearby. You started using big words you wouldn’t use otherwise and speaking Shakespearean English. Or what if you wanted someone to do you a favor so you tried to manipulate them by flattery. Both of these are super-insulting to the person you have a relationship with because you’re devaluing them. You’re trying to USE them rather than BE with them. It’s the same with God. He wants us to see talking with Him as a relational conversation, not a manipulative tool. Because of this prayer SHOULD:

- be a conversation with a loving dad (our Father)
- recognize his bigness/awesomeness (who is in heaven. May your name be honored).
- admit that His plan and way of doing things is better than ours (YOUR kingdom come)
- know it’s okay to ask for what we need, because that’s what a good dad would want (provide for our daily needs)
- ask for His protection from temptation (deliver us from evil)

NOW WHAT:

Today, practice this way of praying. Start by addressing God relationally (you can call him dad if you want - it might feel weird, but He says that’s how He wants us to think of Him!). Focus on believing He cares and is listening, and then admit that His ways and plans are better. Then ask for what you need and for His help and protection.

WANT MORE? Philippians 4:6-7





DAY 26:

The Lord's Prayer

TODAY'S READING: Matthew 7:7-11

In this passage Jesus says "you'll find what you seek and get what you ask for." The natural tendency is to think 'well God doesn't mean He'll give us **WHATEVER** we ask for. To some extent that's true and Jesus does give us a framework for what he means.

Addressing the parents in the crowd Jesus says "if your kid said he was hungry would you give him a rock to eat?" Jesus then explains that if we, who are far less good than God, know how to give good gifts to our kids, how much more does God know how to give good gifts?

This is a helpful way to understand things - if a kid wants something that's bad for them a good parent won't give in. But a really good parent wants to provide for not just their child's needs, but their wants as well. A good parent won't treat a kid to ice cream all the time ... but she might occasionally. A good parent both delights in his child's happiness while also feeling the responsibility to help their child grow into a mature adult. Jesus says God is the same way with us.

A parent also doesn't always expect the child to understand what's best for him. A lot of times the parent has to say "trust me on this one, I'm trying to help you." But a good parent **DOES** want their child to feel comfortable/loved enough to ask for everything.

This is why prayer - at its heart - isn't complicated. We are young children asking our heavenly Dad for what we want and need, and knowing that regardless of the answer - yes, no, or wait - He loves us the same.

NOW WHAT:

If God really is the **PERFECT** Father (far better than our own fathers), and if He really wants us to ask Him for what we want and need, then what do you want to ask for today. Don't feel the need to be spiritual or for the request to be something big, just ask Him, knowing He loves that we trust Him enough **TO** ask.

This isn't a formula - formulas are for math and business, not relationships - but it is a helpful way to organize our thoughts around who God really is.

WANT MORE? Luke 18:1-14





DAY 27:

Vine & Branches

TODAY'S READING: John 15:1-8

One of the easiest traps for a Christian to fall in is the trap of "doing." Remember the story of the rich ruler from a few days ago? He was a doer - he followed all the rules, was ethical at work, tithed how much he was supposed to, went to church every week, read his Bible ... and yet when Jesus said "come follow me" he refused. The ruler's life was so built on doing things FOR God, he rejected the opportunity to BE WITH God.

In our lives, it's possible to LOOK like a good Christian: to generally be nice, go through a 30-day devotional, maybe even serve at church ... and to not really know God for ourselves. In today's passage Jesus says we're like branches on a tree. A branch serves only one purpose - to bear fruit. If it doesn't bear fruit it has no purpose. So imagine if a branch said to a tree "okay, I'm going to try REALLY hard to bear fruit for you" ... that would be missing the point! A branch can't bear fruit on its own, it just naturally bears fruit when it's connected to the tree - it happens because the branch is attached to its source of nutrition.

In the same way we can only bear fruit by being "attached" to Jesus. Reading the Bible only matters if in doing it our attention is drawn to the God who inspired it. Serving at church is only beneficial if we're doing it with the love of God flowing through us.

Our job as Christians is to be connected to the vine of Jesus - and when we do that, HE produces fruit in US.

NOW WHAT:

What would it look like to stay "connected" to Jesus throughout your day - at work, home, church, school, while running errands, changing diapers or eating dinner? Talk to God about what that could look like, and invite him in to the next 24 hours of your life.

If you're up for it, set the alarm on your phone to vibrate every hour or two - use this as a reminder to stop for a few seconds, focus on God being with you, and invite Him into what you're doing.

This isn't a formula - formulas are for math and business, not relationships - but it is a helpful way to organize our thoughts around who God really is.

WANT MORE? 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18





DAY 28: *The Greatest Commandment*

TODAY'S READING: Mark 12:28-34

Take a look at how thick your Bible is (seriously, take a quick glance) ...

That's hundreds of pages of small-font text detailing God's long quest to undo the curse of Adam and Eve and our sin. It's full of histories and details and stories and rules.

And according to today's reading, it all boils down to this: love God, love others. That's it. The end.

Sure there are other details worth talking about, but those two commands are enough to keep us busy for the rest of our lifetimes. To love God is to say "Jesus, wherever you want to take me I'll go." To love others is to interact with others in a way that says "your needs, desires and dreams are just as important as mine."

To live out both of these is near impossible. People are annoying. Our energy runs low, and God sometimes seems far away, and there's distractionsdistractionsdistractions. But if you want to know "how am I doing at this whole 'Christian' thing" then take a step back and ask "am I growing in my relationship with Jesus, and out of that am I learning to love others more?"

This is it. If every day of our lives we move incrementally closer to these two things, then at the end of our life we'll stand before God and He'll say "well done! You lived your life exactly how I wanted you too!"

NOW WHAT:

Tell God you want to learn how to love Him more. Acknowledge the things that make that hard and ask for His help.

Who in your life could use extra love today? Spend time praying for that person, and throughout your day look for ways to model God's love to them.

WANT MORE? [Philippians 2:1-11](#)





DAY 29:

In the End

TODAY'S READING: Revelation 21:1-7

A few days ago we learned that Jesus ascended to heaven but said "I'm coming back soon." Today's passage is what "Jesus coming back looks like."

A few weeks ago we learned that our rebellion against God - our sin - messed up our relationship not only with Him, but with others and the earth itself as well. When Jesus comes back someday he's going to undo all of that.

In v. 1 it says "there's no more sea" - when this book was written the sea was a symbol of chaos and superstition. It was a place where evil spirits dwelled and nature combined to take down even the best sailors. It was, in short, a symbol of a world gone wrong. When the Bible says "there will be no sea" it means there will be no chaos and unpredictability. God will make this earth into a "new earth" and it will work how He always intended.

Not only that, on that day we will stand in the presence of God - no more feeling distant and separated from Him. No more being kicked out of the garden. God Himself will wipe away our tears, and there won't be any death or sorrow or pain to bring them back.

What does this mean for us now? It means this life isn't all their is. It means there's hope in the middle of every pain. Good wins. Evil loses.

It means that one day Jesus is coming back and everything will be set right. He will undo the curse, stand before creation and say "I'm making EVERYTHING new."

And then the best part of the story will begin ...

NOW WHAT:

One day we will see Jesus face to face. As you talk to Him about heaven, hope, or just making it through today imagine the moment when you'll actually get to see Him.

WANT MORE? Revelation 21:22-27





DAY 30:

Reading the Bible Pt. 4

TODAY'S READING: 1 John 3:16-24

God says He wants to speak to us through His word, so before you read any further today stop and ask God to speak to you. If there are any problems, obstacles or emotions that will make hearing from God tough, talk to Him about it and ask for His help!

Once you've done that, open your Bible to the passage below. Read it all the way through once. After that, read it through again and underline one sentence or thought that stands out to you. Once you've done that, read it one more time and circle one word that resonates.

NOW WHAT:

Why does that one sentence or thought stand out to you? What does it say that you need or want? However that thought affected you, talk with God about it. The Bible is His message to you, so let that thought be a conversation starter.

Why did you circle that word? Is it something you need from God? Ask for it. Is it something you wish you were? Ask God to bring that out in you?

However you respond, let the Bible be a way of turning your heart toward Him.





SUNDAY:

Day of Rest pt. 1

Being a Christian is about learning to know, love, and follow God. Take a break from the devotional today and ask God to speak to you through the pastor's message, the worship music, or just some quiet time alone with Him. God's example for us is to have a day of rest - make today as peaceful/restful as possible.



SUNDAY:

Day of Rest pt. 2

One of the most remarkable aspects of Jesus' life is how often He got away from the busyness of life to rest and pray.

Today, get away from busyness as well (if Jesus needed to then so do you!). Reflect, focus on God and everything He's provided. Enjoy His creation. Recharge and get ready for the week to come.





SUNDAY:

Day of Rest pt. 3

We live in a culture that tells us productivity is directly related to value: the more we do as human beings, the more important we are.

But from God's point of view your value comes from being His adopted son or daughter. Today, let go of "being productive" to do the one thing that truly IS productive: resting and enjoying God's creation.



SUNDAY:

Day of Rest pt. 4

Every moment is an opportunity to practice being a branch connected to Jesus. Today, rest in Him - avoid worry, fear, distractions, busyness or anger. Lean on Him and ask for peace.



Congratulations on completing



We have another great suggestion for you to continue studying God's Word...

Start with the book of John and simply use the **"SOAK"** method...

Grab a notebook and your Bible and start with John 1. Once you have finished reading it, follow these steps

S – focus on the **SCRIPTURE** you read.

O – note your **OBSERVATIONS** about that scripture.

A – **APPLICATION** – determine how you will apply these truths to your life.

K – **KNEEL** and pray.

Simply by meditating on one section of scripture, applying it to your life and then praying daily, you will grow spiritually and your life will change.





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