



a 31-day devotional journey through the life of Jesus by R.Brian Phillips

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

There are two things I'd like you to know about me . . .

One, I'm no better or different than anyone else. I, too, have faced troubles in my life, and made poor choices along the way. And, all too often (or, maybe not often enough), I've prayed the words of King David, of David and Goliath fame, "Oh Lord, have mercy on me. Heal me, for I have sinned against You" (Psalm 41:4). Like every human being alive—or who has ever lived—I'm in desperate need of a Savior.

Two, I can't take much credit for the content of this devo, as the majority of the text comes straight from the Bible, and the inspiration for writing it comes from, well, you know Who. All I did was, hopefully, present it in such a way you would see how relevant the life of Jesus is for all of us, today.

So, if you really want to know who the Author is, I'd simply share these words from John, "the disciple whom Jesus loved":

"Before anything else existed, there was Christ, with God. He has always been alive and is himself God. He created everything there is—nothing exists that he didn't make. Eternal life is in him, and this life gives light to all mankind. His life is the light that shines through the darkness—and the darkness can never extinguish it." (John 1:1-5, The Living Bible)

As does everything of any value in my life, God gets all the credit.

#### SO, WHAT'S NEXT?

Congratulations! You just went through the birth, life, death, resurrection, and return of Jesus in 31 days. That's more than most people do in a lifetime!

So, you might be asking, "What's next?"

This devotional was intended to be a jump start to a regular routine of listening and talking to Jesus. Or, put another way, reading the Bible\* and praying. More importantly, it was intended to be a jump start to living the Christian life—becoming a person known for loving God, and loving others.

So, you may want to explore that more. As I mentioned at the beginning of this devo, it's easier to do so with another person, or with a group of others. But, if you don't know where to find people interested in doing the same thing, we'd love to help. Email us at <a href="https://wheredoibegin@brianphillips.org">wheredoibegin@brianphillips.org</a>, and we'll try to connect you with a group of people near you, who are on the same journey.

One last thing, though. I would be doing you a disservice if I didn't make this clear: The Christian life doesn't equal a trouble-free life. Jesus tells us, "Here on Earth you will have many trials and sorrows" (John 16:33). But, in the same breath, he reassures us, saying, "Take heart, because I have overcome the world." In other words, while Jesus doesn't magically rid our lives of troubles, he does provide us strength to get through them.

My hope for you, now that you've gotten to know Jesus better, is that you'll spend more time with him. Namely, because he offers you the strength, love, comfort and direction you'll need to navigate through life's good times, as well as the not-so-good times.

Remembering that, I encourage you to start each day by asking him, "Where do I begin?"

<sup>\*</sup> If you don't have a printed version of the Bible and would like one, we'd be happy to have one sent to you at no cost! A coalition of Christian organizations have teamed up to make Bibles available to literally anyone in the world who would like one. Simply email us at <a href="wheredoibeqin@brianphillips.org">wheredoibeqin@brianphillips.org</a>, include your name, shipping address, and what language you'd like it in (English or Spanish), and we'll arrange to have one sent to you.

"The man who knocks on the door of a brothel is seeking God."  $\sim$  G.K. Chesterton

- 3. Traditional Jewish burial preparation (the Taharah): http://bit.ly/WDIB\_GTKJ\_DAY28\_3
- 4. Jesus' references to his resurrection (http://bit.ly/WDIB\_GTKJ\_DAY28\_4)

## Day 29 - Amazing Grace, The Sequel

1. The disciple whom Jesus loved (http://bit.ly/WDIB\_GTKJ\_DAY29\_1)

## Day 30 - Not A Fortune Teller

Names given to the Holy Spirit in the New Testament (<a href="http://bit.ly/WDIB\_GTKJ\_DAY30\_1">http://bit.ly/WDIB\_GTKJ\_DAY30\_1</a>)

## Day 31 - No More Tears

- 1. Overview of the Book of Revelation:
  - a. Part 1: http://bit.ly/WDIB GTKJ DAY31 1a
  - b. Part 2: http://bit.ly/WDIB\_GTKJ\_DAY31\_1b
- 2. Why is Jesus referred to as a Lamb?: http://bit.ly/WDIB\_GTKJ\_DAY31\_2

### Day 21 - To Cheer Or Jeer

Other accounts of Jesus riding a donkey into Jerusalem (<a href="http://bit.ly/WDIB\_GTKJ\_DAY21\_1">http://bit.ly/WDIB\_GTKJ\_DAY21\_1</a>)

## Day 22 - Virtue Or Vice

- 1. When was the first Passover?
  - a. http://bit.lv/WDIB GTKJ DAY22 1a
  - b. http://bit.ly/WDIB GTKJ DAY22 1b
- 2. Did Jesus heal Simon's leprosy? Ellicott's Commentary for English Readers and Benson Commentary find it likely. (http://bit.ly/WDIB GTKJ DAY22 2)
- 3. The perfume's value: http://bit.ly/WDIB\_GTKJ\_DAY22\_3
- The value of 30 pieces of silver: <a href="http://bit.ly/WDIB\_GTKJ\_DAY22\_4">http://bit.ly/WDIB\_GTKJ\_DAY22\_4</a> (if each piece is equal to a denarius, 30 would be equivalent to \$3,000, based on the calculation of the value of the perfume)

## Day 23 - Be An Example

- 1. Other accounts of The Last Supper (http://bit.ly/WDIB\_GTKJ\_DAY23\_1)
- 2. Washing of feet in the days of Jesus (http://bit.ly/WDIB GTKJ DAY23 2)

## Day 24 - Love Jesus, Love Like Jesus

1. Is Jesus really the only way to God? (http://bit.ly/WDIB\_GTKJ\_DAY24\_1)

## Day 25 - Discipline + Sacrifice = Love

1. The value of pruning (http://bit.ly/WDIB\_GTKJ\_DAY25\_1)

## Day 26 - Abandoned & Alone

 Jesus sweats blood ("Hematohidrosis is a rare condition in which a human being sweats blood." See http://bit.lv/WDIB GTKJ DAY26 1

#### Day 27 - What Does It Take?

- 1. What is the significance of the temple curtain? (http://bit.ly/WDIB GTKJ DAY27 1)
- 2. Details about the temple curtain: (http://bit.ly/WDIB\_GTKJ\_DAY27\_2)

## Day 28 - Just as He Promised

- 1. Facts about Joseph of Arimathea
  - a. A rich man, and follower of Jesus (http://bit.ly/WDIB GTKJ DAY28 1a)
  - Honored member of the high council (<a href="http://bit.ly/">http://bit.ly/</a>
     WDIB GTKJ DAY28 1b)
  - Good and righteous man, and member of the Jewish high council (<a href="http://bit.ly/WDIB">http://wDIB</a> GTKJ DAY28 1c)
  - Did not agree with the decision and actions of the other religious leaders (http://bit.ly/WDIB\_GTKJ\_DAY28\_1d)
  - Secret disciple of Jesus, because he feared the Jewish leaders (<a href="http://bit.ly/WDIB\_GTKJ\_DAY28\_1e">http://bit.ly/WDIB\_GTKJ\_DAY28\_1e</a>)
  - f. Acquaintance of Nicodemus (http://bit.ly/WDIB GTKJ DAY28 1f)
- Why it was unusual for Pilate to agree to give Joseph of Arimathea the body of Jesus (<a href="http://bit.ly/WDIB\_GTKJ\_DAY28\_2">http://bit.ly/WDIB\_GTKJ\_DAY28\_2</a>)

Dear Friend,

When you pick up the Bible for the first time, it can be pretty intimidating. Many people, on their first attempt to read it, start at page one and try to read straight through to the end. First-timers often make it just past Exodus, the second book of the Old Testament, and give up.

Someone may have told you, "Start in the New Testament." But, even that can be discouraging. If you begin with Matthew, the first book of the New Testament, you'll find it starts with a long genealogy leading up to the birth of Jesus. Someday you'll discover some fascinating reasons why it was included in the Bible. But, until then, you might be tempted to stop after reading a family tree made up of 42 generations.

It's my hope this devotional will help you experience the joy of reading the Bible, by giving you just a taste for what's in it.

This particular booklet will take you through the life of Jesus in just 31 days. You won't read the whole Bible, or even the whole New Testament. But, you'll read about Jesus' life, and you'll become familiar with several books of the Bible in the process.

The daily readings are intended to be read in order. So, don't skip a day just because you missed it. If you miss a day, don't sweat it. Just read it the next time you pick up this devo.

Some days include modern-day stories to help make the Bible passages relevant to today. Other days, the Bible verse needs a little more fleshing out, so I've given some context to help it make more sense. And, sometimes, you may see additional Bible verses within the devotional readings, which I found necessary to confirm a specific incident not mentioned in that day's assigned verse, but still relevant to the context. Reading those extra verses will help you verify the accuracy of the commentary.

For those who REALLY want to check for accuracy, I've also provided footnotes regarding customs, culture, and even the source of the modern-day stories shared within the devotional.

Let me mention here that the assigned Bible passages associated with each day are REALLY important. So, I've provided them at the beginning of each day. While you don't have to read them, the daily devotional will make more sense if you do.

I'd like to encourage you, though, to flip open a Bible to read the daily passage, so you get a feel for where it is in the Bible. If you don't have a Bible, go to biblegateway.com and type the Bible passage of the day into the search field, then select New Living Translation (NLT) from the drop-down menu to its right and hit enter. It will then display the appropriate verses.

I hope reading this devotional leaves you wanting to read more of the Bible. If so, find someone you trust to help you navigate through it (like a parent, relative, friend, mentor, coach, or teacher who first talked to you about Jesus; a minister, or youth pastor; a Young Life leader, Youth for Christ volunteer, etc.). Or, find a group of people who are studying the Bible together. Like any journey, it's easier when you have company along the way, rather than going it alone.

I promise that once you begin reading the Bible—the story of God's love for us—you'll find yourself on an exciting new journey!

Now, let me introduce you to Jesus.

#### **FIRST THINGS FIRST**

Before we begin, let's talk about prayer.

In its simplest form, prayer is having a conversation with God. It's talking WITH Him, not just TO Him. In other words, it's having a heartfelt, honest, two-way conversation with Him about things that are on your mind each day.

So, before reading each of the following devotionals, you might start by praying this:

"Lord, is there something You want to tell me, today? I'm listening."

Then, after reading the devotional, take a moment to chat with Him. Talk to God like you would talk with a friend (silently, or even out loud). Tell Him anything that came to mind as you read the daily devotional. To help get you started, I've provided a sample prayer, based on each day's topic. But, I encourage you to use your own words when you talk to God, not mine.

Be real with Him. He cares more about you being open and honest, than saying things just the right way. So, be yourself.

Remember this, though. Just like when you're with a friend, you don't do all the talking. You listen as your friend talks, too. So, after you're finished telling God what's on your mind, take at least 30 seconds to a minute to be silent, in order to give Him a chance to speak.

Now, you might be asking, how does God speak to us? He speaks to us in a number of different ways. He speaks to us through the Bible. He speaks to us through devotionals like this one. He speaks to us through other people. He speaks to us through our thoughts. He sometimes speaks to us in our dreams. And on very rare occasions, He may even speak to us audibly, meaning we may actually hear His voice.

As for me, I've never heard God speak audibly. But, I have heard Him speak to me through all the other ways mentioned above. And they're no less miraculous than hearing His voice. So, be expectant that He WILL speak to you, one way or the other, either during your time of silence, or possibly throughout the day.

So, now that you know what prayer is, let's get started . . .

## Day 10 - Giving While Living

1. Chuck Feeney story (http://bit.ly/WDIB GTKJ DAY10 1)

## Day 11 - Lean On Me

Rolling Stone Magazine's 500 Greatest Songs of All Time (<a href="http://bit.ly/WDIB\_GTKJ\_DAY11\_1">http://bit.ly/WDIB\_GTKJ\_DAY11\_1</a>)

## Day 12 - Right There with You

 At the beginning of Mark, chapter 4, Jesus is teaching on a lakeshore when the crowd starts to grow so large, he climbs into a boat to teach. This is when he starts using parables to drive home his points. It's following this day of teaching that Jesus and the disciples climb into a boat and encounter the storm.

## Day 13 - Giving All You Have

 The cost of feeding five thousand – In some translations, Philip replies it would cost two hundred denarii (an ancient Roman currency) to feed the crowd. A denarius was worth about a day's wages. So, two hundred denarii would equal about 200 days' wages, depending on how many disciples would be included in the work. (<a href="http://bit.ly/WDIB\_GTKJ\_DAY13\_1">http://bit.ly/WDIB\_GTKJ\_DAY13\_1</a>)

## Day 14 - Get Back On The Horse

- 1. Jesus gives Simon a new name (http://bit.ly/WDIB\_GTKJ\_DAY14\_1)
- 2. "Get back on the horse" meaning (http://bit.ly/WDIB GTKJ DAY14 3)

## Day 15 - Mountain Top Experiences

- 1. Other accounts of Jesus' transfiguration (http://bit.ly/WDIB\_GTKJ\_DAY15\_1)
- 2. The life of Moses (see Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy)
- 3. The life of Elijah (http://bit.ly/WDIB GTKJ DAY15 3)

## Day 16 - Amazing Grace

1. Why Mom Sang Compassion to Son's Killer (http://bit.ly/WDIB GTKJ DAY16 1)

## Day 17 - Let It Go

- 1. About Corrie ten Boom story (http://bit.lv/WDIB\_GTKJ\_DAY17\_1)
- For more about Corrie ten Boom, read The Hiding Place, the story of her triumphant life during the Holocaust (http://bit.ly/WDIB GTKJ DAY17 2)

#### Day 18 - His Timing, Not Ours

1. Some thoughts on God's timing (http://bit.ly/WDIB\_GTKJ\_DAY18\_1)

## Day 19 - Unanswered Prayers

1. Lyrics to Garth Brooks' "Unanswered Prayers" (http://bit.ly/WDIB GTKJ DAY19 1)

## Day 20 - You Can Change

Ex-convict helps neighbors cope in Morocco virus lockdown (<a href="http://bit.ly/">http://bit.ly/</a>
 WDIB GTKJ DAY20 1)

## Where Do I Begin: Getting to Know Jesus

Footnotes

### Day 0 - Introduction

 It may seem intimidating when you discover some Bibles contain thousands of pages. But, you'll find a lot of the content and pages are there to help you understand what you're reading (e.g. the NLT Illustrated Study Bible, published by Tyndale, is almost 3,000 pages long). See <a href="http://bit.ly/WDIB\_GTKJ\_DAY0\_1">http://bit.ly/WDIB\_GTKJ\_DAY0\_1</a>.

## Day 1 - Ordinary People

- 1. Abraham Lincoln (http://bit.ly/WDIB\_GTKJ\_DAY1\_1)
- 2. Harriet Tubman (http://bit.ly/WDIB GTKJ DAY1 2)
- 3. Rosa Parks (http://bit.ly/WDIB\_GTKJ\_DAY1\_3)

## Day 2 - Peace On Earth

1. Expanse of Augustus Caesar's rule (http://bit.ly/WDIB\_GTKJ\_DAY2\_1)

## Day 3 - Jealousy Kills

- 1. The Magi's trip (http://bit.ly/WDIB GTKJ DAY3 1)
- 2. King Herod's sickness (http://bit.ly/WDIB\_GTKJ\_DAY3\_2)
- 3. The Wise Men's Gifts
  - a. <a href="http://bit.ly/WDIB\_GTKJ\_DAY3\_3a">http://bit.ly/WDIB\_GTKJ\_DAY3\_3a</a>
  - b. <a href="http://bit.ly/WDIB GTKJ DAY3 3b">http://bit.ly/WDIB GTKJ DAY3 3b</a>

## Day 4 - Titles

Strong's Greek-English Lexicon:

- 1. Jesus (http://bit.ly/WDIB\_GTKJ\_DAY4\_1)
- 2. Messiah (http://bit.ly/WDIB GTKJ DAY4 2)
- Rescuer (http://bit.ly/WDIB GTKJ DAY4 3)
- 4. God's Son (http://bit.ly/WDIB\_GTKJ\_DAY4\_4)

## Day 5 - Battle Of Humility

1. William Henry Harrison biography (<a href="http://bit.ly/WDIB\_GTKJ\_DAY5\_1">http://bit.ly/WDIB\_GTKJ\_DAY5\_1</a>)

## Day 6 - I'm Not Him

 Quote from Matthew Henry about John the Baptist (Matthew Henry Commentary, John 1:19-28 (http://bit.ly/WDIB\_GTKJ\_DAY6\_1)

## Day 7 - Practice Makes Perfect

 Strong's Greek-English Lexicon: Devil (Tempter) (<a href="http://bit.ly/">http://bit.ly/</a> WDIB GTKJ DAY7 1)

## Day 8 - Do It With Excellence

 Example of excellence within Young Life: Non-Negotiables of Young Life Camping (http://bit.ly/WDIB GTKJ DAY8 1)

## Day 9 - It Just Takes One

- 1. The bitter divide between Samaritans and Jews (http://bit.ly/WDIB\_GTKJ\_DAY9\_1)
- What was considered inappropriate between men and women in Jesus' day (<a href="http://bit.ly/WDIB\_GTKJ\_DAY9\_2">http://wDIB\_GTKJ\_DAY9\_2</a>)
- 3. It was inappropriate for a religious leader to interact with a woman with a sketchy reputation (<a href="http://bit.ly/WDIB\_GTKJ\_DAY9\_3">https://bit.ly/WDIB\_GTKJ\_DAY9\_3</a>)
- 4. Story of TJ Kim (http://bit.ly/WDIB GTKJ DAY9 4)

#### **ORDINARY PEOPLE**

**READ:** Luke 1:11-22

**ANSWER THIS:** When was the last time you've been discouraged, and felt like you didn't have anything to offer anyone?

#### THE BREAKDOWN

After walking into the temple to perform his duties as a priest, Zechariah encounters an angel named Gabriel, who had a message for him from God.

Angels can be pretty intimidating. Throughout the Bible, men would tremble at their sight. Which explains why the first thing angels often said when appearing to someone was, "Do not fear." Zechariah's encounter was no exception. As he stood shaking in his boots, Gabriel tells him not to be afraid.

Gabriel then tells Zechariah that God has remembered him (which is interesting, because the name "Zechariah" means "The Lord has remembered"). Then, Gabriel tells him he's going to be a father.

He would be no ordinary father, though. Zechariah would be the father of John the Baptist. And, John the Baptist would later turn people "back to the Lord their God." Zechariah's son was going to introduce people to someone who would change their hearts, and forever change the course of history.

It was astonishing news, to say the least. Zechariah had prayed for years to have a child. Now, in his old age, he's being told by an angel that he'll have a son. On top of that, he was going to have a son with a woman who was long past her childbearing years.

When Zechariah expresses doubt about whether he and his wife could have a child together, Gabriel is offended that the good news he just delivered is received with disbelief. So, Gabriel scolds Zechariah, and disciplines him by temporarily taking away his ability to speak.

## **SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT**

Zechariah got in trouble because he doubted God. In essence, questioning, "How could God possibly use my wife and me?"

The Bible is full of stories about God's crazy ability to use unlikely people to do extraordinary things. And, so are our history books. People like Abraham Lincoln (raised in poverty, multiple political failures, 16th US President), Harriet Tubman (born into slavery, escapee, rescuer of over 300 slaves), and Rosa Parks (department store seamstress, bus passenger, ignitor of the civil rights movement) were used to accomplish great things, in spite of their otherwise ordinary lives.

God accomplishes great things through ordinary people, to remind us He deserves credit for anything we accomplish.

## WHAT DOES THAT MEAN FOR ME?

We shouldn't get discouraged about our perceived lack of abilities, opportunities, or achievements, because no one is too ordinary for God to use. Nor should we brag about what we DO have, because every talent we possess, every success we attain, every opportunity we're given comes only from our Heavenly Father.

#### **PRAYER**

"Lord, I feel like I have nothing to offer anyone. Are you even interested in whatever talent and ability I have? If so, I place it in Your hands, to accomplish what can only be accomplished with Your help. Everything comes from You. Keep reminding me I possess nothing which you haven't freely and generously given."

Write down your response to Answer This here, along with your		
prayer, and/or any thoughts you might have about today's devo.		

#### NO MORE TEARS

**READ:** Revelation 1:17-18; 5:2-6; 5:13; 7:9-10; 19:11-16; and 21:3-4

**ANSWER THIS:** What do you think about Heaven, and who will be there?

#### THE BREAKDOWN

The Book of Revelation is the written record of a vision given to its author, John, generally believed to be "the disciple whom Jesus loved." It tells of God's ultimate defeat of Satan, His final judgement on humanity, and the ushering in of a new Heaven and a new Earth. If you read it without guidance from someone who's knowledgeable about the book, it might seem frightening. But, in reality, it's a book full of hope.

While far too complex to cover in a single daily devotional, we'll simply look at two great takeaways from today's chosen verses. One, Jesus is the main character in the Book of Revelation. And, two, Revelation gives us a beautiful picture of Heaven, and what eternity will look like for those who believe in Jesus.

In today's reading . . .

- John falls at the feet of Jesus, and Jesus tells him not to be afraid, because even though he was once dead, he is alive again, forever and ever.
- John is commanded to look, and is shown "the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the heir to David's throne," and "a Lamb that looked as if it had been slaughtered, but was now standing." They're both references to Jesus and his perfect sacrifice, and ultimate victory—death on the Cross, and resurrection from the dead.
- All of God's creation sings praises to the one sitting on the throne (God), and to the Lamb (Jesus), through whom we are saved from eternal separation from God.
- Jesus, the "Faithful and True," "King of all kings," and "Lord of all lords" wages a final war on evil.
- And, near the end of his vision, John is told God's home will be among his
  people, where there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain, and He
  will wipe every tear from their eyes.

Simply put, the Book of Revelation tells us Jesus will return to triumph over Satan, be crowned ruler over all creation, be worshiped by all who believe in and follow him, and promises us no more heartache, suffering, or death when this life is over.

#### **SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT**

If you tried to picture what Heaven and an eternal life would be like, it wouldn't even come close to how wonderful it could actually be (see 1 Corinthians 2:9)!

#### WHAT DOES THAT MEAN FOR ME?

Anyone can experience the grace and forgiveness Jesus offers in this life, as well as "no more death or sorrow or crying or pain" in the next. All it takes is loving him, and loving like him.

If you haven't already, you can start your journey following Jesus by asking for God's help (we all need it); praying something similar to the prayer below, using your own heartfelt words (it doesn't have to be perfect); and finding others who will walk alongside you (it really helps to be surrounded by a loving community on the same journey, who will encourage you in yours).

## **PRAYER**

"Dear Jesus, forgive me for my pride, and thinking I could live life without you. Help me believe and trust in you, so I can experience your grace and forgiveness in this life—and the peace that comes from no longer being separated from God and knowing there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain in the next life. I am so grateful. Thank you for loving me so much!"

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Write do	Write down your response to <b>Answer This</b> here, along with your prayer, and/or any thoughts you might have about today's devo.		
prayer, e	prayer, and or any thoughts you might have about today 3 devo.		

# DAY 2 PEACE ON EARTH

**READ:** Luke 1:26-38; Luke 2:1-20

**ANSWER THIS:** What are you most anxious about, today?

## THE BREAKDOWN

This is it. The day the prophets had foretold. The day the Savior of the world was to be born. He would be a king. He would rule the Earth. And, what better time or place to come? After all, Augustus Caesar ruled over a third of the planet. Should the Savior be born to a family favored by Caesar, that relationship could be used to spread the Messiah's fame around the world.

But, no, that wasn't to be the case.

Instead, His parents were a poor, teenaged couple. When they arrive in the town of Bethlehem to register for the census, they can't even find a room to stay in. Though it was obvious she was pregnant, no one makes space for the baby's mother. Instead of a comfy bed, the child would be born in a feeding trough.

And who were the first people to greet the newborn King? Were they members of the royal family? Were they celebrities? No. The first people outside the immediate family to welcome the Savior are shepherds. The same shepherds to whom God sent a personal birth announcement, delivered by an angel. An angel whose presence was so alarming, he began his message with, "Don't be afraid," as angels were known to do (sound familiar?).

After that night, everything would be different. God, in His love and mercy, had come up with a plan to bridge the separation that sin caused between Him and humanity. As a result, mankind would finally experience true peace about where they stood with God.

#### SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT

"Peace on Earth, goodwill to men." We hear that a lot during Christmas. Yet, all around it seems like there's everything but peace.

War. Murder. Bullying. Racism. Hate. That's what we hear in the news, day-in and day-out.

So, where's the peace?

Sure, there are those unique stories about good deeds, courage in the face of adversity, heroic rescues . . . and THAT list goes on, too. But, they sure seem fleeting. Here today, gone tomorrow.

Could there be another kind of peace? The kind of peace that comes from knowing there's a better life ahead, and an even better one after this life is over?

#### WHAT DOES THAT MEAN FOR ME?

Are you worried today? Scared about your future? Anxious about bad things happening all around you? Don't be afraid. The Lord promises peace in spite of troubled times. Trust that He has things under control, even when it seems like He doesn't.

## **PRAYER**

"I'm so worried about my life, Lord. But, something tells me no matter what I may be going through, I needn't be afraid. You are in control. You are the One who gives 'peace to all men.' Give me the peace that comes from knowing You."

prayer, and/or any thoughts you might have about today's devo.			

# DAY 30 NOT A PERSONAL FORTUNE TELLER

**READ:** Acts 1:3-9

**ANSWER THIS:** Who would you go to for advice about your future?

#### THE BREAKDOWN

Jesus is wrapping up his time with the disciples. Over a period of 40 days following his resurrection, he's appeared to them on several occasions, leaving no doubt he was alive. He uses the time to talk to them about the Kingdom of God—a reference to God's rule over Heaven and Earth, and made up of those who love Jesus and acknowledge him as Lord.

Once, during those 40 days, while eating with the disciples, he told them to stay in Jerusalem until God sent "the gift He promised." That gift would be the Holy Spirit, whom Jesus previously told them about, prior to his crucifixion.

Jesus reminds them that John the Baptist baptized with water, then tells them they'll be baptized with the Holy Spirit in just a few days. In essence, he was letting them know that while he will no longer be physically WITH them, the Holy Spirit will soon come to dwell IN them.

But, in the last moments the disciples have with Jesus, there's something else on their minds. They want to know when he'll free the Jews from the Roman occupation, and restore their nation to its former glory.

Jesus tells them that's up to God, and no man can know the date or time. He tells them in the meantime, the Holy Spirit will come and fill them with power, enabling them to spread the word about God's love throughout the world, expressed through Jesus' birth, life, death and resurrection.

With those last words, Jesus is lifted up into the clouds, until he is out of sight.

#### SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT

Jesus had previously told the disciples that the Holy Spirit would come and lead them in truth after he was gone (see John 14:16-17). This was important, as Jesus was about to physically depart, and they would need someone to guide them in the next stage of their journey as his followers.

However, judging by their last question for Jesus, they still didn't fully understand the significance of the events that transpired over the previous 40 days. They would need insight from a new Teacher, who could pull back the curtain, so to speak, on the spiritual significance of Jesus' resurrection, and the implication it had for all mankind—that we can trust Jesus at his word, there's life after death, and we'll spend eternity with him if we seek his forgiveness and grace.

## WHAT DOES THAT MEAN FOR ME?

Given the chance, what would you ask Jesus about your future? Would you want details, or would you just want to know if things work out well for you? Unfortunately (or, fortunately), Jesus isn't our personal fortune teller. He'd prefer we trust the Holy Spirit to "lead us in truth," one day at a time, along life's journey. That way, we can ask him for daily guidance, rather than be overwhelmed with knowing what lies ahead.

#### **PRAYER**

"Jesus, sometimes I worry about my future, and I want to know what's going to happen to me. But, I understand I probably couldn't handle knowing too much. I need to trust you and the Holy Spirit to lead me each step along the way, one day at a time."

Write	Write down your response to Answer This here, along with your			
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# DAY 3 JEALOUSY KILLS

READ: Matthew 2:1-12

**ANSWER THIS:** How does it make you feel when someone's better than you at something you enjoy doing?

#### THE BREAKDOWN

It was probably about a 900-mile journey for the wise men to travel from "eastern lands" to Jerusalem. But, they had seen an event in the skies so extraordinary, they were willing to leave the comfort of home to take the difficult trip.

Upon arriving in Jerusalem, they inquire where the king of the Jews was born. Word gets back to King Herod that foreigners are asking about a newborn king, and that leaves Herod and all of Jerusalem troubled. Herod's reputation for paranoia and revenge was well-known. So, the prophecy of a new king would make him feel threatened. And, when he felt threatened, he had a nasty reputation of taking it out on his subjects.

In response to his questions about the Messiah (the term used in prophesies about the person who would one day free his people from bondage), the local priests and religious teachers tell Herod the child would be born in Bethlehem. So, Herod shares that information with the wise men. He tries to deceive them, though, asking them to report back to him when they find the child. He says he wants to worship the child, when he really intends to kill him. His paranoia and jealousy outweigh any desire to pay tribute to this newborn king.

The wise men go on their way, and with the help of a star find the child with his parents. They present him with gold (a gift suitable for a king), frankincense (an incense used in the worship of God) and myrrh (a spice used for burials—a foreshadowing gift, symbolic of suffering).

Afterward, the wise men are warned in a dream about Herod's intention to kill the boy Jesus, so they take another route home.

#### SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT

Rather than secure his rule, Herod's vengeful nature led to grim consequences.

History shows he was mentally unstable, and prone to violent attacks of jealousy. His suspicious nature led him to turn against one of his ten wives, even though he was deeply in love with her. In great pain, and mental and physical distress, Herod murdered her, along with her two sons, her brother, her grandfather, and her mother.

After contracting an agonizing disease, Herod unsuccessfully attempted suicide. Medical analysis of historical records conclude that Herod died an excruciatingly painful death from kidney disease, complicated by maggot-infested gangrene.

You might say he died of paranoia and jealousy.

#### WHAT DOES THAT MEAN FOR ME?

When you see someone excel over you in something you enjoy doing, are you jealous? Don't be. It will only eat you up. Instead, appreciate the gifts God has given the other person, and encourage them, rather than wishing them to fail.

## **PRAYER**

"Lord, sometimes I can't help being jealous of others. Especially when they're better at something than I am. Give me appreciation for the abilities You've given others, and a desire to encourage them in their God-given talents and gifts."

to <b>Answer This</b> here, along with your s you might have about today's devo.

## AMAZING GRACE, THE SEQUEL

**READ:** John 21:1-17

**ANSWER THIS:** Who in your life do you wish would forgive you?

## THE BREAKDOWN

Seven of Jesus' disciples, Peter, Thomas, Nathaniel, James and John (the sons of Zebedee), and two others who aren't named, are standing on the shore of Galilee, where Jesus often preached to the crowds.

Out of the blue, Peter says he's going fishing. The others join him, and they fish through the night without any luck.

At dawn, when the light was low and the disciples were too far away to recognize him, Jesus yells out to them from the shoreline, asking if they've caught anything. When they tell him no, he instructs them to throw their net out on the right side of the boat, where they'll catch some fish. When they do, the net fills up with so many fish, they can't pull it in.

At that moment, John ("the disciple whom Jesus loved") says to Peter, "It's the Lord!" and Peter throws on some clothes, jumps out of the boat, and swims to shore. While Peter's swimming to Jesus, the others start paddling the boat to shore, dragging the net full of fish with them.

Once there, they find Jesus and Peter waiting for them, along with some fish cooking over a fire, and some bread. Jesus tells Peter to bring some of the fish they caught, so Peter goes back to the boat and helps drag the net full of fish to the shore—more fish than their nets could ordinarily hold without tearing.

Once everyone is gathered, Jesus invites them to have breakfast with him. Even though this is the third time they've seen him since his crucifixion, they're still surprised by his presence. But, it's undeniably Jesus.

Then, in an incredibly grace-filled exchange between Jesus and Peter, Jesus asks Peter three times, "Do you love me?", once for each time Peter denied he knew him. And, each time, Peter replies, Yes!" And, each time Jesus instructs him to take care of his lambs and sheep (meaning his followers), showing Peter he trusts him to carry on the ministry.

#### SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT

Certainly, Peter was overwhelmed with guilt, having denied he even knew Jesus three times, prior to Jesus' crucifixion. He must have wondered if Jesus could ever forgive him for such a betrayal.

Earlier in his ministry, Jesus told the story of the rebellious son, whose father showed amazing grace when he accepted him back into the family with much fanfare (see Day 16). Jesus told that story to illustrate how much God loves us, no matter what poor choices we make in life.

Now, Jesus extends that same kind of grace to Peter, offering his love and forgiveness. By doing so, he removes the heavy burden of guilt from Peter's shoulders, and restores their friendship.

## WHAT DOES THAT MEAN FOR ME?

Jesus offers all of us the same grace he showed Peter. But, it takes a great deal of humility to admit our faults, ask for forgiveness, and accept his grace. Yet, every one of us has it in us to swallow our pride and admit we've made selfish choices in life. When we sincerely ask Jesus to forgive us, he does. And, in so doing, our relationship with God is restored, and a party breaks out in Heaven (see Luke 15:7).

So, now, the big question is will you respond, "Yes!" when Jesus asks, "Do you love me?"?

## **PRAYER**

"Lord, I do love you. But, I don't feel very lovable. Forgive me for the poor choices I've been making in my life. I want to experience Your amazing grace and forgiveness."

Write down your response to Answer This here, along with your		
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DAY 4 TITLES

**READ:** Luke 2:21-52

ANSWER THIS: If someone were to give you a nickname, what would you want it to be?

#### THE BREAKDOWN

In Matthew 1:21, when an angel of God tells Joseph that his fiancé, Mary, who was still a virgin, was going to give birth to a son, the angel makes it clear the child should be named Jesus. In Hebrew, the name "Jesus" means "God Saves."

Not long after his birth, Jesus' parents take him to Jerusalem to dedicate him to the Lord, as was the Jewish custom for firstborn sons. While at the Temple (a place of worship, much like our churches, today), a man named Simeon recognizes Jesus as the Messiah whom God had promised he would see before he died. "Messiah" means "Promised Deliverer."

While Simeon is telling Mary and Joseph that Jesus was destined to be the salvation for all nations, an elderly woman named Anna overhears him. Hearing Simeon, and seeing Jesus, she begins to praise God, and tells everyone that Jesus was the "rescuer" whom they had been waiting for.

When Jesus is twelve, his parents take him to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover (a festival celebrating the day God miraculously rescued the Jews from Egyptian bondage). Afterward, on their way back home with friends and family, they realize Jesus is no longer with them. Three days later, they finally find him at the Temple in Jerusalem. Concerned, they ask him why he stayed behind. And he replies they should have known he'd be in his Father's house (his first recorded reference to his relationship to God).

God Saves. Promised Deliverer. Rescuer. Jesus clearly had some impressive titles.

More impressive, though, was his ancestry: His father was God.

#### SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT

In our Western culture, we love titles. Titles like Student Body President, Team Captain, or CEO are sought after. They're given to us by people who respect us and have faith in our abilities.

Nicknames, like titles, can be attractive, too. But, they can also be destructive. Names like "Weirdo," "Lamebrain", or "Tool," are given by people who disrespect us, and wish to diminish anything we accomplish. In reality, the people who give them are often compensating for their own low self-esteem.

In high school, I struggled in my Western Civilization History class. If I made a "C," it was a real accomplishment. My teacher, Mr. Benton, nicknamed me "Battlin' Brian," because he could see how hard I was trying. That motivated me to work even harder, and I eventually squeaked out a "B" in his class.

I've never forgotten him, or the positive impact he had on my life, simply because he gave me a name that inspired me, rather than one that demoralized me.

#### WHAT DOES THAT MEAN FOR ME?

Have you ever been given a nickname, or given one to someone else? Was it an encouraging one, or a belittling one? If we consider what name we would like to be called, maybe we'd pick more positive ones to give others.

#### PRAYER

"Lord, I know how I feel when people call me something not-so-encouraging. Help me keep that in mind when I'm tempted to give someone a nickname I wouldn't want for myself. And, point out when I'm tempted to treat someone in a way I wouldn't want to be treated. Remind me to

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#### **JUST AS HE PROMISED**

**READ:** Matthew 27:57 - 28:15

**ANSWER THIS:** When's the last time someone actually did what they said they were going to do for you?

#### THE BREAKDOWN

It's late Friday, and Jesus is dead. A wealthy religious leader named Joseph, from a city called Arimathea, had argued with the other leaders against executing Jesus (see Luke 23:51), and goes to Pilate to ask for his body. Pilate, the Roman governor who yielded to the other Jewish leaders and sentenced Jesus to death, releases the body to him.

Joseph wraps the body in linen cloth, as Jewish custom required, and places it in his own burial cave, rolling a huge stone across the entrance so it couldn't be disturbed. Watching were two women, both named Mary, who were followers of Jesus.

On Saturday (called the Sabbath by the Jews—a day designated for rest), religious leaders approach Pilate suggesting he seal off the cave and place guards there. Several times, Jesus had mentioned being "raised after three days." So, their reasoning is, if followers of Jesus steal his body, rumors might spread that he rose from the dead, and a riot could break out. So, Pilate agrees with their recommendation.

On Sunday, the same two women who watched Joseph place Jesus' body in the cave, go visit it. Prior to their arrival an earthquake strikes, and an angel rolls the stone away from the entrance to the cave and sits on it (see Mark 16:4, Luke 24:2 and John 20:1). The angel's appearance is so alarming, the guards placed there by Pilate faint in fear. Only when the women arrive does the angel make the typical angelic announcement: "Don't be afraid."

The angel then tells the women Jesus isn't there, he's risen from the dead, and that he'll meet them in Galilee.

With mixed emotions, the women run away to tell the others. On their way, they run into Jesus, who, like the angel, tells them, "Don't be afraid," and reminds them to tell the others he'll meet them in Galilee.

Meanwhile, some of the guards have gone into town to report the very thing the religious leaders had feared. So, the leaders bribe the guards to spread a lie that the disciples stole the body, then promise to defend them to Pilate, as they will certainly face harsh punishment for the body's disappearance.

#### **SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT**

Victory Day marked the unconditional surrender of Nazi Germany to the Allies in World War II. The Resurrection was God's Victory Day—death's unconditional surrender to Jesus.

Why is that so important? Because Jesus' victory over death gives us the assurance we can trust him at his word (multiple times he promised he would be raised from the dead), and the assurance that there is life after death.

#### WHAT DOES THAT MEAN FOR ME?

If anyone wants proof that Jesus was who he said he was, they need not look any further than the Resurrection. Not only did Jesus keep his promise that he would rise from the dead, he also showed us we need not fear death.

Eternal life with him awaits us after this life is over, if we will believe and put our trust in him.

#### **PRAYER**

"Jesus, it's honestly more than I can grasp. Thank you for loving me sacrificially, and offering me life beyond this one."

Write down your response to Answer This here, along with your	
prayer, and/or any thoughts you might have about today's devo.	
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# DAY 5 BATTLE OF HUMILITY

READ: Matthew 3:13-17

ANSWER THIS: What would you say is your best trait, or one that your most proud of?

#### THE BREAKDOWN

It was Jesus' coming out party. His inauguration. An initiation ceremony that would identify Jesus as the one who would tell and show people how to restore their broken relationship with God. His life would no longer be kept in relative privacy.

Yet, in stark contrast to the importance of the event, it was a battle of humility. Rather than political posturing for who would be the greatest, John and Jesus jockeyed for who would be least.

John, whom Jesus called "the greatest born of women," questions why he would baptize Jesus, and not the other way around. And Jesus, arguably the greatest historical figure of all time, says it had to be that way. Remember? An angel appeared to John's father, Zechariah, and told him it was his son who would point people to the Savior of the world (see Day 1).

So, John consents to Jesus' request, and baptizes Him. And then, afterward, Jesus receives a benediction. But, it was no ordinary benediction.

A benediction is a blessing that comes at the end of a religious service. And boy, did Jesus receive a blessing. When John lifts Jesus out of the water, the Holy Spirit descends on Jesus in the form of a dove, and an audible voice from Heaven is heard saying, "This is my dearly loved Son, who brings me great joy."

If there were any doubts that Jesus was the one whom God had chosen to deliver a message of hope to the world, there could be none now.

It was an inauguration day that no one would forget.

#### **SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT**

To most Americans, the name William Henry Harrison doesn't ring a bell.

Yet, Harrison had a number of things to be remembered for. One, he was the 9th U.S. president. Two, he gave the longest inaugural address of a newly elected president ever. And, three, he served the shortest presidential term in American history—30 days.

At his inauguration, Harrison gave an address that lasted almost two hours. Wearing neither hat nor coat, he pridefully held his audience captive, and droned on and on for an hour and forty-five minutes in a March snowstorm. Thirty days later he died from pneumonia and set another record: He was the first president to die while in office.

## WHAT DOES THAT MEAN FOR ME?

Take a couple cues from the inauguration of Jesus: In humility, acknowledge the authority of others. And, if given the opportunity to lead, be known for serving others, rather than demanding that others serve you.

### PRAYER

"Lord, it's difficult not to feel prideful when I'm given a leadership role. Help me to keep Jesus' humble attitude in mind when I excel at something, or when I'm given authority over others."

prayer, and/or any thoughts you might have about today's devo.			

# DAY 27 WHAT DOES IT TAKE?

**READ:** Luke 23:26-49

**ANSWER THIS:** What is something you find hard to believe?

#### THE BREAKDOWN

After Jesus has been unfairly tried and sentenced to death, he's forced to carry the cross on which he'll be hung, to a hill called The Skull. A man named Simon, from the African city of Cyrene, is grabbed from the crowd and told to carry the cross for Jesus, presumably because Jesus no longer has the strength to carry it himself.

As Jesus staggers toward his death, women along the road are weeping for him. In distress, he deflects their grief, telling them to weep for their own children and what they will face in the future.

Upon arriving at the hilltop, he's nailed to his cross, and hung between two criminals. Even after he asks God to forgive the people responsible for this injustice, many in the crowd remain hard-hearted, gambling for his clothes, mocking him, and spitefully placing a sign above his bloodied head that reads "King of the Jews."

Even one of the criminals hanging beside him insults him. The other, though, in a final act of remorse, admits his crime and asks Jesus to remember him. Remarkably, Jesus, despite his suffering, assures the man he'll be joining him in paradise.

At noon, the sun goes dark, and remains that way for three hours. Suddenly, the curtain in the Jewish temple, separating worshipers from the area where only high priests were allowed due to God's holy presence, is torn in two.

At that moment, Jesus shouts, "Father, I entrust my spirit into Your hands!" and dies. The events of the day are so extraordinary, a Roman officer declares that Jesus must have been the Son of God (see Matthew 27:54 and Mark 15:39).

The crowd goes home in mourning, with the exception of Jesus' stunned friends, and the women who followed him. They simply stand at a distance, watching in despair and disbelief.

#### SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT

What was it that caused the Roman officer to see Jesus not just as an innocent man, but as the Son of God?

Was it the way Jesus showed compassion for others, even those responsible for his unjust execution? Was it the mysterious way the sun went dark for three hours? Was it how intimately Jesus referred to God as "Father," even as he breathed his last? Could the officer possibly have heard that the temple curtain, which once separated people from God, had now been torn down the middle, making God accessible to everyone?

Or, was just being in Jesus' presence, even as he was dying, enough?

#### WHAT DOES THAT MEAN FOR ME?

What will it take for you to recognize Jesus is who he claimed to be—the Son of God? Are the historical accounts of his life enough for you? The things he said and did? Or, do you need more proof? He's given us plenty. But, none more convincing than what you'll read about next.

#### **PRAYER**

"Jesus, I want to believe. But, I've grown so skeptical, and don't know what to believe anymore. Give me faith and confidence in who you really are when I'm faced with doubt."

Write down your response to Answer This here, along with your	
prayer, and/or any thoughts you might have about today's devo.	
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## DAY 6 I'M NOT HIM

**READ:** John 1:19-34

**ANSWER THIS:** If someone sought your advice about a difficult situation they're facing, how would you respond?

#### THE BREAKDOWN

John the Baptist's mother must have told him throughout his life, "You're going to do great things when you grow up!" But, John has no delusion he's the Savior the Jews have been waiting for. Rather, he knows his purpose in life is to point people to the Savior.

So, in fulfillment of prophecy, spoken by a man named Isaiah hundreds of years before John's birth (see Isaiah 40:3), John sets out to tell people about the coming Messiah. He tells the crowds that the one who was born after him, and whose public ministry will begin after his, actually existed long before he did. While a bit confusing, John is basically saying Jesus is the Messiah, who existed before creation.

John speaks these words in the presence of the religious experts, and they're not at all pleased. He tells his listeners the Messiah is actually standing among them, and points to Jesus saying, "I testify that this is the Chosen One of God," an offensive statement to the religious experts, who considered it blasphemy.

John makes it very clear that Jesus is the Messiah, not him, and points out that God, who was once invisible, would now reveal Himself through Jesus. In other words, if you wanted to know what God is like, all you need to do is listen to and get to know Jesus.

John gladly accepts his primary role in life is to point people to Jesus, not himself. One biblical scholar described John as "more interested in doing good than appearing great."

#### SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT

In the movie Rudy, the title character wants to attend Notre Dame and play on their football team. But, there are insurmountable odds against him. He comes from a blue-collar family and doesn't have the money for tuition. His dyslexia makes studying difficult, and he doesn't have the grades for a scholarship. Plus, he doesn't have the physical stature to play college football.

At the height of his frustration, he asks a priest for some advice. In response, the priest, Father Cavanaugh, tells Rudy, "Son, in 35 years of religious study, I have only come up with two hard incontrovertible facts: There is a God. and I'm not Him."

## WHAT DOES THAT MEAN FOR ME?

We would be wise to follow Father Cavanaugh's and John the Baptist's examples. When someone comes to us for advice, or they just need to share about something difficult they're going through, we should listen intently, and take the posture of "There is a God, and I'm not Him." Then point them to Jesus for help and guidance in their situation.

#### PRAYER

"Lord, there are times I'm in over my head when someone asks me for my opinion, or what they should do in a really difficult situation. Remind me to point them to Jesus for help and guidance, rather than trying to fix their problems on my own."

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# DAY 26 ABANDONED & ALONE

**READ:** Luke 22:39-71; 23:13-24

**ANSWER THIS:** Have you ever felt lonely, and abandoned by your friends? And, if so, when was that?

#### THE BREAKDOWN

Following the Passover meal with his disciples, Jesus leads them toward the Mount of Olives, where he previously encountered people singing and praising his arrival.

Once there, he cautions the disciples not to give in to temptation, then walks ahead to pray. It's a gut-wrenching prayer, as he asks God to spare him the torture he's about to go through, but says he's willing to endure it if that's what God wants. An angel shows up to give him strength, but he's still in such turmoil he starts to sweat blood. He then returns to the now sleeping disciples, and cautions them again not to give in to temptation.

Suddenly, a crowd led by Judas approaches to take Jesus captive. Judas identifies Jesus to the crowd by kissing him, and the disciples prepare to fight on Jesus' command. Peter (*identified in John 18:10*) draws his sword and cuts off the ear of a slave standing in the crowd, whom Jesus then miraculously heals.

Jesus peacefully surrenders, and as they take him away, Peter follows. Soon, Peter is recognized as one of the disciples, but three times he denies it. Following his third denial, a rooster crows, fulfilling what Jesus predicted during the Passover meal (see Day 24). Then, Peter runs away weeping.

Though Jesus is unfairly accused, cursed, beaten, and whipped, he never denies he claimed to be the Son of God.

And, the same crowd that once sang and praised his arrival, is now shouting for him to be crucified—an agonizing execution where criminals are hung on a cross until they suffocate to death.

## **SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT**

Jesus knew this day would come. And it was as awful as he anticipated it would be.

The crowds who once shouted praises to him, were now shouting for his execution. His best friends have scattered. One, Judas, betrayed him for pocket change. Another, Peter, denied even knowing him. Everyone had abandoned him.

Even God seemed silent, and indifferent to what was happening to him.

This was the darkest and loneliest time in Jesus' life.

If you've ever thought God couldn't possibly understand what you're going through during the most difficult time of your life, think again.

#### WHAT DOES THAT MEAN FOR ME?

One of the worst things to go through in life is feeling like you're all alone, at a time when you need someone the most. Yet, we can be comforted knowing God is with us, and knows our pain. Even if you feel like He's not near, or doesn't even care. He is, and He does.

Knowing He loves us, and is always with us, can give us the strength and comfort to make it through the darkest and loneliest days of our lives.

#### **PRAYER**

"God, there are days I feel totally alone, and find it hard to just get out of bed. I feel the tiniest bit of hope knowing You're near, and You'll take care of me, even if it doesn't seem like You are, or will. It's times like these I need Your help to make it through the day."

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# DAY 7 PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT

READ: Matthew 4:1-11

**ANSWER THIS:** What activity do you enjoy so much that you constantly practice at it to improve?

#### THE BREAKDOWN

Jesus has just had his inauguration day, and he's about to launch his public ministry. But, there's one thing he must do, first. He must face his enemy, the devil.

Let there be no doubt, the tempter (one translation for "the devil") is single-minded in his plan. He needs to tempt Jesus to be disobedient to God, otherwise his plans to defeat God, and enslave all mankind, will fail.

Growing up, Jesus spent a great deal of time studying the Hebrew Bible (what we call the Old Testament), knowing he would be challenged about his beliefs. So, now, he's taking an extraordinary measure to prepare for a face-to-face encounter with the devil. He's going to fast for forty days.

Fasting (going without food for a period of time) was, and still is, considered a practice that helps us hear more clearly from God. And Jesus was going to need clarity to prepare for his encounter with the enemy, in order to deflect his lies. He'll have to be on top of his game.

From a human perspective, heading into a conflict following a forty day fast isn't the wisest thing to do. But, Jesus knew success wouldn't depend on physical strength. It would require spiritual endurance that comes from years of preparation.

The tempter tries every trick in the book. He tempts Jesus with physical nourishment. He tempts him to test God's faithfulness. And, finally, he tempts him with wealth and power.

With these three simple words, Jesus deals a knock-out blow each time: "the Scriptures say . . ."

## **SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT**

When athletes train for their sport, they spend countless hours practicing. They practice under various conditions, come rain or shine. They practice with and against athletes of different skill levels. They practice when they don't feel like practicing. They even practice in their mind, thinking through every possible play.

Why? Because when it comes time to compete for the prize, they've already rehearsed how they'll respond to various situations. Performing at a superior level then becomes second nature when playing in a game that counts.

No matter what's thrown at them, a well-practiced athlete is up to the challenge. If they didn't practice, the end result would surely be defeat.

#### WHAT DOES THAT MEAN FOR ME?

Followers of Jesus, especially new ones, need to be grounded in the teachings of the Bible, so we can become better at explaining what we believe, and recognize when the devil is trying to deceive us. If we're well-practiced like Jesus, when truth is questioned or twisted, we'll be able to confidently respond, "the Bible says . . ."

#### **PRAYER**

"Jesus, help me understand your teachings, and give me the desire to spend time with you daily. Prepare me to resist the devil when he tempts me, so I can defend what I know to be true, and respond with confidence, 'the Scriptures say . . .""

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# DAY 25 DISCIPLINE + SACRIFICE = LOVE

**READ:** John 15:1-13

ANSWER THIS: What are some ways you've shown someone how much you love them?

#### THE BREAKDOWN

Jesus is using an agricultural metaphor to explain a universal truth about God: He demonstrates His love for us through discipline and sacrifice.

First, Jesus compares God to a gardener who must cut off UNPRODUCTIVE branches, in order for productive ones to remain healthy. Additionally, He prunes PRODUCTIVE ones, so they can produce even more. So, productive branches aren't spared a certain level of discomfort, just because they're productive. Pruning is necessary for them to reach their true potential.

Second, Jesus compares himself to a vine that carries nutrients to the branches. If the branch is cut off from the vine, it withers away and becomes useless. But, if a branch remains attached to the vine, it gets its nutrition from the vine, and bears much fruit.

Finally, Jesus makes it clear that the disciples are the branches. For branches (the disciples) to remain attached to the vine (Jesus), they need to remain in his love. How do they do that? By obeying his commands, such as loving each other the same way he has loved them. If they do so, Jesus promises they'll experience incredible, overflowing joy! A joy that only comes through staying connected to him.

But, discipline (pruning) isn't the only way God demonstrates His love for us. He also demonstrates it through sacrifice. So, Jesus gives the disciples an example of what sacrificial love is when he says, "There is no greater love than to lay down one's life for one's friends."

It won't be long before Jesus gives them the ultimate example of sacrificial love.

#### SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT

While sadly not always the case because we live in a broken world, when a parent disciplines a child, it's for his or her own good. Done correctly, parents discipline their children because they love them, and want them to grow into the men or women God intended them to be. To not discipline a child is to not love them. That's a hard thing to understand when you're growing up.

Another hard thing to understand is how a person willingly gives up their own life for someone they love. But, when a person willingly sacrifices their life for someone who couldn't care less, that's taking love to a whole new level (see Romans 5:7-8).

#### WHAT DOES THAT MEAN FOR ME?

Jesus showed he loved his disciples when he disciplined them to help them grow in their relationship with God. And, as we'll read over the next few days, he shows them how much he loved them by making an unimaginable sacrifice.

How much you love someone can be measured by how you answer these two questions: One, are you willing to risk rejection by disciplining someone you love, in order to help them grow in their relationship with God? And, two, what are you willing to sacrifice to show them you love them?

## **PRAYER**

"Jesus, how can I possibly live life and love people the way you do? The only way I can is with your love—and as much as I hate to admit it, with your discipline. Please, help me remain connected to you, so I can learn how to live and love like you do."

Write down your response to <b>Answer This</b> here, along with your prayer, and/or any thoughts you might have about today's devo.			

# DAY 8 DO IT WITH EXCELLENCE

**READ:** John 2:1-11

**ANSWER THIS:** When was the last time you did something with excellence?

#### THE BREAKDOWN

Following the launch of his ministry, Jesus and his followers (called disciples) are invited to a wedding celebration. To visualize what they experienced that day, picture the reception that follows a modern-day wedding. Many wedding receptions these days include appetizers, dinner, a wedding cake, desserts, beverages, and dancing. This is the setting in which Jesus performs his first miracle.

Somewhat reluctantly, but out of respect for his mother, Jesus responds to her appeal to help when the wedding host runs out of wine. Note that his mother didn't specifically tell him to perform a miracle. She just points out the problem, then leaves it up to Jesus to solve it. She fully trusts him to come up with a solution. Even though Jesus tells her it's not his time, yet (possibly referring to a much bigger miracle he'll perform at a later time), he goes into action.

He has servants fill six large jars with water, each able to hold 20 to 30 gallons. Then he proceeds to change the water to wine. And, not just average-tasting wine. According to the host, it was the best wine of the evening. Which was very unusual, in the host's opinion. In his experience, most people serve a lesser quality wine late in the evening, when guests' tastes aren't as picky. But, not in this case. The best was saved for last.

That's so like Jesus. Not only does he pull off a miracle, but he goes above and beyond. He doesn't just make ordinary wine out of water, he makes extraordinary wine.

#### SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT

I learned a valuable lesson as a leader in a ministry called Young Life. I was taught the importance of doing everything with excellence.

For instance, when preparing a message to give at a Young Life Club, we were taught not to "wing" it—we would practice it several times before giving a talk. When holding Club in someone's home, we would take great care to leave the house looking better than the way we found it. And, when inviting teens to a Young Life camp, we knew we were inviting them to experience "the best week of their lives."

Doing everything with excellence was our goal, because that's what Jesus did.

## WHAT DOES THAT MEAN FOR ME?

Young Life taught me to do everything with excellence, because Jesus did everything with excellence. He never cut corners, because he valued people so much. Shouldn't we do the same?

#### **PRAYER**

"Dear Lord, please give me the passion Jesus had to serve others with excellence. Then, give me the ability to do it."

prayer, and/or any thoughts you might have about today's devo.			

Write down your response to **Answer This** here, along with your

## DAY 24 LOVE JESUS, LOVE LIKE JESUS

**READ:** John 13:31-14:6

**ANSWER THIS:** What do you think it would take to spend eternity with God?

#### THE BREAKDOWN

After Judas leaves to finalize his plan to betray Jesus, Jesus makes it clear his days are numbered. So, he's going to leave the disciples with one more example to follow after he's gone.

"Love each other, just as I have loved you." Jesus' love is so extraordinary, that if the disciples love one another the same way he has loved them, everyone will know they're followers of Jesus.

Simon Peter is stuck on one point, though. Jesus just said they can't go where he's about to go, at least not yet, and Peter wonders where that is. He goes so far as to say he's willing to die, if that's what it takes to join Jesus.

Jesus' next words must sting, as he tells Peter that's the furthest thing from the truth, and that Peter's going to deny he even knows him three times before the rooster crows the next day.

But, Jesus follows with these reassuring words: "Don't let your hearts be troubled." "I'm going to prepare a place for you." "There's plenty of room for everyone." "I'll be back for you." And, "You'll always be with me where I'm going."

When Jesus tells them, "You know the way to where I'm going," it's Thomas who gets stuck on one point, this time. He tells Jesus they have no idea where he's going, or how to get there.

So, Jesus makes one of the clearest declarations he's ever made, telling them, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me."

## **SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT**

While some people may argue that Jesus' claim that he's the only way to God comes across as exclusive, it's actually very INclusive. ANYONE can come to the Father.

- They don't have to be perfect.
- They don't have to earn their way.
- They don't have to be members of a particular club, or secret society.
- They don't have to be born a certain ethnicity, religion, or skin color.
- They don't have to be rich or poor.
- They don't have to be athletic, popular, outgoing, or famous.
- They don't have to be smart, well-spoken, leaders, or social influencers.

They just need to love Jesus, and love like Jesus.

## WHAT DOES THAT MEAN FOR ME?

Jesus was very clear there's only one true way to God—through him. Are you bouncing all over the place, trying different things to make sure you're in good standing with God, but still feeling unsure? Stop trying so hard. It's pretty simple. Love Jesus, and love like Jesus.

## **PRAYER**

"Heavenly Father, I feel like I'm constantly trying to please You, and fall flat every time. My heart is troubled. Help me find peace in knowing You simply want me to love Jesus, and love others the way he loves them."

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## IT JUST TAKES ONE

**READ:** John 4:5-30, 39-42

**ANSWER THIS:** What's one, small thing you can do to show kindness toward someone, even if it's someone who's not be very popular?

#### THE BREAKDOWN

In our modern culture, it's almost impossible to comprehend how countercultural Jesus was in his time.

In today's passage, Jesus does three culturally offensive things during his visit with the Samaritan woman:

- One, Jesus was a Jew, and he has the nerve to speak to a Samaritan (there existed a bitter divide between Samaritans and Jews that dated back more than 700 years).
- Two, he speaks to a woman (it was inappropriate for a man to publicly speak to a woman, unless they were related).
- And, three, he speaks to a woman with a questionable reputation (she admits she's had 5 husbands, and was currently living with a man, which was very strongly looked down upon in those days).

But, Jesus cares more about people than he cares about social norms. In the words of author Trillia Newbell, "This was part of his appeal. People who were used to being dismissed, ridiculed, and rejected were suddenly talking with someone who both saw them and loved them."

Jesus' disregard for social taboos was so profound, and his declaration that he was the Messiah so shocking, the woman breathlessly runs away, leaving her water jug behind, to tell everyone in the village about the man she just met. Her excitement causes people to drop what they were doing and go see this man who might "possibly be the Messiah." Jesus' care for one socially outcast individual lead to the salvation of an entire community.

One unlikely person, sharing her story, was all it took to change the lives of many.

## **SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT**

The movie October Sky is a true story about Homer H. Hickam, Jr., who grew up with few opportunities in a West Virginia coal mining town, but eventually became a successful NASA engineer.

Homer, a popular boy in high school, was fascinated with rocketry. In one scene from the movie, while eating lunch with his friends, Homer eyes the school's smartest (and "nerdiest") kid, Quentin Wilson, eating alone at his table. Needing help to build a successful rocket, and to the horror of all the kids in the lunchroom, Homer moves over to Quentin's table, and befriends him.

That one, small gesture led to changing everyone's attitude toward Quentin, and eventually impacted the lives of everyone in the community.

## WHAT DOES THAT MEAN FOR ME?

Have you ever asked yourself what difference can one person possibly make? Well, you can start by helping someone at your school, in your neighborhood, or even in your own home. Just be observant and ask God to point out someone who could use your help. You never know how much a kind gesture to one person might affect many others.

### **PRAYER**

"Lord, there are times when I want to help others, but I'm not sure how. Please give me compassion for people who need my help, and show me what gifts You've given me to offer people in need. And Lord, when asked why I'm helping, give me the courage to tell them what I'm learning about Jesus, and how he helped others. And how that makes me want to do the same."

Write down your response to <b>Answer This</b> here, along with your prayer, and/or any thoughts you might have about today's devo.			

#### **BE AN EXAMPLE**

**READ:** John 13:1-17

**ANSWER THIS:** Who's someone you have a hard time being around because they've hurt you?

#### THE BREAKDOWN

Jesus is sitting down with his disciples over a traditional Jewish meal to celebrate the Passover. The Bible refers to this particular evening as the Last Supper, as it was the last meal he shares with his disciples before his arrest and execution.

As he's contemplating what's going to happen over the next few days, he's full of love for his closest friends, the disciples. A love that includes Judas, the one who betrays him.

The disciples must be curious why he suddenly gets up from the table, takes off his robe, wraps a towel around his waist, and starts pouring water into a basin. His intentions are soon made clear when he starts kneeling down to wash their feet, and drying them with the towel around his waist.

Washing the feet of guests before a meal was a common practice back then, the job of the lowliest of servants. So, when Jesus gets to Simon Peter, Peter tells him no way. He'd rather have him wash his head, hands, AND feet, simply because it wouldn't be as humiliating of an act for Jesus to perform.

But, the example Jesus is setting for them is too important, so Jesus won't have it any other way. Unless Peter allows him to wash his feet, Jesus tells him he can't truly claim to be his disciple. If Jesus, as their teacher and Lord, is willing to humble himself to this degree, then the disciples should be willing to do the same for others.

Even if "others" includes someone who betrays them.

#### **SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT**

Imagine how dirty people's feet got back in Jesus' time. They didn't have shoes and socks like we do, now. They wore sandals. So, their feet were pretty disgusting by the end of the day. Especially, if they'd been traveling from town to town on dirt roads. So, stooping, both figuratively and literally, to wash someone else's feet was about as humiliating as it could get.

Yet, that's what Jesus did, and asked the disciples to do likewise—serve in ways they considered "beneath" them. Their willingness to do as Jesus did would demonstrate their love for him, and show people what it means to be a follower of Christ.

#### WHAT DOES THAT MEAN FOR ME?

Who is it that needs you to serve them in a way that doesn't come naturally to you, or you consider "beneath" you? Be they a friend, or the last person on earth you'd want to befriend, Jesus provided the example for the kind of service we, as his followers, should extend to others.

#### **PRAYER**

"Dear Lord. I can't believe the way Jesus served the disciples in such a humble way—including Judas, the one who betrays him. I need Your help to do something that's not easy for me. Help me be a good example of how Jesus served others, even if it means serving someone who hurt me."

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#### GIVING WHILE LIVING

**READ:** Luke 5:1-11

**ANSWER THIS:** What's one thing you've been putting off for a long time?

#### THE BREAKDOWN

Jesus' fame has obviously spread, as large crowds are now following him to hear his message. Standing on the shore of the Sea of Galilee (a large lake in Israel, that still exists to this day), Jesus feels the crowd pressing in around him.

Imagine being first in line for a sold-out concert, waiting for the gates to open, when the crowd starts to push toward you, and there's nowhere to go. It can be pretty unnerving. Jesus is experiencing something similar.

He doesn't seem too concerned, though. Looking over his shoulder, he notices a couple boats and some fishermen cleaning their nets. Boldly, he steps into one of the boats, and asks the owner, a fisherman named Simon, to push it out into the water, where he could safely preach to the crowd. Simon agrees to, even though he's had a discouraging night.

For Simon, fishing wasn't a sport. It was a livelihood. Catching absolutely nothing was devastating, as it meant no money to be earned, and no food for his family. So, when Jesus asks him to go out further and drop his nets, he must have been annoyed. There were no fish out there, or he would have caught them the night before.

Still, once more out of respect, Simon consents to Jesus' request.

What happened next was so miraculous, that after they hauled in a huge catch of fish, Simon tells Jesus he isn't worthy to be in his presence. He then leaves his boat, nets and fish behind to follow Jesus, as do the other fishermen.

#### **SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT**

In our success-oriented culture, it's rare to hear about people who walk away from their fortune for a greater cause. But, it does happen.

In his thirties, Chuck Feeney started a business that became a global success, and earned him \$8 billion (that's "billion" with a "b"). After twenty years running the business, he and his wife met with their attorney, and signed over their fortune to a foundation. The foundation's sole objective was to give away everything the Feeneys owned before they died.

Asked why they did that, Feeney said, "It was the right thing to do. Giving while living is a lot more fun than waiting till you're dead."

### WHAT DOES THAT MEAN FOR ME?

Are you putting off a decision to follow Jesus? Are you telling yourself, "I'll follow him, but not now."? Discover the joy of doing something now, rather than putting it off till later.

#### **PRAYER**

"Lord, I know you offer something far greater right now, than anything I've already experienced, or want to experience. Give me the desire and courage to follow you now, wherever you might lead."

Write down your response to <b>Answer This</b> here, along with your prayer, and/or any thoughts you might have about today's devo.			
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### VIRTUE OR VICE

**READ:** Mark 14:1-11

**ANSWER THIS:** What or who do you love more than anything else in the world?

#### THE BREAKDOWN

Leading up to the Jewish Passover, certain religious leaders were meeting together to figure out how to have Jesus arrested in secret, and then executed. They were jealous of his popularity, angered by his "blasphemous" claims to be God's Son, and offended by his accusations that they were hypocrites.

Meanwhile, Jesus is eating at the home of Simon, a man whose disease of leprosy was likely healed by Jesus, when a woman enters the room and gently pours expensive perfume over his head (she is identified in *John 11:2 and 12:1-3* as Mary, the sister of Lazarus). The response to her action, from others at the table, is anger at the waste of something that could have been sold to help the poor. But, Jesus stops them, saying they will always have the poor to help, but they won't always have him—a reference to his approaching death.

Jewish custom dictates cleansing a body before burial, making Mary's act an extravagant expression of that tradition. By some estimates, the perfume would be worth \$30,000 in today's dollars. To emphasize the significance of the moment, Jesus correctly predicts her story will be forever remembered and told, proven true by the fact we're talking about her in this devotional.

Soon after, Judas, a close friend of Jesus and one of his disciples, went looking for the religious leaders. The promise of money is too tempting for him, and he agrees to betray Jesus for 30 pieces of silver (as told in Matthew 26:15), the equivalent of \$3,000, today.

#### **SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT**

What a contrast. Mary performs an extravagant act of love by pouring \$30,000 worth of perfume over the head of Jesus. While Judas, on the other hand, accepts \$3,000 for the head of lesus

Mary sacrifices her money for the love of Jesus. Judas sacrifices Jesus for the love of money.

While most of us will never face such serious choices, all of us will be tempted during our lives between two options: Making a right choice that requires sacrifice, and making a wrong choice that results in betrayal.

Simply put, it comes down to choosing between virtue or vice.

#### WHAT DOES THAT MEAN FOR ME?

How would you complete the sentence, "I would do anything for the love of \_\_\_\_\_"? Did you fill in the blank with "Jesus," or something else?

#### **PRAYER**

"Lord, sometimes I'm embarrassed at what I'm willing to sacrifice to come across as cool, get something I want, or satisfy a selfish desire. I want to be remembered for something better than that. Give me the desire and strength to give up selfish gain, and replace it with a deep love for Jesus."

prayer, and/or any thoughts you might have about today's devo.			

## DAY 11 LEAN ON ME

**READ:** Mark 2:1-12

ANSWER THIS: Who do you consider your best friends, and why?

#### THE BREAKDOWN

Jesus returns to Capernaum (pronounced kuh-PERR-nee-uhm), following several days of teaching and healing, and word gets out he's back in town. Soon, the house where he's staying is packed with people wanting to hear him preach. Some are there hoping to be healed. There were so many people, the crowd spills out the front door of the house. No one can get in at this point. Or, so it seemed.

Some men bring their paralyzed friend to see Jesus, hoping for a miracle. When the men arrive, they discover they can't get in through the front door, so they climb on top of the roof and dig a hole directly above where Jesus is standing. Then, they lower their friend down on a mat, right in front of him. Jesus acknowledges their faith, and says to their paralyzed friend, "My child, your sins are forgiven."

Wait, what? He came to be healed, not forgiven.

Jesus had an agenda this day. He'd already demonstrated his ability to perform miracles. Now, he was going to make an extraordinary statement. Only one person could forgive sins, and that was God. So, by forgiving a man's sins, Jesus was putting himself on equal terms with God. That was heresy to some, and healing to others.

Before anyone could say what was on their minds, Jesus turns to the paralyzed man and tells him to pick up his mat and go.

Not only does the man get up, he jumps up! After all, he'd just been healed. Both physically and spiritually.

#### **SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT**

Bill Withers' song, "Lean on Me," is #208 on Rolling Stone's 500 Greatest Songs of All Time list. Maybe that's because its lyrics are so universal. After all, who doesn't want a friend to lean on?

Lean on me when you're not strong
I'll be your friend, I'll help you carry on
For it won't be long
'Til I'm gonna need somebody to lean on.

In the case of the paralytic's friends, though, there was no expectation that he could ever be that person they could "lean on." Paralytics were shunned by society, and didn't have the opportunities they have today. His friends were truly selfless, not expecting anything in return.

#### WHAT DOES THAT MEAN FOR ME?

The paralytic's friends cared so much for him, they took him to Jesus. Do you love your friends that much? They need the healing and forgiveness Jesus has to offer just as much as you do.

#### PRAYER

"Father, I need your healing and forgiveness. So do my friends. Give me the boldness and sensitivity to share what I'm learning about Jesus with them."

prayer, and/or any thoughts you might have about today's devo.			

#### TO CHEER OR JEER

**READ:** Luke 19:28-40

**ANSWER THIS:** When's the last time you screamed your head off at a concert or sporting event?

#### THE BREAKDOWN

After leaving Jericho, Jesus begins the 15-mile trek to Jerusalem. On the way, he walks ahead of his disciples—possibly to be alone as he contemplates what's going to happen over the next several days.

Once there, he turns to two of the disciples and makes an unusual request. He asks them to go into the nearby village, find a young donkey that's never been ridden, untie it from its post, and if anyone stops them, he tells them to say, "The Lord needs it."

Sure enough, they find the donkey, untie it, and are stopped by the owners. As Jesus instructed, they say, "The Lord needs it," and the owners let them take the donkey without incident.

Upon returning to Jesus with the donkey, they throw clothes over its back, and Jesus hops on.

As Jesus rides the donkey into town, a crowd starts to form, and they begin laying clothes out in front of him (other accounts say they also cut and laid down palm branches). When he reaches the road leading to the Mount of Olives, a mountain ridge running along the east side of Jerusalem, everyone starts to sing and shout: "Blessings on the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in highest heaven!"

Some people in the crowd were men known for their very strict adherence to religious laws, and weren't too keen on how the people were worshiping Jesus. So, they angrily tell Jesus to make them stop.

Unruffled, Jesus tells them if the people kept quiet, the stones would burst into cheers!

#### **SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT**

Jesus, whose fame has spread, has come to Jerusalem. Many Jews believed he was God's prophet, the Messiah, and would liberate them from their Roman occupiers. So, how could they possibly stay quiet upon his arrival?

Imagine your school is competing for the state championship of any sport or competition. Tons of screaming fans are cheering your team on. Then, someone comes over and tells the coach to keep you all quiet. They even accuse your team of breaking the rules. But, your coach knows that's not true, and replies there's no way to keep you all quiet. You can't stop people from cheering on their championship-bound team.

#### WHAT DOES THAT MEAN FOR ME?

Jesus' arrival in Jerusalem was far more meaningful than any school competition. It was truly something to shout and sing about. But, not everyone felt that way. Some people accused him of making false claims and leading people astray.

So, which side are YOU on? Are you cheering Jesus on, or are you jeering at those who do?

#### PRAYER

"Heavenly Father, sometimes it's hard to relate to events that happened over 2,000 years ago. Help me to understand who Jesus really was, and why some people were so captivated by him, and others opposed to him. I want to be one of those who cheer him on, and not someone who criticizes those who do."

prayer, and/or any thoughts you might have about today's devo.			
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#### **RIGHT THERE WITH YOU**

**READ:** Mark 4:35-41

**ANSWER THIS:** What's the toughest thing you're going through right now?

#### THE BREAKDOWN

The crowds continue to grow larger, as news about Jesus spreads.

Once again, he finds himself on the lakeshore with countless people pressing in (see Mark 4:1). So, he climbs into a boat to put some space between himself and the crowd, and begins teaching using parables (stories that teach a moral lesson). Rather than lecturing, Jesus preferred to use parables, in order to help people better understand who God is, and how much He loves them.

Later, following a full day of teaching, Jesus tells his disciples—the twelve men who are now following him—that he wants to cross over to the other side of the lake. So, they all climb into a boat, and start sailing across the Sea of Galilee.

Not long after, a fierce storm hits. Waves begin washing over the sides of the boat, and it starts to fill up with water. The disciples, in a state of panic, turn to Jesus, and find him sleeping! Which really isn't that unusual, since one, he's tired after a long day. And, two, he's not that concerned.

The disciples start to come unglued, and cry out to Jesus, "Teacher, don't you care that we're all going to drown!?" Jesus wakes up perturbed (yes, even Jesus gets annoyed at times), and yells at the storm, "Silence! Be still!" Suddenly, everything is calm, again.

Curious about their lack of faith, Jesus asks the disciples, "Why are you afraid?"

Ironically, the disciples are more frightened now than ever, as they realize they're in the presence of no ordinary human being.

## **SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT**

The storms we face in life can take many forms. Some are natural, such as the one the disciples and Jesus experienced. But, others can be relational, emotional, mental, or even physical.

When a storm of any kind is bearing down on you, it can be frightening, and feel overwhelming. During those times, we need to remember three things from today's account of Jesus and the storm:

- Jesus didn't prevent the storm.
- Jesus was present in the storm.
- Jesus had power over the storm.

God doesn't always step in and prevent difficulties in our lives. But, He's with us during those times. And, He has the power to get us through them.

## WHAT DOES THAT MEAN FOR ME?

Whatever difficulty you're going through right now, you can find peace knowing that Jesus is in control. There's no assurance when or if your circumstances will change, but there is this guarantee: Jesus will be right there with you.

#### **PRAYER**

"Lord, I'm really struggling. Life is really difficult right now. I just want things to get better. Give me the peace that comes from knowing you're right here with me, and teach me how to lean on you for the strength to get through."

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prayer, and/or any thoughts you might have about today's devo.			

#### YOU CAN CHANGE

**READ:** Luke 19:1-10

**ANSWER THIS:** What are you feeling so guilty about today that you're having trouble forgiving yourself for?

#### THE BREAKDOWN

Jesus has arrived in Jericho. Next stop, Jerusalem. As is the case everywhere he goes, a crowd is following. And, not surprisingly, Jesus does something culturally unacceptable, again. He talks to a tax collector.

In Jesus' time, tax collectors were traitors—Jews, collecting taxes from Jews, on behalf of their Roman occupiers. Their income came from overcharging their own people, and pocketing the profit.

Zacchaeus (pronounced za-KEE-uhs) was the chief tax collector for the region. He must have been deeply resented by his fellow Jews, as he had become extraordinarily rich by burdening them with inflated taxes.

Now, here he is, trying to get a glimpse of Jesus. But, because he's so short, he can't see over the crowd. And, the people aren't about to let him squeeze through for a better look. Searching ahead, he sees a sycamore tree on the side of the road where Jesus will soon pass by. So, he runs to it, and climbs up to get an unobstructed view of Jesus.

When Jesus gets there, he looks up at Zacchaeus, whom he's never met, and calls him by name. He tells Zacchaeus he's going to stay at his home, tonight. Not at an inn, not at a dignitary's house, but the home of a crooked tax collector!

Excitedly, Zacchaeus leads Jesus to his house, then tells him he's going to give half his wealth to the poor, and give anyone he's cheated four times what he took from them.

Jesus knows he's sincere, and announces that Zacchaeus is a new man.

#### SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT

Noureddine Elmihnida of Rabat, Morocco, wanted a fresh start when he got out of prison, and he wanted to make up for the pain he had caused his loved ones. He sought to regain the respect of his community, his parents and his friends.

During the pandemic lockdown of 2020, Elmihnida began grocery shopping and fetching medication for those who couldn't leave their homes. With a special permit to leave his own house, he ran errands for the elderly and vulnerable, risking becoming infected with the devastating COVID-19 virus.

Confidently, Elmihnida said, "God will protect me because he knows I'm helping people without expecting a payback."

Elmihnida's self-sacrifice showed everyone he was a changed man.

## WHAT DOES THAT MEAN FOR ME?

Are you tired of being weighed down by guilt, and hating yourself for something you've done? Do you want to change? Here's the good news. Jesus loves you just as you are, but wants to help you become the person God designed you to be. You just need to seek and accept his forgiveness, and invite him to help you change.

## **PRAYER**

"Jesus, I need your help. Please forgive me. I want to become the person God created me to be. I am so floored by how you love me and want to help me change. I give you permission to start

Write down your response to <b>Answer This</b> here, along with your prayer, and/or any thoughts you might have about today's devo.			

## DAY 13 GIVING ALL YOU HAVE

**READ:** John 6:1-15

ANSWER THIS: What do you own that you wouldn't give up for any amount of money?

#### THE BREAKDOWN

The crowds following Jesus have steadily grown, and on this day there's about five thousand men who came to see and hear him. By some accounts, the crowd is possibly two or three times that, if you count the women and children, too. It was getting late, and people were growing hungry. So, Jesus turns to Philip, one of his disciples, and asks, "Where can we buy bread to feed all these people?"

Surely Philip had one of those, "You gotta be kidding!" moments. It was a totally absurd thing to ask. It would take months to earn enough money to feed that many people. But, Jesus is testing him, to see how strong his faith is.

Then Andrew, Simon's brother, speaks up and makes a seemingly useless observation: "There's a boy here with five loaves of bread and two small fish." Philip must have thought, "This is getting ridiculous. How is THAT going to help?" Even Andrew had his doubts, wondering what good that would do with so many people to feed.

Then Jesus takes charge. He has everyone sit down, receives the loaves and fish from the boy, thanks God, and distributes the food to the crowd. As it gets passed around, little by little, people eat until they are completely full.

When the disciples pick up the leftovers, there's enough to fill up twelve baskets!!

Everyone realizes they've just witnessed a miracle, and start spreading the word that Jesus is the prophet who will save them from the Roman occupation. They are so excited, they want to make him their king.

#### **SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT**

The old proverb, "a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush," suggests it's better to hold onto something you already have, than risk losing everything by trying to get more.

That pretty much describes the choice the boy in this story had. Would he keep what he already had, or give it all away in hopes of getting something better?

Had he kept the loaves and fish, his family may have had just enough to satisfy themselves. But, by giving it all away, he and his family, like the rest of the crowd, had more than they could eat.

More importantly, by giving it all away, the boy got to participate in a miracle!

## WHAT DOES THAT MEAN FOR ME?

It's very tempting to keep what we have to ourselves. But, when we do, we miss out on the miracle of seeing what Jesus can do with our time and talents. What are you missing out on today by holding onto what you have, rather than giving it all to Jesus?

## **PRAYER**

"God, show me what I have that You'd like me to hand over to You. I'd like to see what You can do with it, and participate in Your bigger plan for my life."

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#### UNANSWERED PRAYERS

**READ:** John 11:17-44

ANSWER THIS: What prayers have you been praying that still haven't been answered?

#### THE BREAKDOWN

Jesus and his disciples arrive in Bethany to discover Lazarus has been dead for four days. When word gets out that Jesus has arrived, Mary stays home to grieve, while Martha goes out to see him.

Torn between frustration and faith, Martha tells Jesus if only he'd been there, Lazarus wouldn't be dead. But, it hasn't shaken her belief that Jesus is the Messiah. Jesus assures her Lazarus will rise again, leading Martha to think he means Lazarus will experience new life one day, when the world is made new (you'll read more about this on Day 31).

Soon after, Mary, followed by a crowd of mourners, joins Martha and Jesus, and expresses the same sentiment her sister did about Jesus' late arrival. "If only you had been here . . . "

Deeply moved by Mary's grief, and with an anger rooted in knowing this was never the way God intended life to be, Jesus weeps as they lead him to Lazarus' burial place. Some people, in their insensitivity, use the moment to criticize him for neglecting his close friend, and not coming earlier to heal him.

Arriving at the tomb where Lazarus is buried, Jesus tells those present to move the stone covering the entrance. Martha is worried about the odor from a 4-day-old corpse, so Jesus gently reminds her that Lazarus would rise again.

Looking up toward Heaven, Jesus thanks God for what he's about to do, then yells, "Lazarus, come out!" And, Lazarus does! Like a mummy, wrapped in the traditional grave clothes of the time.

Everyone must have been in shock, as Jesus tells them to unwrap Lazarus and set him free.

#### SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT

"Unanswered Prayers" by Garth Brooks tells of a common experience we all share: We think when God doesn't answer our prayers the way we want, He doesn't care. We think if He would do this, or do that, or act quicker, or stop something from happening, things would turn out differently. That may be true, but God knows what's best, and has bigger and better plans for us.

The raising of Lazarus from the dead is a great example. If Jesus had healed Lazarus, as Martha and Mary wanted, they would have missed out on a much greater miracle . . . proof that Jesus had power over death.

In not too many days, he would prove it, again.

### WHAT DOES THAT MEAN FOR ME?

What is your unanswered prayer? You can be sure God cares, even if you don't feel like He does. He rarely answers prayers the way we'd like. But, He does give us strength to carry on, until He answers our prayers in His perfect way and perfect timing.

#### **PRAYER**

"Heavenly Father, I'm desperate. Life is so hard right now, and it seems like You're not answering my prayers. But, I know You care, and You're timing isn't my timing. So, give me Your strength to live one day at a time, until that day I get to experience Your perfect answer."

Write down your response to <i>Answer This</i> here, along with your prayer, and/or any thoughts you might have about today's devo.

# DAY 14 GET BACK ON THE HORSE

**READ:** Matthew 14:22-33

ANSWER THIS: What's one thing you failed at that you never tried again?

#### THE BREAKDOWN

Following the miracle of feeding thousands of people, Jesus tells his disciples to set off across the lake to the other side. In the meantime, he sends the people home. Then, as night falls, he heads up into the hills for some alone time with God, a common practice of his.

While heading toward Capernaum in their boat, the disciples run into rough weather. Only, unlike the last time they got caught in a storm, Jesus isn't with them at the moment. Then, around three in the morning, when they are three to four miles out and rowing hard against strong winds and choppy water, they see something approaching on the water. Thinking it's a ghost, they cry out. What they hear next, is shocking.

Jesus says, "Don't be afraid. It's me!"

The next thing the disciples hear is Peter\* saying to the figure coming toward the boat, "If it's really you, Jesus, tell me to come walking on the water to you." To which Jesus replies, "Come on!"

Peter goes over the side of the boat, and starts walking on the water. But, before he gets to Jesus, he begins to sink and cries out in fear. So, Jesus reaches out to save him, pulling him up and telling him he should have trusted him and not doubted.

When Peter and Jesus get back into the boat, the storm calms down. But, not the disciples. They begin to worship Jesus, and exclaim, "You're the Son of God!"

\* Peter is actually Simon. You can read about why Jesus calls him Peter in John 1:41-42.

#### **SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT**

"Get back on the horse" is an old saying, meaning don't give up when you fail at something. Try it again.

This is what happened with Peter. He gathers up enough courage to step out of the boat and walk on water, then loses faith when he takes his eyes off Jesus and starts to sink. But, his faith must have been restored when Jesus pulls him up, and they stand there together on top of the

Peter could have resisted Jesus, and swum back to the boat. Instead, he gave it another try, and with Jesus' help, stood on water, again.

## WHAT DOES THAT MEAN FOR ME?

There are times when you'll feel strongly about your faith in Jesus. And, other times when you'll have doubts, and stumble. That's OK, we all have days like that. Jesus is more interested in seeing us "get back on the horse," than never failing in the first place.

## **PRAYER**

"Jesus, sometimes it seems like my belief in you and the miraculous things you did waffles back and forth several times a day. I can't do this on my own. Please strengthen me when my faith wavers and doubt creeps in."

	prayer, and/or any thoughts you might have about today's devo.	
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## DAY 18 HIS TIMING, NOT OURS

**READ:** John 11:1-16

**ANSWER THIS:** When was the last time you wanted something "right now," but someone said you had to wait?

#### THE BREAKDOWN

Siblings Mary, Martha and Lazarus were dear friends of Jesus, living in Bethany, a city just outside of Jerusalem. When Jesus receives a message from the sisters that their brother is sick, he tells his disciples it won't end in death. Instead, Jesus says God will receive glory as a result, implying people will acknowledge God's greatness after witnessing what's about to happen.

Oddly, instead of immediately departing to see his sick friend, Jesus lingers, waiting a couple days to leave.

When he finally says it's time to go, the disciples are concerned for his safety. Just a few days prior, in the same vicinity where they were heading, people had threatened to stone Jesus to death for claiming he was the Son of God.

In response to the disciples' concern, Jesus makes a reasonable observation, saying it's safer to travel during the day, than at night. As was typical of him, his statement had a double meaning: Walking in God's light is better than walking in spiritual darkness.

Finally, Jesus tells the disciples Lazarus is asleep, and he must go wake him up. Not surprisingly, they take him literally, and assume Lazarus is feeling better. Realizing they didn't get it, Jesus tells them more straightforwardly, "Lazarus is dead." But, he says he's glad he wasn't there already, as the events that are about to unfold will strengthen their belief.

One of his disciples, Thomas, still concerned for Jesus' safety, bravely tells the others, if Jesus is willing to die, then they should all go and die with him.

#### **SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT**

Sometimes it's hard to understand Jesus' actions. It's doubly hard to understand his inaction.

Aside from his three closest disciples, Peter, James and John, Lazarus was probably his next closest friend. Yet, when Jesus is told Lazarus is sick, he lingers, instead of immediately going to see him. By now, there was no doubt that Jesus could heal people. So, why didn't he leave right away to care for his close friend?

Without the ability to see into the future, his disciples must have been confused. Did Jesus not care? Why would he choose to stay a couple more days? It wasn't like he had anything more important to do.

Or, did he?

### WHAT DOES THAT MEAN FOR ME?

If you're anxious about a difficult situation, constantly praying for God to intervene, and nothing has changed, you might be tempted to think He's not doing anything. His inaction is actually action. What it really boils down to is timing. And, His timing is rarely ours.

#### **PRAYER**

"Lord, the hardest part of believing You care, is waiting on You. Help me to be patient, and show me Your timing is always better than mine."

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# DAY 15 MOUNTAIN TOP EXPERIENCES

**READ:** Luke 9:28-36

ANSWER THIS: What's one of the greatest memories in your life?

#### THE BREAKDOWN

The disciples have witnessed Jesus spending exhausting days teaching, healing and performing miracles. Frequently, they would see him slip away by himself, where in solitude, he could listen and talk to God without interruption. On this day, Jesus invites his closest disciples, Peter, John, and James to join him for some prayer time. They have no idea what they're in for.

They head up the mountain, and Jesus starts to pray. Then, three surprising things happen.

- One, Jesus' face is "transformed" and his clothes become "dazzling white" (one
  account says his face shined like the sun, and his clothes became white as light).
- Two, Moses and Elijah (whose stories are told in the Old Testament, and who lived and died hundreds of years before Jesus) appear and strike up a conversation with Jesus about events that are soon to unfold in his life.
- And, three, a cloud unexpectedly covers them.

The disciples are awestruck. So much so, Peter starts rambling about pitching tents for Jesus, Moses and Elijah to prolong the moment. He didn't know what to do or say, so he just launches into what is common behavior for him: Impulsively acting without thinking.

To calm the situation, God speaks to them from the cloud saying, "This is my Son, my Chosen One. Listen to him." He's confirming the fact that Jesus is His son, and basically tells the disciples to chill out, and listen to what Jesus has to say.

Suddenly, the cloud is gone, and so are Moses and Elijah. All that remains is Jesus.

#### **SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT**

The term "mountain top experience" is used to describe life-changing events that exceed anything that happens during the normal course of our lives. Its origins come from the Bible, because so many amazing things written about in the Bible seem to happen on mountain tops.

The modern use of the term, though, carries with it a cautionary tone. More often than not, when people have a mountain top experience, the high that comes from the experience fades away when they find themselves back in the daily routine and habits they were in before. Any attempt to extend or recreate the experience falls flat. And, soon after, discouragement sets in.

#### WHAT DOES THAT MEAN FOR ME?

Mountain top experiences—especially those that lead to a life following Jesus—can be a very good thing. But, we shouldn't try to prolong the experience itself, like Peter tried to do. We need to remind ourselves that, at the end of the day, when the experience fades away, Jesus is still there.

#### PRAYER

"Dear Lord, I've had so many mountain top experiences I've lost count. And when I come back down to earth, I question whether or not they were real. Thank you for reminding me they are real, but aren't meant to last. What is meant to last is a relationship with Jesus."

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## DAY 17 LET IT GO

**READ:** Matthew 19:16-26

**ANSWER THIS:** What are you holding against someone, that might be hurting you more than them?

#### THE BREAKDOWN

Jesus is about to leave for Jerusalem, when a man desperately runs up to him, kneels and asks, "What good deed must I do to have eternal life?"

First, Jesus responds, "Why ask me about what is good? There is only One who is good." Jesus is laying the groundwork to help the man understand that if God is the standard for "good," then we'll never be good enough to earn eternal life.

Jesus then lists six of the ten commandments God gave the Jews, as recorded in the Old Testament (see Exodus 20:1-17), suggesting that if the man can just obey these six, he'll have eternal life. The man responds he has obeyed them. However, no person could honestly claim they've consistently obeyed all six, from their youth to adulthood. But, Jesus isn't going to argue the point. He's more concerned about something else.

He tells the man if he's serious, then he must sell everything he owns, give the money to the poor, and follow him. Upon hearing this, the man is speechless, and goes away sad. He just can't let go of his money.

Jesus then turns to his disciples and makes the shocking statement that it's harder for a rich person to enter Heaven than it is for a camel to go through the eye of a needle. Not surprisingly, the disciples ask: Who could possibly be saved, then?

Jesus agrees it's humanly impossible. Then he makes a statement so full of hope, that Christians have recited it for centuries:

"With God, everything's possible."

#### SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT

Jesus' primary concern is with our hearts. One time, he cautioned a crowd, "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." (see Matthew 6:21) In other words, what we cling to most in life will affect our hearts, in good or bad ways.

Wealth isn't bad, in and of itself. But, if we cling to money (or anything else, for that matter) so much that we aren't willing to let go of it in response to Jesus' invitation to follow him, then we risk missing out on something much better.

Corrie ten Boom, a Nazi concentration camp survivor from World War II, didn't struggle with wealth. Rather, she had difficulty letting go of her hatred toward her former captors. Later in her life, she spoke these words of caution: "Hold everything in your hands lightly, otherwise it hurts when God pries your fingers open."

#### WHAT DOES THAT MEAN FOR ME?

What is it that keeps you from responding to Jesus' invitation? Are you afraid he's going to ask you to give up your nice things? Or, maybe there's someone you need to forgive, but you feel like you just can't because there's too much anger inside you. What are you holding on to that's keeping you from following Jesus? Right now, it might seem too hard to let go. But, remember, "With God, everything's possible."

## PRAYER

"Lord, show me what I'm holding on to so tightly that it's keeping me from experiencing the better life you want for me. It's really hard to let go completely and follow You. I need Your help, even if that means prying my fingers open."

Write down your response to <b>Answer This</b> here, along with your prayer, and/or any thoughts you might have about today's devo.
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## DAY 16 AMAZING GRACE

**READ:** Luke 15:1-2, 11-32

ANSWER THIS: When has someone given you grace, when you deserved punishment?

#### THE BREAKDOWN

People with rather sketchy reputations loved listening to Jesus. One day, while being criticized by religious leaders for hanging out with "sinners," Jesus tells a parable about a rebellious son and a loving father.

As the story goes, the younger of two brothers tells their dad he wants his inheritance now, rather than later, presumably so he can enjoy it while he's young. Without arguing, his dad gives it to him, and the boy goes off on a pleasure-seeking binge. Not surprisingly, it isn't long until he's spent all his money on "wild living."

Penniless and starving during a terrible famine, the only work he can find is on a farm, feeding pigs. He's so poor and hungry, he longs to eat what the pigs are eating, but no one will even give him that. Finally, he comes to his senses, realizing his own father's workers are better off than he is. So, he decides to go home and beg for a job, practicing along the way the humble speech he'll give his dad.

When he gets within sight of home, his father sees him in the distance, runs to him, kisses him, doesn't let him finish his speech, and fully restores him to his place in the family. Then he throws a party for him!

The story ends with the older son getting angry about all the attention his defiant brother is getting, while he himself has been obedient all along. His dad acknowledges his loyalty, but explains why they're celebrating: His younger brother was once as good as dead, and now he's alive. He was lost, and now is found.

It's a story about God's amazing grace.

#### **SOMETHING TO THINK ABOUT**

In 2015, Tamika Brown took the stand, prior to the sentencing of the person convicted of killing her son, for one last chance to say something to the young man. Instead of harsh words, though, she sang a song.

Partway through the song, she forgot the words. So, she made up her own: "So you think that you can't make it through/Just remember my God cares for you/Don't give up; don't give in/ Today, make Jesus Christ your No. 1 friend."

Her last words to the young man were, "Would it shock you to hear that I love you?"

Now, that's amazing grace!

#### WHAT DOES THAT MEAN FOR ME?

Which son sounds most like you in Jesus' parable? Are you seeking satisfaction from other things besides God? Or, are you thinking you're "good enough" for God?

God's unconditional love is the only thing that qualifies us to be a part of His family. All you need to do is admit you've been seeking the wrong things to replace His love. Or, that you think you've somehow earned His love. The truth is, all you need to do is accept His love.

Realizing God offers us such unconditional love and amazing grace, should influence us to offer other people the same.

## **PRAYER**

"Loving Father, it's hard to believe you love me like the father in Jesus' parable loves his sons. May that reality penetrate my heart, that I might stop running away from you, or thinking I'm so good I don't need you. Then, help me love others the same way You love me."

Write down your response to <b>Answer This</b> here, along with your prayer, and/or any thoughts you might have about today's devo.	