

*_everyday
disciple_*

DAILY DEVOTIONS

Bracken Ridge
BAPTIST CHURCH

counting the cost_

DAILY DEVOTIONS



Week 1 - Day 1 - The Cost of Being a Disciple

This is the first of six Plans on growing as a disciple of Jesus. This first Plan helps you decide whether you really are committed to being a true disciple. As Jesus made clear, being his disciple involves a challenging choice. You must weigh up the costs and benefits of serving Jesus and decide whether you are willing to sacrifice your life and desires to follow Him. This Plan will assist you in making this choice. We will start with the costs of being a disciple, but we will certainly get to the benefits.

Please note that this Plan offers more than a daily reflection on Scripture. It is designed to forge everyday disciples who are aware of God's presence and hear God's voice throughout the day. Please try to build the lunchtime meditations and evening reflections into your routine, as well as the morning devotions. Before each session, pause to be aware of God's love and presence.

MORNING

Scripture: Luke 9:22-24

²²And he said, "The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life." ²³Then he said to them all: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me.

²⁴For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it.

Devotion

When the early followers of Jesus saw His power and heard His promise of a new Kingdom, they knew they had enlisted in something special. They expected Jesus to be welcomed by the Jewish people and to establish His rule as the new King of the Jews. For them, being a ground-floor disciple of Jesus was an exciting and potentially rewarding opportunity. As early-adopters, they were going to have important roles in this new Kingdom.

However, when Jesus explained to his followers what being His disciple was really all about, He often started with the costs, rather than the benefits. Perhaps that's because they had no idea of the costs. Jesus' Kingdom was going to be the opposite of what they expected. For Jesus, being King meant rejection and martyrdom (9:22). And for His disciples, following Him involved self-sacrifice and daily crucifixion (9:23). Jesus was crystal clear: being His disciple would be a costly business. Oh, Jesus did offer an indication of reward in 9:24, but as we consider what it means to be an everyday disciple, we will start where Jesus started here – with the cost.

Jesus described three overlapping requirements for disciples. 1. Deny yourself. Everyday disciples embrace *sacrifice*. They surrender their own agendas and desires. They give up their rights. 2. Take up your cross daily. Everyday disciples embrace *suffering*. While Jesus' audience didn't understand the deeper implications of the cross, they had seen Roman crucifixions. They knew that "taking up a cross" involved embarking on a journey of shame, pain and death. 3. Follow Jesus. Everyday disciples embrace *submission*. They genuinely seek to do what pleases Jesus. As Jesus made very clear, being His disciple is an extremely costly business. He didn't make it easy. He clearly spelt out the requirements of being His disciple. Jesus asks the same things of His disciples today. He calls for sacrifice, suffering and submission. It's a significant cost in a world that promotes freedom, pleasure, instant gratification and self-centeredness.

Prayer

I look forward to learning about the blessings of being Your disciple, but right now, help me to embrace the cost. You make it clear that being Your disciple involves crucifixion as well as resurrection. Please help me to trust You enough, to follow You and serve You no matter how costly Your call may be. I know I'm committing to sacrifice, suffering and surrender, but I genuinely have a heart to be Your disciple today.

Today's Bible Focus

"Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves, take up their cross daily, and follow me."

LUNCHTIME (or when you can make a moment during the day)

1. Meditate for a short time on today's Bible Focus. Let it seep into your heart.
2. Look and see what is happening around you from God's perspective and listen to see whether God is whispering anything to you.
3. Pray for any not-yet Christians God has placed on your heart.

EVENING

1. *Remember:* Repeat today's Bible Focus.
2. *Reflect:* Reflect on the day and thank God for what He has said and done.
3. *Repent:* Check where you have neglected or disobeyed God during the day and ask for forgiveness and freedom.
4. *Release:* Name any concerns or fears on your mind and release them to Jesus.

Week 1 - Day 2 - It's Particularly Costly for the Prosperous

MORNING

Scripture: Mark 10:19-23

¹⁹[Jesus said] You know the commandments...²⁰“Teacher,” he declared, “all these I have kept since I was a boy.”²¹ Jesus looked at him and loved him. “One thing you lack,” he said. “Go, sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.”²² At this the man’s face fell. He went away sad because he had great wealth.²³ Jesus looked around and said to his disciples, “How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!”

Devotion

This must be one of the most heartbreaking stories in the Bible. A young man came to Jesus genuinely looking for the key to eternal life. He was a good guy who had really tried hard to keep all of God’s laws for his whole life. Jesus saw his heart and “loved him” (10:21). It’s pertinent that Mark mentions this. Jesus must have seen the incredible potential in this young man. He saw his genuine passions and desires. Followers with hearts like this young man’s were few and far between.

But the guy “went away sad” because Jesus asked him to abandon his “great wealth.” Here’s the issue. If becoming a disciple of Jesus means sacrificing everything, then the more you have, the harder that is going to be. It’s more challenging for those who are prosperous, self-sufficient and respected to become true disciples of Jesus than those who are desperate and broken. That explains why Jesus said that it was so hard for rich people to enter the kingdom (10:23). That’s because they have so much to lose.

So what does this mean for us? Jesus is not necessarily saying that giving away everything we own is a condition of being His disciple. This is just a demand He placed on this rich guy. But Jesus is saying that we need to be willing to sacrifice everything that stops us from depending on and following Him. The rich guy wouldn’t do it despite his great heart and deep desires. He weighed up the cost and it was too much for him. He went away sad, missing all that Jesus offered.

Is there anything that stands in the way of your dependence on and submission to Jesus? Is there anything that He is asking you to sacrifice? What will you do about it?

Prayer

Lord, You have given me a lot of good things and I am very thankful. But I don’t want Your blessings to stand in the way of following You. Please search my heart and reveal anything that I am clinging to more than You. Free me from my idols so that I can be a fully devoted disciple of Jesus. I’m laying it all on the line Lord. I’m Yours forever.

Today’s Bible Focus

“How hard it is for those who are prosperous to enter the kingdom of God!”

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Week 1 - Day 3 - Counting the Cost

MORNING

Scripture: Luke 14:28-33

²⁸“Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Won’t you first sit down and estimate the cost to see if you have enough money to complete it? ²⁹For if you lay the foundation and are not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule you, ³⁰saying, ‘This person began to build and wasn’t able to finish.’ ³¹“Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Won’t he first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand? ³²If he is not able, he will send a delegation while the other is still a long way off and will ask for terms of peace. ³³In the same way, those of you who do not give up everything you have cannot be my disciples.

Devotion

At this stage of His ministry, Jesus was very popular. Huge crowds were following Him around, attracted by His power and authority. But Jesus never mistook fans for followers. He knew there was a world of difference between those who were hanging out for the next miracle and those who would commit to His lifestyle and submit to His teaching for life. He kept emphasizing to the crowds that being His disciple would cost them everything they were holding on to (14:26, 33).

In this Scripture, Jesus challenges potential disciples to count the cost before committing. Not to get carried away by the excitement of the dream. Like someone erecting a tower block, you need to weigh up the cost carefully before starting to build. In the seaside town in which we live, there are several large vacant properties for sale. They were originally purchased by keen developers who despite all their effort couldn’t raise the finances to build their dreams. They are witnesses to failure. Similarly, you don’t want to get all passionate about following Jesus and then find that you’re not willing or able to keep going. That’s disappointing for everyone. As these devotions have emphasized: count the cost first.

But there seems to be a different emphasis in Jesus’s second story. Here we have a king weighing up the cost of going to war against a superior force. Perhaps in this picture, the king with 20,000 soldiers represents God. The question is, “Can you afford to take on God?” As the king about to go to war found, you’d be better off making peace while you can (14:32). We not only need to weigh up the cost of following Jesus, but also the cost of not following Jesus by rejecting His call to be a disciple. It’s a dreadful cost. No one can win in a fight against God.

As Jesus calls us to be His daily disciples, we face these two key questions: “Can I afford to give up my life to follow Jesus?” and “Can I afford to hold on to my life and end up losing everything?” It’s a huge call that we all have to make.

Prayer

It’s tempting to look for some middle path in following You, Jesus. A pathway that will give me a little more personal pleasure, freedom and control. But You never allowed for it. You kept speaking about two options: the wide path or the narrow path, building on the rock or the sand, for You or against You. Lord, as I weigh up Your invitation to be Your disciple, please give me the courage to say yes every day, knowing the cost of both following and rejecting You.

Today’s Bible Focus

“Won’t you first sit down and estimate the cost.”

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Week 1 - Day 4 - The Benefits for Disciples

MORNING

Scripture: Mark 10:28-30

²⁸Then Peter spoke up, “We have left everything to follow you!” ²⁹“Truly I tell you,” Jesus replied, “no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel ³⁰ will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age: homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields—along with persecutions—and in the age to come eternal life.

Devotion

We’ve spent three devotions exploring the cost of being a disciple of Jesus. That’s been heavy, but knowing and embracing the cost is crucial. Now it’s time, at last, to look at the benefits. As Peter watched the rich guy leaving, it struck him that he and his mates had done exactly what Jesus was asking. They had left everything to follow Him (10:28). Sure, they had not previously been millionaires, but they had chosen to make following Jesus their priority, and it had cost them everything.

Jesus assured His disciples that it would be incredibly worthwhile. Most importantly, they would receive eternal life (10:30). They would live forever with God enjoying all the blessings and goodness that God’s presence brings. This reward of eternity with Jesus far outweighs any temporary costs. God will totally remake heaven and earth and will live with us with all His beauty and blessing.

But it is what Jesus says about the present age that particularly intrigues me. He promised that His disciples would receive 100 times what they had sacrificed. Jesus can’t be speaking literally because the disciples definitely didn’t finish up with 100 homes or 100 times as many children. Jesus is describing the wonder of being filled with God’s Spirit and being part of God’s family with the relationships and resources it offers.

As a disciple of Jesus, you will benefit hugely, both now and forever. That is Jesus’ promise. Every sacrifice you make and rejection you face will be compensated a hundred times.

Prayer

I know that You will give me far more than anything I can give You. As I lay my life on the line, I receive the ancient Aaronic blessing: “The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you. The Lord turn his face towards you and give you His peace” (Num. 6:24-26). Lord, you are already pouring out the riches of heaven on me, and there is so much more yet to come. I’m glad that I’m Your disciple forever.

Today’s Bible Focus

“Those who sacrifice will receive a hundred times as much.”

LUNCHTIME (or when you can make a moment during the day)

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Week 1 - Day 5 - A Great Investment

MORNING

Matthew 6:19-21

¹⁹“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. ²⁰But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Devotion

We don't have to worry too much about moths and vermin destroying our earthly treasures (although I do have a few T-shirts with moth holes in them), but with all the scams around, we certainly have to watch out for thieves. Some people sadly have lost their life savings to criminals. Jesus is making the point that anything we accumulate on earth is incredibly transitory. There are some benefits for us in collecting stuff, but they will be short-lived. As Job rightly said, “Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart” (Job 1:21). At the very most, we have our treasure until we die. Certainly, everything that we have achieved and amassed on earth will be left behind. Every single thing. Treasures on earth are temporary.

On the other hand, everything we do for Jesus and others will last forever. As you serve Jesus today, you are building up “treasure in heaven” that will be remembered and celebrated forever. None of the sacrifices you make for Jesus will be overlooked or disregarded. You have probably forgotten most of your ordinary acts of service, but God hasn't, and He never will. They will bring joy to His heart and your heart forever. This puts the sacrifices involved in being a disciple of Jesus into perspective. Everything you do for God matters. Everything counts for eternity. The blessing of your treasure in heaven will last forever, bringing huge joy to Jesus, to others, and to you.

We don't live as disciples to make sure we have treasures in heaven. We do it to please Jesus. But be assured that nothing you do as a disciple is wasted or forgotten. Not now or forever. Keep depositing those “treasures in heaven.” They will all bring eternal blessing.

Prayer

It's incredible to think that everything I do for You and others will count forever. What a privilege to serve and give and love and forgive. These things not only please You now, but they will please You for eternity. My attitudes and actions will be cause for celebration in the new heavens and earth. That makes my ordinary life now very significant. Please help me to live as Your disciple today.

Today's Bible Focus

“Store up for yourselves treasures in heaven.”

LUNCHTIME (or when you can make a moment during the day)

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Week 1 - Day 6 - A Living Sacrifice

MORNING

Scripture: Romans 12:1-2

¹Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. ²Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

Devotion

Paul does not use the word “disciple” in his letter to the Romans, but he captures the concept here in the phrase “living sacrifice” (12:1). We have seen that disciples of Jesus sacrifice their agendas, priorities and securities, to follow and obey Jesus. While the reward is huge, the cost is significant.

It can be painful and distressing to abandon things that make our lives secure, enjoyable, and respected by others. Living as an everyday disciple is like climbing up on an altar and offering ourselves as a sacrifice to Jesus every day. It's a great way to live. It brings huge pleasure to God (12:1) and blessing to us, and will make a difference forever. But it is costly. So Paul's choice of “living sacrifice” is a helpful and accurate picture of a disciple.

According to Paul (12:2), being a disciple involves a transformation in us that causes us to think differently from the world and enables us to receive and follow God's will. As we abandon our personal priorities, God gets hold of our mind and renews it. We start to think like God does. We see people differently. We experience different longings. Different things satisfy us. Over time, our daily acts of sacrifice become a joyful surrender to Jesus who we love and trust.

I hope you have now made a firm commitment to be a true disciple of Jesus, understanding both the demands and blessings. In the next four Plans in Everyday Disciple, we will explore how to grow as a disciple.

Prayer

I climb back up on the altar and offer myself to You again. I just want to serve and please You. I trust You with my life and future. Keep transforming my mind so that I will see what You see, love what You love, and break free from the attraction of this world. Show me Your will and I will do it. May I live as Your disciple today.

Today's Bible Focus

“Offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God.”

LUNCHTIME (or when you can make a moment during the day)

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immersed in scripture_ DAILY DEVOTIONS



Week 2 - Day 1 - The Beauty of Scripture

Having weighed the costs and benefits, and committed ourselves to being everyday disciples of Jesus (see “Counting the Cost”), we will now explore how we can become healthy disciples. One essential way is by saturating ourselves in Scripture. Through Scripture, we get to know God, hear His voice and His heart, learn how God works, appreciate His promises, live God’s way, and receive God’s guidance. This Plan focuses on the importance and purpose of Scripture in building disciples of Jesus.

Please note that this Plan offers more than a daily reflection on Scripture. It is designed to forge everyday disciples who are aware of God’s presence and hear God’s voice throughout the day. Please try to build the lunchtime meditations and evening reflections into your routine, as well as the morning devotions. Before each session, pause to be aware of God’s love and presence.

MORNING

Scripture: Psalm 19:7-12

⁷The law of the LORD is perfect, refreshing the soul. The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy, making wise the simple. ⁸The precepts of the LORD are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the LORD are radiant, giving light to the eyes. ⁹The fear of the LORD is pure, enduring forever. The decrees of the LORD are firm, and all of them are righteous. ¹⁰They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold; they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the honeycomb. ¹¹By them your servant is warned; in keeping them there is great reward. ¹²But who can discern their own errors?

Devotion

When David wrote this song, most of the Bible had not yet been written. But God’s people did have His Law (the first five books of the Bible) and a growing body of sacred writings that may have included Joshua, Judges, and some of Samuel’s writings. David is reflecting on this written revelation from God when he says that it is perfect, trustworthy, right, radiant, firm, righteous, precious, and so sweet.

That’s a resounding commendation from David. It’s obvious that he intensely loved what God revealed about Himself and His desires for His people in Scripture. And David only had a fraction of what we have in our Bible. What a privilege we have in being able to read Scripture and to know for sure what God is like and how He wants us to live. No wonder studying Scripture has such a vital role for those who are disciples of Jesus. As David says, it refreshes the soul, it makes wise the simple, it gives joy to the heart and light to the eyes, and it warns us when we are blindly walking into trouble.

Everyday disciples of Jesus will make the study of God’s Word a high priority because the benefits are deeply significant. God’s truth is sweeter than honey. According to David, it’s pleasurable and enjoyable as well as being incredibly helpful and revealing. I’m not sure if you have experienced the joy of Scripture yet, but there is only one way to find it. Saturate yourself in Scripture and let God do His work in you through His Word.

Prayer

Lord, You have not chosen to reveal Yourself in vague ideas or feelings, but through Your written Word. We are so privileged. It’s encouraging to know that David loved the part of Your revelation he had received, and I pray that I too will grow in my respect for, trust in, love for, and enjoyment of Your Word. Please keep opening my heart to Your truth. May I be refreshed and renewed and changed as I daily study Scripture. Give me a sweet tooth for Your Word.

Today's Bible Focus

"God's revelation in Scripture is perfect, refreshing the soul."

LUNCHTIME (or when you can make a moment during the day)

1. Meditate for a short time on today's Bible Focus. Let it seep into your heart.
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Week 2 - Day 2 - A Free Buffet

MORNING

Scripture: Isaiah 55:1-2, 10-11

¹ “Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost.² Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labour on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and you will delight in the richest of fare... ¹⁰ As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, ¹¹ so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.

Devotion

This prophetic Scripture from Isaiah does not refer directly to Scripture, but it does focus on the Word of God (55:11) and its power and that’s why we’re studying it. Isaiah is prophesying that in the future, the Jewish exiles would do it tough. Separated from their precious homeland, they would be physically and spiritually hungry and thirsty (55:1). But in this prophecy, God assures these future exiles that His promise of a return to Israel would be fulfilled without them having to lift a finger. They only had to eat His Word, believe His truth, and see God accomplish everything He promised.

This broken and thirsty future generation could be certain that God’s Word is incredibly powerful. They could be absolutely confident that no matter what their circumstances, once God Word goes out, everything will happen as He says. They would not have to try to solve the problems themselves, but could rest in what God said and see God do exactly as He promised.

Can you see the parallel for us? As we long for spiritual change in our broken world, God calls us to drink deeply of his promises and to rest in Him. We are not to try to solve the problems ourselves, but we are to listen to God through His Word and align ourselves with what He says. Isaiah pictures it as famished people “eating” God’s word (55:2) and finding the most wonderful satisfaction in His revelation. I love that metaphor. Reading Scripture is feasting on the truth and promises of God. So come thirsty people. God is offering a free buffet feast for you in His Word! “Eat what is good and you will delight in the richest of fare” (55:2).

Prayer

Your Scripture is filled with promises and encouragements and truths that I need to discover and hold on to. I’m sorry when I feel that I know what is best and try to solve problems without listening to You. I am hungry and thirsty for Your living truth. I need to know what You want and what You are going to do. Transform my heart and perspective as I feast freely on Your Word.

Today’s Bible Focus

“Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters – they’re free.”

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Week 2 - Day 3 - Saturated in Scripture

MORNING

Scripture: Matthew 4:1-10

¹ Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. ² After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. ³ The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread." ⁴ Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God' [Deut. 8:3]." ⁵ Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. ⁶ "If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down. For it is written: "'He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone' [Ps. 91:11-12]." ⁷ Jesus answered him, "It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test' [Deut. 6:16]." ⁸ Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendour. ⁹ "All this I will give you," he said, "if you will bow down and worship me." ¹⁰ Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only' [Deut.6:13]."

Devotion

In this Scripture, we find Jesus at both his weakest and strongest. He is physically weak after fasting for forty days, but He is spiritually powerful as He faces all that Satan can throw at Him. Satan tempts Jesus with ways to avoid His costly ministry and death – using miracles for His own benefit (4:3), showing off His power (4:6), and taking a shortcut to building His kingdom (4:9). Jesus parries each temptation with a quote from the Bible. He doesn't try to defend Himself against Satan with His own thoughts or abilities. He intentionally goes back to God's truth and quotes it to Satan. This tells us two things about Jesus.

First, Jesus was very familiar with Scripture. Like many Jewish men of His time, Jesus would have learned great slabs of Scripture off by heart, but I suspect Jesus went further than others. If at 12 years of age, He amazed the teachers in Jerusalem with his knowledge (Luke 2:47), imagine what He would have known and understood by the age of 30 as He commenced His public ministry. Jesus obviously was saturated with Scripture. His mind was full of God's truth.

Second, Jesus relied on Scripture. This came out clearly when He was under temptation. As Satan tried to manipulate and break Him (even quoting Scripture back to Him), Jesus just focused on God's revealed truth. He trusted and relied on God's Word. The wilderness temptation was not just a battle of wills for Jesus. He had a whole body of truth that He believed in and held on to.

Jesus is the gold standard for us. If knowledge of and reliance on Scripture was so important and beneficial for the Son of God, it certainly is vital for us. Everyday disciples of Jesus must be saturated in Scripture.

Prayer

Psalm 119:105 says, "Your word is a lamp for my feet and a light for my path." My path is often shadowy and difficult, and I desperately need a good torch, especially when Satan uses the darkness to attack. As I study Scripture, may Your Word shine powerfully, guiding me to truth, growing my wisdom, and protecting me from temptation. Please help me to know and love Your Word like Jesus, so that it saturates my life.

Today's Bible Focus

"Jesus answered Satan, 'It is written...'"

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Week 2 - Day 4 - God's Word Cuts Deep

MORNING

Scripture: Hebrews 4:12-13

¹² For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. ¹³ Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

Devotion

The Bible is a very old group of 66 books that were written over a period of 1500 years. The whole Bible was finalized in its present form by AD 400. I don't imagine that you are reading many other books that are more than 1600 years old. But, despite its age, the Bible is in no way out of date. As God's revelation to us, the Bible is incredibly helpful. We learn about the nature of God. We learn about God's dealings with people. We learn about the grace of God revealed in the gospel. God has so much to teach us through His Scripture.

But when the Holy Spirit breathes through the revelation of the Bible, it moves beyond truths for us to understand, learn and practice. It becomes "alive and active" (4:12). It turns into a razor-sharp sword, slicing deep into our hearts and minds. It exposes hidden truths about our motivations and secret passions. It cuts us open to expose both the good and the bad.

This might seem dangerous and frightening to you. We like to protect ourselves by not allowing people to know too much about our inner workings. But God already knows everything about you (4:13), and He deeply loves you and wants the very best for you. He has a vision of who you can become, and He knows that this will require cutting and uncovering to bring healing. So God uses His Scripture to do this deep work in our hearts and minds.

So as you read the Bible, pray for the Holy Spirit, like a surgeon, to do His work and expect some cutting and exposing, and then deep restoration. Don't try to hide from God, but open up your heart and life to the Spirit's work through His Word. Pray for God to speak to you through His Word and Spirit. Everyday disciples of Jesus are transformed by God's Word.

Prayer

Your Word is like a razor-sharp sword as it is enlivened by the Spirit. I have already experienced this. Sometimes I find Scripture uncomfortable as it penetrates my deepest parts, but this is what I need as Your disciple. Please speak to me. Break down my defences. Uncover my sin. Speak truth to my heart. Don't hold back Lord. I can handle the truth. Set me free.

Today's Bible Focus

"The word of God is alive and active."

LUNCHTIME (or when you can make a moment during the day)

1. Meditate for a short time on today's Bible Focus. Let it seep into your heart.
2. Look and see what is happening around you from God's perspective and listen to see whether God is whispering anything to you.
3. Pray for any not-yet Christians God has placed on your heart.

EVENING

1. *Remember:* Repeat today's Bible Focus.
2. *Reflect:* Reflect on the day and thank God for what He has said and done.
3. *Repent:* Check where you have neglected or disobeyed God during the day and ask for forgiveness and freedom.
4. *Release:* Name any concerns or fears on your mind and release them to Jesus.

Week 2 - Day 5 - Just Do It

MORNING

Scripture: James 1:22-25

²²Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. ²³Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror ²⁴and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. ²⁵But whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues in it—not forgetting what they have heard, but doing it—they will be blessed in what they do.

Devotion

This week we have found that the Bible teaches us God’s truth and wisdom. It reveals God’s will and promises. And, enlivened by God’s Spirit, it cuts deep and opens up our hearts to God’s healing work. But no matter how powerful and helpful God’s Word is, no matter how much we learn from it, reading the Bible is of no use to us if we do nothing about it.

James draws on the illustration of a mirror that is of no help if you don’t use it. What’s the point of a mirror if it doesn’t assist you to brush your hair or adjust your makeup or trim your beard? Mirrors are only helpful if they produce some action. Similarly, reading Scripture is pointless for us if we hear what it is saying, and then keep on living the same way. There’s no purpose in studying the Bible if you’re not planning to do something about it.

The real blessing of studying Scripture is not more knowledge (although that can certainly help). According to James, the blessing comes as we remember what we have learned and put it into practice (1:25). For this reason, I’ve written a daily Bible focus into the Everyday Disciple devotions so that we can meditate on God’s truth and implement it during our day.

However, we need to be realistic about this. You will not be able to apply every single thing that you are learning from God’s Word. No one has the focus, energy or time to keep adding new practices to their life every day. Much of our spiritual growth comes through God’s Word gradually seeping into our minds and hearts. But we must come to Scripture with a ready heart to put it into practice, not just learn more.

Prayer

I’m enjoying reading Your Word each day, Lord. I come with an expectation that I will not only learn something new, but that You will speak to me personally. I’m a slow learner, but I really want the truth and life of Scripture to transform the way I think and live. Please show me what I need to change and give me strength to obey. I’m ready to do whatever pleases You. Grow me as I study the Bible. I want to be a doer of the Word, not just a hearer.

Today’s Bible Focus

“Do not merely listen to the word, do what it says.”

LUNCHTIME (or when you can make a moment during the day)

1. Meditate for a short time on today’s Bible Focus. Let it seep into your heart.
2. Look and see what is happening around you from God’s perspective and listen to see whether God is whispering anything to you.
3. Pray for any not-yet Christians God has placed on your heart.

EVENING

1. *Remember:* Repeat today’s Bible Focus.
2. *Reflect:* Reflect on the day and thank God for what He has said and done.
3. *Repent:* Check where you have neglected or disobeyed God during the day and ask for forgiveness and freedom.
4. *Release:* Name any concerns or fears on your mind and release them to Jesus.

Week 2 - Day 6 - An Example of God's Word at Work

MORNING

Scripture: Acts 8:30-35

³⁰Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. "Do you understand what you are reading?" Philip asked. ³¹"How can I," he said, "unless someone explains it to me?" So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. ³²This is the passage of Scripture the eunuch was reading: "He was led like a sheep to the slaughter, and as a lamb before its shearer is silent, so he did not open his mouth. ³³In his humiliation he was deprived of justice. Who can speak of his descendants? For his life was taken from the earth." ³⁴The eunuch asked Philip, "Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?" ³⁵Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus.

Devotion

The man riding in the chariot was a high-ranking, Ethiopian official who had been worshipping in Jerusalem. He was most likely a God-fearer, a term used to describe followers of Judaism who had not fully converted to become Jews. You see the monotheism and ethics of Judaism were very appealing to godly seekers in a degraded, pagan culture, so some people would become semi-Jews. They practiced the Jewish faith, but identifying as a Jew through circumcision was often a bridge too far. This God-fearing guy was returning to Ethiopia after worshipping in Jerusalem.

In this story, we find a great example of the purpose and power of Scripture.

1. The Ethiopian official is reading Scripture and God awakens a hunger. He is stuck in Isaiah 53 and its prophecies about Jesus. He wants to know who Isaiah is referring to.
2. Philip (placed by God alongside the chariot) knows Scripture well and can explain it correctly. He hops into the chariot and shares the good news about Jesus from the scroll of Isaiah (8:35).
3. God's Spirit enlivens Scripture as Philip shares the gospel, and the heart of the Ethiopian guy is radically changed by the truth of Scripture.

A method of evangelism that is proving effective these days is asking someone who is interested in learning about Christianity to study the Bible with you. This story is a very early example of two people exploring the Scriptures together as God works in power through His Word. Not only is reading the Bible helpful in teaching us and changing us, but it also powerful in evangelism. Maybe there is a not yet Christian you could invite to read the Bible with you? Remember Hebrews 4:12: "The Word of God is alive and active."

In this Plan, we've seen how knowing and living Scripture is vital for everyday disciples of Jesus. In the next Plan in the series ("Serving in Community"), we will explore the purpose and value of Christian community for our growth and ministry as disciples.

Prayer

I recognize the power of Your Spirit-inspired Word in transforming my life, but I don't always believe that this will happen for others, especially those who don't know You yet. I pray for those You have put around me who are not yet Christians. Please work in their hearts and open their eyes. Lord, is there any helpful Scripture that I could share with them at the moment?

Today's Bible Focus

"Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus."

LUNCHTIME (or when you can make a moment during the day)

1. Meditate for a short time on today's Bible Focus. Let it seep into your heart.
2. Look and see what is happening around you from God's perspective and listen to see whether God is whispering anything to you.
3. Pray for any not-yet Christians God has placed on your heart.

EVENING

1. *Remember:* Repeat today's Bible Focus.
2. *Reflect:* Reflect on the day and thank God for what He has said and done.
3. *Repent:* Check where you have neglected or disobeyed God during the day and ask for forgiveness and freedom.
4. *Release:* Name any concerns or fears on your mind and release them to Jesus.

-serving in community_ **DAILY DEVOTIONS**



Week 3 - Day 1 - Created for Community

Being an everyday disciple of Jesus requires involvement in a community. The Bible makes it clear that God never envisaged or allowed for lone ranger disciples. Everyday disciples find commitment to and involvement in a community both essential and strategic. This Plan explores the importance and purpose of community for disciples of Jesus. (These devotions have been adapted from another Plan I have written for YouVersion [Jesus Style Leadership 4 – Sent and Team]).

Please note that this Plan offers more than a daily reflection on Scripture. It is designed to forge everyday disciples who are aware of God’s presence and hear God’s voice throughout the day. Please try to build the lunchtime meditations and evening reflections into your routine, as well as the morning devotions. Before each session, pause to be aware of God’s love and presence.

MORNING

Scripture: Genesis 1:26-31, 2:18

^{1:26} Then God said, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.” ²⁷ So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them... ³¹ God saw all that he had made, and it was very good... ^{2:18} The LORD God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him.”

Devotion

Genesis 1 and 2 provide two different pictures of creation. Genesis 1 gives the overview and Genesis 2 expands on some parts. God did a great job with creation. After each creative flourish, the narrator emphasises that God saw that what He had done was good. This culminates in 1:31 where God comments that His creation was “very good.”

But as Genesis 2 brings out, there was one aspect of creation that God said was not good. This was the creation of a lone man (2:18). It’s not that God made a mistake that had to be corrected. Genesis 1 shows that it was always God’s intention to create a community of people, because that is what God Himself is like. God said, “Let us make mankind in our image” (1:26). God is Trinity. He is both one and three (Father, Son and Holy Spirit). God has always been community, so His intention in creating us was to create a human community like Him.

Adam couldn’t reflect God by himself. A lone person could not be community. Right at the centre of creation were two people (Adam and Eve) who would together represent God on the earth. This remains God’s good intention for us. We have been designed and created to serve together, to grow together, to live together, and to show God together. We can only do this in community.

Prayer

Father, Son and Holy Spirit, You serve together in love, unity and interdependence. I know this is a high ideal but I long to serve together with my Christian brothers and sisters in a way that represents You well. Make

me aware of the community You have called me to and help me to anchor myself firmly and lovingly in this community. Keep teaching me how to represent You in and with my community.

Today's Bible Focus

"Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, in our likeness.'"

LUNCHTIME (or when you can make a moment during the day)

1. Meditate for a short time on today's Bible Focus. Let it seep into your heart.
2. Look and see what is happening around you from God's perspective and listen to see whether God is whispering anything to you.
3. Pray for any not-yet Christians God has placed on your heart.

EVENING

1. *Remember:* Repeat today's Bible Focus.
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4. *Release:* Name any concerns or fears on your mind and release them to Jesus.

Week 3 - Day 2 - Community Really Helps

MORNING

Scripture: Ecclesiastes 4:7-12

⁷ Again I saw something meaningless under the sun: ⁸ There was a man all alone; he had neither son nor brother. There was no end to his toil, yet his eyes were not content with his wealth. “For whom am I toiling,” he asked, “and why am I depriving myself of enjoyment?” This too is meaningless— a miserable business! ⁹ Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labour: ¹⁰ If either of them falls down, one can help the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up. ¹¹ Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone? ¹² Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.

Devotion

We’ve seen that the concept of community comes from the very nature of God. Because God lives and works in community, so do we. But the wisdom teacher of Ecclesiastes takes a different approach. He looks at life “under the sun.” The expression “under the sun” means without taking God into account. He concludes that even if there were no God, no purpose, and no future hope, aloneness would still be a terrible frustration and curse for people.

The teacher argues that everyone can see that there are huge benefits in doing things together. You work better. You help each other with problems. You support each other. You pass your blessings on. You defend yourself better. You can even keep each other warm (a big issue in cold Israelite winters without heaters). Even if there was no revelation from God, it’s obvious that “two are better than one” (4:9). Aloneness is a “miserable business” (4:8).

He’s right of course. We don’t need God to tell us that we are built to work together in relationships. The concept of community is part of the fabric of God’s world. Of course, there are some things that we have to do alone, but the more we work with others, the more healthy, supported, and effective we will be. As a disciple of Jesus, you need your community, and your community needs you.

Prayer

Thanks for the people You have put around me as I serve You. Thanks for my mentors and my friends and my church community. I am so glad that I don’t have to serve You alone. Please help me to build strong relationships that will last. May I be a good friend and a loving community member. May those close to me know that I care for them and have their backs.

Today’s Bible Focus

“Two are better than one.”

LUNCHTIME (or when you can make a moment during the day)

1. Meditate for a short time on today’s Bible Focus. Let it seep into your heart.
2. Look and see what is happening around you from God’s perspective and listen to see whether God is whispering anything to you.
3. Pray for any not-yet Christians God has placed on your heart.

EVENING

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4. *Release:* Name any concerns or fears on your mind and release them to Jesus.

Week 3 - Day 3 - Unity in Diversity

MORNING

Scripture: John 17:20-23

²⁰“My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, ²¹that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. ²²I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one—²³I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.”

Devotion

Christians are a varied lot. We have different cultural backgrounds, different political views, different priorities, different perspectives, and even different theologies on some issues. Surprisingly, our diversity is actually a great strength of Christianity. It means we can embrace such a wide range of cultures and practices. You will find disciples of Jesus in every single ethnic group.

But while our diversity is wonderful, it is also a challenge. We frequently find it difficult to work together with people who are different from us. In this prayer, Jesus is praying for those who would believe in Him in the future. That’s us (and millions of others). He prays that we will be unified in the way the Trinity is unified – complete unity (17:23). Of course, that sort of unity is impossible humanly, but we have all been saved by the same grace of Jesus and we all have the same Spirit living within us, so we share a huge amount in common.

It’s this unnatural but incredible unity among disciples of Jesus that will show the world that Jesus is real (17:21, 23). It’s easy to get on well with other Christians if you never have anything much to do with them. But that’s not unity. Unity is forged in the cauldron of community with Christians who are different from us. Our unity in our diversity shows the power of God. It’s only in community that we can truly represent Jesus.

Prayer

Sometimes it’s easier and less complicated just to do my own thing in serving You, Lord. That way there are fewer tensions, disagreements, restrictions, frustrations, and complications. But I know that Your ways are better, and You call me to serve with other disciples of Jesus in real community. Please help me to love those in my community and life who see and do things differently from me. May we together show our world that You are real and loving.

Today’s Bible Focus

Jesus: “May they be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me.”

LUNCHTIME (or when you can make a moment during the day)

1. Meditate for a short time on today’s Bible Focus. Let it seep into your heart.
2. Look and see what is happening around you from God’s perspective and listen to see whether God is whispering anything to you.
3. Pray for any not-yet Christians God has placed on your heart.

EVENING

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Week 3 - Day 4 - Serving Together

MORNING

Scripture: Romans 12:3-8

³For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you. ⁴For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, ⁵so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. ⁶We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; ⁷if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; ⁸if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.

Devotion

Some disciples of Jesus are super confident in their abilities and are keen to do everything they can. Others feel inadequate and are reluctant to take on responsibility. Both attitudes will cause problems in a community in which everyone's contribution is needed and valued.

1. To the self-confident, Paul says: "Don't think of yourself too highly" (12:3). Don't get carried away with your abilities and achievements. You're probably not as talented or gifted as you think. You can't do it all by yourself. You really do need the help of others in the community. Work out what your gifts are and give space for others to use theirs. Remember that everyone in your community has been placed there by God to contribute.

2. To the inadequate, Paul says: "You have been gifted by God and your contribution is vital" (12:6-8). Put every effort into using your gifts. Don't hang back or make excuses. Get in there and give it a go. This is good advice. If you have not worked out what your gift is yet, then try different things and see how God uses you. As Paul makes clear, the body (or community) needs everyone to pull their weight in a humble way. As everyday disciples, Jesus is expecting us to play our part in community.

Prayer

Thanks for the gifts You have given me. May I use them well. Please keep me from pride by trying to do too much by myself or by over-emphasising my contribution. Please also keep me from underestimating my influence and not putting in the effort. I really do want to make a difference by humbly using my gifts effectively with my brothers and sisters. Use us, Lord.

Today's Bible Focus

"Each member belongs to all the others."

LUNCHTIME (or when you can make a moment during the day)

1. Meditate for a short time on today's Bible Focus. Let it seep into your heart.
2. Look and see what is happening around you from God's perspective and listen to see whether God is whispering anything to you.
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EVENING

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Week 3 - Day 5 - Carrying Burdens

MORNING

Scripture: Galatians 6:1-5

¹ Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently. But watch yourselves, or you also may be tempted. ² Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfil the law of Christ. ³ If anyone thinks they are something when they are not, they deceive themselves. ⁴ Each one should test their own actions. Then they can take pride in themselves alone, without comparing themselves to someone else, ⁵ for each one should carry their own load.

Devotion

There seems to be a contradiction in this Scripture. We are to "carry each other's burdens" (6:2) and we are to "carry our own load" (6:5). That is a lot of carrying. What does Paul mean?

In our community, we are responsible for each other. If someone goes down under their burden the whole community suffers. So we share the load and support each other. This means correcting others (gently) when they are doing wrong as well as caring for them when they are doing it tough. It's so good when you know that your community has got your back; that they will be there for you when you are struggling with sin or with life.

But then what does Paul mean when he says that each one should carry their own load (6:5)? Well, one danger of community is comparing and competing with other members. We can think we are superior because we're more gifted, achieving more, or working harder than others in the community. Or we can feel inferior because we are not as able as others. Paul says to forget about what others do. Don't compare. We are each accountable to God for what He has called us to do. Don't let any slackers or heroes in your community be an excuse for you not to give it your best shot.

Prayer

Thanks again for my brothers and sisters, especially those that form my close community. Help me to be humble and supportive and to share the load that others are carrying. Help me to care enough to gently correct my friends when necessary. But keep me from fixating on what others are doing or not doing. May I serve You well whatever happens in my community.

Today's Bible Focus

"Carry each other's burdens."

LUNCHTIME (or when you can make a moment during the day)

1. Meditate for a short time on today's Bible Focus. Let it seep into your heart.
2. Look and see what is happening around you from God's perspective and listen to see whether God is whispering anything to you.
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EVENING

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Week 3 - Day 6 - What Community Can Achieve

MORNING

Scripture: Nehemiah 6:15-16; 7:1-3

^{6:15} So the wall [around Jerusalem] was completed on the twenty-fifth of Elul, in fifty-two days. ¹⁶ When all our enemies heard about this, all the surrounding nations were afraid and lost their self-confidence, because they realized that this work had been done with the help of our God. ^{7:1} After the wall had been rebuilt and I had set the doors in place, the gatekeepers, the musicians and the Levites were appointed. ² I put in charge of Jerusalem my brother Hanani, along with Hananiah the commander of the citadel, because he was a man of integrity and feared God more than most people do.

Devotion

It took 52 days for the Jews to rebuild the wall around Jerusalem. That's incredible. I've watched roadworks that have taken years to complete using modern equipment, and here the Jewish community, under significant pressure and opposition, rebuilt the wall of Jerusalem (including brand new gates) in less than two months. With a new wall around their capital, the Jews could control their own destiny (under God) at last. This is the power of a community working together under God.

Nehemiah was a godly leader. He grieved, prayed, believed, shared faith vision, and helped deal with external opposition and internal conflict. But the community did the work. Nehemiah would have had no chance of completing this project by himself or with the small team he brought from Persia to Jerusalem. He needed everyone to pull their weight. And they did.

You can imagine the community's excitement and confidence in God when the last gate was hung. This was their wall. Everyone knew that God had done something very special, including the surrounding nations. As you live and serve with your community, you will see God do things that seemed impossible. This is the power of a community of disciples serving God together.

Prayer

In a divided world that prizes independence and individualism, may our church community show our world that we are stronger and better together. As Your disciple, may I humbly serve with my community, encouraging and strengthening others as well as giving it my best shot. And most of all, may those who surround us see that we are doing all this with Your help.

Today's Bible Focus

"The surrounding nations realised that this work had been done with the help of God."

LUNCHTIME (or when you can make a moment during the day)

1. Meditate for a short time on today's Bible Focus. Let it seep into your heart.
2. Look and see what is happening around you from God's perspective and listen to see whether God is whispering anything to you.
3. Pray for any not-yet Christians God has placed on your heart.

EVENING

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growing intimacy_

DAILY DEVOTIONS



Week 4 - Day 1 - Intimacy Was Important for Jesus

Being an everyday disciple of Jesus is not just about knuckling down and doing what He says. It also involves intimacy with and dependence on Jesus. True disciples have a growing relationship with Jesus in which they enjoy His love, rest in His grace, and appreciate His closeness and care. Through this deepening friendship, disciples learn to trust and depend on Jesus, and His life flows through them. Disciples are far more than followers of Jesus; they are also friends and lovers.

Please note that this Plan offers more than a daily reflection on Scripture. It is designed to forge everyday disciples who are aware of God's presence and hear God's voice throughout the day. Please try to build the lunchtime meditations and evening reflections into your routine, as well as the morning devotions. Before each session, pause to be aware of God's love and presence.

MORNING

Scripture: Luke 5:15-16; Luke 6:12

^{5:15} Yet the news about him [Jesus] spread all the more, so that crowds of people came to hear him and to be healed of their sicknesses. ¹⁶ But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.

^{6:12} One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God.

Devotion

This was a busy time in Jesus' ministry. His reputation as a teacher and healer was growing and the crowds were flocking to Him. Jesus must have been both excited and exhausted by the opportunities. He had so much to offer, and His time was so short. There was so much truth to teach and so many people to heal.

Yet Jesus kept disappearing. He consistently deserted His hungry fans and headed off alone into deserts and up mountains. You see Jesus prized His intimacy with His Father and would not sacrifice this for anything. His authority and power flowed from this relationship. His healing and teaching ministry was dependent on it. Jesus wanted time with His Dad to renew His heart and refresh His spirit. He knew the real power of His life and ministry flowed from His Dad and He desperately needed to stay close to Him. Jesus couldn't do this in the hurly and burly of ministry. Lonely places were essential.

If God's Son needed to allocate precious time in a crowded schedule to be alone with His Father, then clearly, we will need to do the same. I'm not sure how you will manage this with all the demands on your time. just know that Jesus showed us that intimacy with the Father is vital and that He intentionally carved out spiritual retreats in isolated places and whole nights of prayer. For Jesus, this prayerful intimacy was not an optional extra whenever He could find the time. Cultivating His intimate relationship with His Father lay at the heart of His life and ministry. He depended on it and so do we. What is a small step you can make towards isolated, intimate time with God? Maybe you can carve out an hour somewhere.

Prayer

As read about Your example, Jesus, frankly feel inadequate. It's not so much my laziness (although that is a factor), but often put doing good things before my intimacy with You. really do want to kindle a deep and close relationship with You, so please encourage me and help me to carve out the space that will allow this to happen. Help me to find my lonely deserts and high mountains.

Today's Bible Focus

"Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed."

LUNCHTIME (or when you can make a moment during the day)

1. Meditate for a short time on today's Bible Focus. Let it seep into your heart.
2. Look and see what is happening around you from God's perspective and listen to see whether God is whispering anything to you.
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EVENING

1. *Remember:* Repeat today's Bible Focus.
2. *Reflect:* Reflect on the day and thank God for what He has said and done.
3. *Repent:* Check where you have neglected or disobeyed God during the day and ask for forgiveness and freedom.
4. *Release:* Name any concerns or fears on your mind and release them to Jesus.

Week 4 - Day 2 - The Danger of Disconnection

MORNING

Scripture: James 4:2-4, 8.

²You desire but do not have, so you kill. You covet but you cannot get what you want, so you quarrel and fight. You do not have because you do not ask God. ³When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures. ⁴You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world means enmity against God? Therefore, anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God...

⁸Come near to God and he will come near to you.

Devotion

James is describing a very sad state of affairs in the church, however, doubt that the Christians were actually killing each other (4:2). Most likely, James uses the term in the same way that Jesus did when he equated anger with murder (Matt. 5:21-22). The church members were at each other's throats – fighting and quarrelling over their priorities and desires. The church was a selfish mess.

But then this is what inevitably happens when God is left at a distance. Once we try to live for God without closeness to Him and dependence on Him, we end up pursuing our own agendas and adopting the agendas of the world around us. We lose touch with God's heart and passions and power, and instead have to fight hard for what we want, sometimes even arrogantly presuming we are fighting for God. James doesn't see this Christian infighting as just a normal product of living in a broken world but as enmity against God (4:4). When we lose our closeness to God, we end up fighting against Him, as well as each other.

James describes the solution in 4:8, "Come near to God and He will come near to you." Prayerful intimacy with God protects us from joining forces with the world. Prayerful intimacy with God brings God near. Prayerful intimacy with God corrects our motives. Prayerful intimacy with God aligns our hearts with His. Prayerful intimacy with God radically changes the way we think and live. People who live close to God are more humble, peaceful, joyful, and hopeful. You can pick them. God's heart really does rub off on us as we come close.

Prayer

It's easy for me to believe that my agenda is Your agenda, Lord. It's easy for me to think that I'm fighting for You when really I'm fighting for myself and my ideas and desires. Please come close to me as humbly draw close to You. Forgive me, humble me, soften me, purify me, and align my heart with Yours. need Your presence filling my life. want to be near You.

Today's Bible Focus

"Come near to God and He will come near to you."

LUNCHTIME (or when you can make a moment during the day)

1. Meditate for a short time on today's Bible Focus. Let it seep into your heart.
2. Look and see what is happening around you from God's perspective and listen to see whether God is whispering anything to you.
3. Pray for any not-yet Christians God has placed on your heart.

EVENING

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Week 4 - Day 3 - Knowing God's Love

MORNING

Scripture: Ephesians 3:17b-19

¹⁷ And pray that you, being rooted and established in love, ¹⁸ may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, ¹⁹ and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

Devotion

Nothing in Christianity is clearer than the love of God. God has created us in love. He has chosen us in love. He has saved us in love. He recreates us in love. He will live forever with us in love. We just can't get away from the extraordinary love of God. "God is love" was the first verse learned as a child in Sunday School. And yet in this Scripture, Paul was praying that the Ephesians would grasp and really know the love of God. What? Surely they already knew God's love.

Paul understood that moving the Ephesian disciples' appreciation and acceptance of God's love from their heads (understanding that God loved them) to their hearts (really believing that God loved them) was a difficult and often unnatural journey. He needed to ask God for this to happen. A deep knowledge of God's love is challenging and uncommon because we experience so little of this depth of unconditional love in our lives. It seems impossible that our holy God will continue to love us whatever we do. But it's true. Oh, the immensity and depth of God's love.

Part of our journey as everyday disciples is to fall in love with Jesus and experience how wide and long and high and deep His love is for us. Our appreciation of God's love grows through our increasing intimacy with Jesus as we rest and depend on Him. Deeply absorbing and enjoying God's love will probably require lots of prayers like the prayer Paul prayed here. But as our relationship with Jesus deepens, so our appreciation of His love will expand until we are "filled to the measure of all the fullness of God" (3:19).

Prayer

pray that being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

Today's Bible Focus

"May grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ."

LUNCHTIME (or when you can make a moment during the day)

1. Meditate for a short time on today's Bible Focus. Let it seep into your heart.
2. Look and see what is happening around you from God's perspective and listen to see whether God is whispering anything to you.
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Week 4 - Day 4 - Constantly Praying

MORNING

Scripture: Ephesians 6:18

¹⁸ And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people.

Devotion

When Paul writes "with this in mind," he is referring to the huge spiritual struggle that every disciple of Jesus faces (see 6:10-17). He has just been advising the Ephesians on how to defend themselves against the devil's schemes. Like the Ephesians, we need to be constantly alert to all that Satan is throwing at us (and every other disciple of Jesus), and the best way to stay sharp is to be constantly praying.

This certainly means praying for personal protection from Satan. One of our constant prayers is, "Lead me not into temptation but deliver me from evil." But our prayer goes much further than protection. We are to pray "on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests for all of the Lord's people" (6:18). There are lots of things happening in and around us, and our hearts and prayers go out to all those who are struggling under pressure or rejoicing in God's blessings. We talk to God about it all.

One of the reasons why some Christians see few answers to their prayers is because they only ask for God's help when they face a huge problem that they can't find a solution for. That's not the way God wants it with His disciples. He longs to be included in everything. He wants to work in the big and little challenges. He loves being involved in all our lives. He wants an intimate relationship based on constant communication. He calls us to always keep on praying for all the Lord's people on all occasions with all kinds of prayer (6:18). God wants to share your life. So don't hold back. Talk to God about all you are doing and facing. He loves being in the center of everything. He loves intimacy.

Prayer

Lord, I'm aware of the spiritual pressure that am under. Please strengthen me and protect me from temptation. I also want to talk to you about my Christian brothers and sisters who are worrying or wavering or weakening or wandering away from You. Please guide my prayers through Your Spirit and hear all my small talk. Thank You that we are doing this life together. Keep me spiritually sharp.

Today's Bible Focus

"Pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests."

LUNCHTIME (or when you can make a moment during the day)

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2. Look and see what is happening around you from God's perspective and listen to see whether God is whispering anything to you.
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Week 4 - Day 5 - The Extra Help We Need

MORNING

Scripture: Romans 8:26-27

²⁶In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. ²⁷And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God.

Devotion

Some of us find intimacy with God natural, but most of us don't. Maybe it's because we are programmed to do things ourselves rather than rely on God. Maybe it's because we have never been able to trust people enough to let them close. Maybe it's because we feel that we don't measure up to God's expectations and don't deserve to be close to Him. Whatever the reason, God understands our struggle and has given us His Spirit to assist us.

One way God's Spirit helps us is by praying on our behalf. So even when you don't pray because you're overwhelmed, or you have nothing left to say, or you just haven't made prayer a priority, the Spirit within you is still praying on your behalf. And He nails it every time. He knows what you need and He knows what God wants, so He keeps on crying out for you when you can't or don't pray.

This is not an excuse for you to shirk prayer by saying, "Well God's Spirit prays better than do, so why bother? I'll let Him do the work." God loves and responds to your prayers no matter how feeble or ordinary they are. But it does show how far God will go to build intimacy with you. He loves to hear and answer your cries even when His Spirit in you is doing the heavy lifting. He wants to be close to you. He wants to help. He wants to answer. He wants to be needed. And He will do everything He can to keep the channels of communication open.

Prayer

Thanks for praying for me Holy Spirit even when I'm saying nothing to You. don't deserve Your help, but am deeply appreciative of it. want to join You more in Your praise and prayer. want to groan with You when needed. want my prayers to align more and more with God's will as Your prayers do. Together we are building a strong prayer team.

Today's Bible Focus

"The Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans."

LUNCHTIME (or when you can make a moment during the day)

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Week 4 - Day 6 - Intimacy is Not All Roses

MORNING

Scripture: Hebrews 12:10-11

¹⁰They [our fathers] disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, in order that we may share in his holiness. ¹¹No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.

Devotion

I'm presently helping train a young puppy, Willow. She loves everyone and is very enthusiastic about life. Her excitement and affection are mostly charming and contagious. But she has so much to learn about controlling her instincts and living safely and well. Willow doesn't really appreciate my training role, especially when try to discipline her, so we're getting there very slowly. If only she could see that it is ultimately for her own good. But then, guess she's a puppy.

This Scripture talks about the key discipline role of both earthly fathers and our heavenly Father in the growth of their children. Earthly fathers don't always get it right, but God is spot on in His discipline of His disciples. He knows exactly what we need to become children that look like their Dad. Because He loves us so much, God is correcting and forging us. Every struggle he allows us to go through has a God-ordained objective. The greater our intimacy with God, the more He will seek to forge us.

The problem is that God's discipline means some short-term pain for us, and like Willow, we find this unpleasant. It's easy to think that if God really loved us, He would make life enjoyable and easy for us. Such an idea, of course, is nonsense. God is preparing us for an eternity with Him where we will share In His holiness (12:10). Because He loves you so much, He is intent on shaping your heart and forging your character. Whatever pain you are enduring now, be sure that God loves you deeply and is carefully and fondly working the best for you, his precious child.

Prayer

love it when I'm really close to You and everything is working out well in my life. know that my long-term future will be like this permanently. But in the short term, help me to trust Your love through the struggles and seemingly unanswered prayers. Keep producing a harvest of righteousness and peace in me no matter what it may cost me. Prune and discipline me. May my pain draw me closer to You and make me more like You.

Today's Bible Focus

“God disciplines us for our good, in order that we may share in His holiness.”

LUNCHTIME (or when you can make a moment during the day)

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called to multiply_

DAILY DEVOTIONS



Week 5 - Day 1 - Time is Running Out

Everyday disciples of Jesus have been commissioned. They are on a mission to multiply disciples of Jesus. They are committed to growing God's kingdom by sharing the good news about Jesus and discipling those who respond. This Plan explores the urgency of our mission and the opportunity we have to reap the harvest that God has planned.

Please note that this Plan offers more than a daily reflection on Scripture. It is designed to forge everyday disciples who are aware of God's presence and hear God's voice throughout the day. Please try to build the lunchtime meditations and evening reflections into your routine, as well as the morning devotions. Before each session, pause to be aware of God's love and presence.

MORNING

Scripture: 2 Peter 3:8-10

⁸ But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. ⁹ The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead, he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. ¹⁰ But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything done in it will be laid bare.

Devotion

Many of the early Christians had a strong expectation of Jesus' imminent return to earth. As persecution of the church increased, it seemed to them that Jesus would fulfil His promises, rescue His people, and hold their rebellious world accountable. They were motivated to endure because they believed that Jesus was about to intervene. But when Peter was writing this letter almost 40 years after Christ's resurrection, things were getting tougher for the church and there was still no sign of Christ coming back to rescue and judge. Consequently, "scoffers" (3:3) were making fun of the Christians' hope in God's power to intervene. These doubters were attacking God's sovereignty and trustworthiness. Well, here we are almost 2000 years later, and still Jesus has not returned. Perhaps you too wonder what God is doing. This Scripture gives us some insights.

The seeming delay of Christ's return is not because he doesn't care or is powerless to do anything. No way. He has intervened before, and He certainly will do so again. Jesus' wonderful (for Christians) and catastrophic (for our world) return and judgment are on the horizon (3:10). There is no doubt about that. But Peter tells us about the Lord's heart. He just loves those rejecting him so deeply that He wants them all to be saved. That's why Jesus waits. It's because God longs for your friends and family and coworkers and neighbors to receive him.

This deep desire for lost people to be saved drives God's plan for His world. It's His priority. We might see rebellion, arrogance, and evil, but the Lord mostly sees broken and separated people who need his salvation. He is incredibly loving and patient. His passion is for more people to be saved. This passion becomes the passion of everyday disciples of Jesus. Time is running out. "The day of the Lord will come like a thief" (3:10). Our friends, family and neighbors need Jesus before it's too late.

Prayer

Lord, please place Your heart for the lost in me. Keep reminding me of why I'm on this earth. I pray that the lost people around me will see your grace in my life and will be drawn to repent of their living without You.

I'm not sure when You will say, "Enough is enough," but, like You, I desperately want those You have put in my life to be with us forever. Please use me Lord.

Today's Bible Focus

"Not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to repent."

LUNCHTIME (or when you can make a moment during the day)

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Week 5 - Day 2 - Time to Reap

MORNING

Scripture: John 4:35-38

³⁵ Don't you have a saying, 'It's still four months until harvest'? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest. ³⁶ Even now the one who reaps draws a wage and harvests a crop for eternal life, so that the sower and the reaper may be glad together. ³⁷ Thus the saying 'One sows and another reaps' is true. ³⁸ I sent you to reap what you have not worked for. Others have done the hard work, and you have reaped the benefits of their labour."

Devotion

There evidently was a well-known proverb in Jesus' day that said, "It's still four months until the harvest" (4:35). This saying meant, "Don't try to rush the harvest. You have plenty of time." That makes a lot of sense. I'm no farmer, but I know that you must give crops space to ripen well before they are harvested. You must get your timing right. Similarly, in life, we need to be careful not to rush things. There is time for everything.

It was still early in Jesus' ministry and probably he was being urged to take His time. There was no rush to build His kingdom. He was only 30 (young for a Rabbi) and seemed to have time on His side. Anyway, they were in Samaritan territory, and you couldn't expect a Kingdom harvest among heretics. This reasoning sounded wise, but those quoting the proverb had their timing completely wrong. It was harvest time. The crops were ready and the reapers had much work to do. The harvest was ripe. Jesus knew that He was in the middle of a reaping season.

But is this true of your context? I suspect that it is, but you probably need to pray that through yourself. However, I can guarantee that there is some crop to be harvested around you. As the brokenness of our world becomes more apparent, people are desperate for truth and life. Open your eyes and look. There are not-yet Christians whom God and others have sown into and who are now ready to explore and enter belief in Jesus. I'm sure there is still lots of sowing for you to do, but you wouldn't want to be sowing when you should be reaping. As Jesus said, "I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest" (4:35).

Prayer

Thanks for the opportunities I have to sow You, Jesus, into the lives of people around me by my lifestyle, actions and words. May I be faithful in sowing. But please open my eyes to those who are ready to explore and encounter You. Please give me the courage to be a reaper as well as a sower. May You use me to help someone join Your forever kingdom. Grow my boldness as I witness to You and Your grace.

Today's Bible Focus

"Look at the fields - they are ripe for harvest!"

LUNCHTIME (or when you can make a moment during the day)

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Week 5 - Day 3 - The Process of Conversion

MORNING

Scripture: Romans 10:13-15

¹³ For, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” ¹⁴ How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? ¹⁵ And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!”

Devotion

In this Scripture, Paul spells out the process of conversion. Although the timing of the five stages varies, it tends to happen in a set order. Paul starts at the end and works backwards. I will reverse Paul’s order to explain the process.

1. Someone needs to be sent. As we have seen already, that someone is actually every disciple of Jesus. We all have been commissioned to share the good news about Jesus with the people we know. 2. The sent person needs to preach to the not-yet Christian. Paul is not talking about preaching a sermon but sharing the truth of the gospel. The sent person must tell them about Jesus. 3. They need to receive the message. The truth of the gospel has to cut through their previous beliefs and doubts so that they hear it, not just with their ears, but with their heart. 4. They must believe the good news about Jesus. They have to accept that the gospel is true and relevant to them. 5. They need to personally cry out to Jesus in repentance and faith. That’s the process. Every one of these steps must occur for someone you know to be saved.

Sometimes these stages happen in quick succession, but usually, they take considerable time and the sent ones have to be patient. But the process of conversion starts when disciples of Jesus recognize that they have been sent to share the gospel and they take their calling seriously. In His grace, God chooses to give us a significant role in His miraculous conversion process. It’s such a precious privilege to be sent by Jesus to bring the good news. In God’s eyes and maybe in the eyes of some of your friends, you really do have “beautiful feet” (10:15) as you go with the gospel to those who need to hear.

Prayer

Forgive me when I see my role as a preacher of the gospel to be an obligation rather than a privilege. I do long to kick off the process of conversion for many by sharing Your good news. Please may Your grace envelop me so that I live in the wonder of your good news and please place in my heart a passion for the gospel. I want to be someone with “beautiful feet.”

Today’s Bible Focus

“How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!”

LUNCHTIME (or when you can make a moment during the day)

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Week 5 - Day 4 - Playing Your Part

MORNING

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 3:5-8

⁵What, after all, is Apollos? And what is Paul? Only servants, through whom you came to believe—as the Lord has assigned to each his task. ⁶I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow. ⁷So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God, who makes things grow. ⁸The one who plants and the one who waters have one purpose, and they will each be rewarded according to their own labour.

Devotion

I understand what Paul is getting at here when he talks about planting and watering. Gardening is one of the areas in which Deb (my wife) and I have distinct roles. Deb loves to plant (as long as I dig the holes), and I love to nurture the plants by watering, fertilizing and pruning. I suspect that my role is more taxing, but the arrangement works for us, as we each get to do what we enjoy.

The Corinthian church was divided over who was their most significant leader. Some idolized Paul who planted the church and others admired Apollos who nurtured the new converts. It was an issue of considerable debate and was dividing the church. In this Scripture, Paul uses a gardening analogy to show that such disputes are stupid. Paul and Apollos were just following their callings and using their gifts to joyfully serve. Neither of them should be regarded as important. They were faithful and would be rewarded by God for this (3:8). But when it came to significant influence, it was God who changed lives and grew the church (3:7).

Similarly, disciples of Jesus may have different roles in the conversion process. While we all need to share the gospel, some of us are best at sowing the seed, some of us are best at reaping (the evangelists), and some of us are best at encouraging and nurturing new converts. Don't get hung up on what others can or cannot do. Just be thankful that God gives you a part to play and praise God as He works through you.

Prayer

I thank You that multiplying disciples is a team process. We all use our gifts to build Your Kingdom. I really appreciate the things that I can do to help people believe in and follow You. Please help me to play my part well. I want to give it my best shot. But when it comes to the crunch, I know that this is Your work and I'm glad just to have a small part.

Today's Bible Focus

“Only God makes things grow.”

LUNCHTIME (or when you can make a moment during the day)

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Week 5 - Day 5 - Powerful Witnesses

MORNING

Scripture: Acts 1:6-8

⁶Then they gathered around him and asked him, “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?” ⁷ He said to them: “It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. ⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

Devotion

Jesus’ disciples were attracted by the hope of an earthly Jewish kingdom. They wondered whether the departure of Jesus and the coming of the Spirit would be catalysts for the establishment of this new Jewish kingdom in which they would have significant roles. This was very attractive to the disciples, and they wanted to know if their moment had arrived.

But Jesus had much bigger plans for His Kingdom. It was going to engulf all nations “to the ends of the earth.” These Jewish boys who had travelled no further than where they could walk probably had no idea what the ends of the earth meant, but Jesus did. His kingdom would be worldwide - accessed by every people group on earth.

This kingdom would not spread through military might or charismatic leadership but through “witnesses” - ordinary people sharing their experience of the grace of God revealed in Jesus. Witnessing remains Jesus’ method of growing His Kingdom. He is building a Kingdom of huge influence both now and forever, and it is spreading through the witness of ordinary people like you and me. Of course, the early disciples couldn’t do this by themselves, and neither can we. We can’t change the lives of our family and friends, let alone people in other ethnic groups. But with God’s Spirit, we become incredibly powerful witnesses and Kingdom builders.

Prayer

I must admit, I feel pretty ordinary when it comes to sharing my faith. But then, so were Your disciples and look how You used them. Please empower my witness Jesus. May the simple things I say about You be enlivened by Your Spirit so that they touch the hearts of the people around me. You can work and have worked in great power through everyday witnesses. Please use me.

Today’s Bible Focus

“You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you.”

LUNCHTIME (or when you can make a moment during the day)

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2. Look and see what is happening around you from God’s perspective and listen to see whether God is whispering anything to you.
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Week 5 - Day 6 - Different Reactions to Jesus

MORNING

Scripture: Luke 8:36-39

³⁶Those who had seen it told the people how the demon-possessed man had been cured. ³⁷Then all the people of the region of the Gerasenes asked Jesus to leave them, because they were overcome with fear. So he got into the boat and left. ³⁸The man from whom the demons had gone out begged to go with him, but Jesus sent him away, saying, ³⁹“Return home and tell how much God has done for you.” So the man went away and told all over town how much Jesus had done for him.

Devotion

I may have given the wrong impression. It would be easy to think from the devotions this week that ripe fields mean that everyone is just waiting to hear about and respond to the good news about Jesus. However, as this reading brings out (and you already know), the presence and power of Jesus are both attractive and disconcerting. The man whose life had been dominated by demons welcomed Jesus' work in freeing him and offering him a new start. On the other hand, the locals struggled with events they saw as dangerous and wanted Jesus as far away from them as possible.

This is often the case. Some people will welcome the good news about Jesus and others will be threatened by it. Keep praying that people's eyes will be opened to the love and power of Jesus, but don't expect that this will always produce a positive response. The reactions of our friends are not under our control. If the Gerasenes rejected Jesus Himself, then it's likely we will sometimes find the same response when we witness about the Jesus we love.

But this shouldn't stop us. Jesus' instructions to the delivered man were explicit. Despite the negativity in the region, he was to tell everyone he knew about what Jesus had done for him. The people God has placed around you may not always appreciate God or the church, but they can't deny your experience of Jesus. You may not be able to answer all their objections, but you can share about how much Jesus has done for you.

Prayer

It would be so good if everyone could know Your love and experience Your grace. But I live in a world that is often suspicious, cynical, and even antagonistic towards You. Please help me not to become defensive, but to appreciate what You have done and are doing for me. Help me to keep lovingly sharing this good news with those around me no matter how they react.

Today's Bible Focus

“Go home and tell how much God has done for you.”

LUNCHTIME (or when you can make a moment during the day)

1. Meditate for a short time on today's Bible Focus. Let it seep into your heart.
2. Look and see what is happening around you from God's perspective and listen to see whether God is whispering anything to you.
3. Pray for any not-yet Christians God has placed on your heart.

EVENING

1. *Remember*: Repeat today's Bible Focus.
2. *Reflect*: Reflect on the day and thank God for what He has said and done.
3. *Repent*: Check where you have neglected or disobeyed God during the day and ask for forgiveness and freedom.
4. *Release*: Name any concerns or fears on your mind and release them to Jesus.

finishing well_ DAILY DEVOTIONS



Week 6 - Day 1 - Run with Perseverance

Everyday disciples of Jesus are running a marathon. They follow Jesus until the end. Finishing the discipleship marathon well involves patience and perseverance. This Plan explores how to overcome some of the barriers to finishing well and how to keep going, anticipating the great reward in store for you.

Please note that this Plan offers more than a daily reflection on Scripture. It is designed to forge everyday disciples who are aware of God's presence and hear God's voice throughout the day. Please try to build the lunchtime meditations and evening reflections into your routine, as well as the morning devotions. Before each session, pause to be aware of God's love and presence.

MORNING

Scripture: Hebrews 12:1-3

¹Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, ²fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. ³Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

Devotion

Christians dropping out of the discipleship "race" is not a new issue. Scholars estimate that there were 7,000 to 10,000 Christians in the Roman world by AD100. With at least 500 followers of Jesus after the resurrection (1 Cor. 15:6), another 3,000 added to their number at Pentecost (Acts 2:41), and lots of evangelism recorded in Acts, 10,000 Christians seems like a relatively small number after 70 years of gospel preaching. There must have been many Christian converts who got entangled in sin (12:1) or grew weary and lost heart (12:3). Sadly, many didn't make it to the finish line.

The solution in this Scripture is to focus on the example of the many who have persevered ("a great crowd of witnesses" - see Heb. 11) and especially "fixing our eyes on Jesus" (12:2) who faithfully continued through all the challenges and suffering to His ascension and enthronement. A great cloud of witnesses has confronted what you are facing, and they staunchly endured. Jesus himself faced the shame and pain of crucifixion and He persevered. Don't focus on the deserters but look to the finishers and be encouraged and inspired by their endurance. With Jesus, you will complete your race well. Persevere.

You're getting tired. Persevere. You're feeling overwhelmed by the pressure. Persevere. You're struggling with sin. Repent and persevere. You're facing failure and criticism. Persevere. You feel inadequate. Persevere. God seems distant. Persevere. You're growing weary. Persevere. Fix your eyes on Jesus and persevere. True disciples of Jesus finish their race.

Prayer

Sometimes it's hard work being Your disciple, Jesus. I desperately want to follow You well, but there are so many challenges and disappointments and temptations. However, I know that You (and many others) faced all these things and continued to obey and serve God to the end. So I'm not giving up. Please help me to keep my eyes on You and to persevere.

Today's Bible Focus

"Let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus."

LUNCHTIME (or when you can make a moment during the day)

1. Meditate for a short time on today's Bible Focus. Let it seep into your heart.
2. Look and see what is happening around you from God's perspective and listen to see whether God is whispering anything to you.
3. Pray for any not-yet Christians God has placed on your heart.

EVENING

1. *Remember:* Repeat today's Bible Focus.
2. *Reflect:* Reflect on the day and thank God for what He has said and done.
3. *Repent:* Check where you have neglected or disobeyed God during the day and ask for forgiveness and freedom.
4. *Release:* Name any concerns or fears on your mind and release them to Jesus.

Week 6 - Day 2 - Resisting Satan

MORNING

Scripture: 1 Peter 5:8-11

⁸ Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. ⁹ Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings. ¹⁰ And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. ¹¹ To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen.

Devotion

Finishing the race is tough because we are up against some powerful opposition. The spiritual being behind all this opposition is Satan himself. He knows our flaws and will attack when we are at our weakest. Sometimes he flexes his muscles and looks like a roaring lion (5:8), trying to make us afraid. At other times, he masquerades as an angel of light (2 Cor. 11:14), pretending that he wants what is best for us.

But don't be fooled, Satan's agenda is clear. He wants to rip you off, make you suffer, and stop you from being a disciple of Jesus. He is constantly prowling around, looking to destroy your faith. I don't want to make you paranoid. Not every problem we face comes directly from Satan's hand. But he is active, and you are a big target if you are an everyday disciple of Jesus.

So, you have to RESIST him (5:9). Don't listen to his lies. Don't believe his promises. Don't fear his power. Call him out. Tell him that you belong to Jesus. And you will find that for all his bravado, he's actually a toothless tiger. He's already been defeated. The real power lies with Jesus (5:11), and each time you resist Satan, you grow stronger (5:10) and he grows weaker.

Prayer

I'm no match for Satan by myself Lord. He's too smart, seductive, strong and skilled. But I know that he is powerless against you. You have already shown that with your resurrection. Satan had no strength to keep you dead and buried. He crumbled before you. Please open my eyes to Satan's lies. Fill my resistance with your resurrection power today. Make me strong, firm and steadfast, so that I finish my race well.

Today's Bible Focus

"Resist the devil, standing firm in the faith."

LUNCHTIME (or when you can make a moment during the day)

1. Meditate for a short time on today's Bible Focus. Let it seep into your heart.
2. Look and see what is happening around you from God's perspective and listen to see whether God is whispering anything to you.
3. Pray for any not-yet Christians God has placed on your heart.

EVENING

1. *Remember:* Repeat today's Bible Focus.
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Week 6 - Day 3 - Winning the Prize

MORNING

Scripture: Philippians 3:12-14

¹²Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. ¹³Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, ¹⁴I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

Devotion

Everyday disciples of Jesus have three clear foci.

1. Disciples are *past-oriented*. At the center of our faith lies a series of events that occurred almost 2000 years ago. Jesus lived, died, rose again, and ascended to heaven. We constantly remember and celebrate these events because they are foundational to our grace relationship with God. Our faith is founded on an historical event - the life, death and resurrection of Jesus.

2. Disciples are *present-oriented*. God is at work in our lives today. We talk with God and listen to His Word. We enjoy His presence and recognize His guidance. God's Spirit lives in us and works through us. We appreciate all that God is doing in our world and align ourselves with His work.

3. But disciples of Jesus must also be *future-oriented*. That's what Paul is getting at in this Scripture. We carry a sense of dissatisfaction with our world and our own brokenness (3:13). We love what Jesus has done for us and what He is doing in and through us, but we know that there is a great reward ahead. We believe that our future is way better than anything we have known and experienced so far. Jesus has called us to follow him because He wants to share this reward with us (3:12, 14). It's our hope, our goal, our prize. Our future orientation propels disciples of Jesus to make a huge effort to follow Him and to finish well. Paul uses words like "pressing on" and "straining." We have a constant eye on our incredible future, and this keeps us persevering and giving it all we've got. We will not miss out on this amazing prize.

Prayer

Thanks, Jesus, for what you have already done. I deeply appreciate Your sacrifice for me. Thanks, Holy Spirit, for all that You are doing at the moment to strengthen and empower my spiritual life and ministry. Thanks, Father, for promising me an incredible future with You. May this "prize" be so real that it encourages my effort and commitment today.

Today's Bible Focus

"I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me."

LUNCHTIME (or when you can make a moment during the day)

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Week 6 - Day 4 - The Battle for Your Heart

MORNING

Scripture: Colossians 3:1-4

¹Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ²Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. ³For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. ⁴When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

Devotion

This Scripture shows how what has happened to us now and what will happen to us in the future should change the way we follow Jesus. *Our present reality:* You have died to an independent, self-centered life (3:3) and have been resurrected to a new life in Christ. Your life has radically changed. You are a new creation. *Our future reality:* When everything is completed and Jesus returns to establish His new perfect heaven and earth, you will rule with Him (3:4). Your new life and your future trajectory all revolve around Jesus.

Because your present reality and your future hope are deeply tied to what Jesus has done and what He will do, it would be a complete waste of time getting too entrenched in this world and what it offers. Our hearts (3:1) and minds (3:2) are captured by Christ and His life and His growing kingdom. This seems obvious and straightforward, but of course, it's a huge challenge. We live in a world that seeks to invade every longing of our hearts and every portion of our minds. It tries to capture our desires and thinking and tie us to the temporary and dissatisfying.

But everyday disciples of Jesus "set" their hearts and minds on the reality of their present life in Jesus and their future hope with Jesus (3:1,2). Paul makes this an imperative. It's something we have to intentionally do. It won't happen naturally. Each day we consciously focus on who we are and who we will be in Christ. This is an act of our will, a choice we keep making. You need to deliberately "set your mind on things above" throughout your day.

Prayer

This world bombards me with its promises and worries. It's so easy for my heart and mind to be captured by empty dreams and anxious thoughts. But I know that I am a new creation and that I have a significant place with You in Your kingdom forever. Please give me the strength to focus my heart and mind on Your plans and promises today. May I see things from "above" (from your perspective).

Today's Bible Focus

"Set your mind on things above, not on earthly things."

LUNCHTIME (or when you can make a moment during the day)

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Week 6 - Day 5 - Training Instead of Trying

MORNING

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 9:24-27

²⁴ Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. ²⁵ Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last, but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. ²⁶ Therefore I do not run like someone running aimlessly; I do not fight like a boxer beating the air. ²⁷ No, I strike a blow to my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.

Devotion

This Scripture brings back memories of footy training when I was a serious Rugby player at school. We'd come back from the Christmas holidays and get straight into training. It was challenging and, at times gut-wrenching, training our bodies into shape, but it paid off when we eventually got out on the football field. In my old age, I no longer play football, but I have been going to the gym for 15 years. I notice at the gym that some people start with great enthusiasm. They *try* really hard for a while, but they don't usually last long. Trying doesn't get them very far. Eventually, they find it too hard, get disappointed, and give up. On the other hand, many *train* their bodies. They have a goal and a plan. They start on a disciplined program with steps to gradually improve. I see them at the gym, session after session, year after year. They achieve their goals. Training works.

Paul says that if Olympic athletes (or gym junkies) train so hard for a gold medal of limited value, he is certainly going to train harder for his eternal reward. A lot of Christians are into trying. They are challenged through a sermon and try to spend more time with God. They feel convicted about a sinful habit and they try hard to change it. They see the needs of others in their community and try to do something. But eventually, it gets too hard and they give up. Trying doesn't bring lasting transformation.

True disciples of Jesus, like Paul, are into training, not trying. They are patient and disciplined because they are building habits and commitments that bring long-term change. Of course, they still fail. But with an eye on the "prize," they get back up and train some more. How are you training yourself at the moment?

Prayer

I feel relieved that I don't have to try harder to follow You, Lord Jesus. Trying has not worked for me in the past. It has just produced lots of frustration and guilt. But I've seen athletes train and that's what I'm doing. Help me to serve and obey, so that I will continue to build into my life the disciplines and behaviors that will help me become like You and that will get me to the end of my earthly race still running strong.

Today's Bible Focus

"We train ourselves hard in order to get the crown that will last forever."

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EVENING

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Week 6 - Day 6 - Building for Eternity

MORNING

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 3:10-15

¹⁰By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as a wise builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should build with care. ¹¹For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. ¹²If anyone builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, ¹³their work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each person's work. ¹⁴If what has been built survives, the builder will receive a reward. ¹⁵If it is burned up, the builder will suffer loss but yet will be saved—even though only as one escaping through the flames.

Devotion

In this Plan, we have been emphasizing the future crown/prize/reward that God promises to us when we run and finish the “race” as disciples of Jesus. This prize is life forever with God and it is a tremendous incentive for us to follow Jesus and finish well. While our prize comes as a grace gift from God, being a disciple of Jesus calls for obedience and training on our part. We put in a lot of effort, but does any of this matter in the end?

In this Scripture, Paul suggests that if we build well, there is a further reward on top of eternal life (3:14-15). Now we need to be careful before reading too much into one Scripture. Some biblical scholars are uncomfortable with any interpretation that suggests an earned reward, so I am wary. But because what we do for Jesus on earth lasts forever, then our “building” (the good we have done, the truth we have taught and the lives we have touched) will certainly follow us to the new heaven and earth. Our efforts will be there forever to honor God and to be celebrated by all. They will never be forgotten.

This does not diminish God's grace. Eternal life is completely based on the work of Jesus, not our efforts (3:15). And because everything we do for God comes from His grace, ultimately God will get the glory for all our efforts and achievements. But how encouraging this is. The building you do with God will last forever. It makes following Jesus today incredibly significant. It's a bonus of being an everyday disciple of Jesus. Our driving motive of course is to serve Jesus, but the results of our service will be remembered and celebrated forever. It all counts. We are building for eternity.

Prayer

May I build with truth and grace today, Lord Jesus. May my attitudes and actions reflect You. May my seemingly insignificant words and behaviors build on the foundation of Your gospel to make a difference that will last forever. Here I am, please use me, Lord.

Today's Bible Focus

“If what we have built survives the fire, we will receive a reward.”

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