

CONNECT CHURCH



# «NEXT» STEPS

A 21-day devotional written by  
members of Connect Church



We are so glad you've chosen to join us on this 21-day journey. Our prayer is that these next few weeks become more than a routine, but that you experience real moments with God that shape your heart, strengthen your faith, and deepen your walk with Jesus.

Life moves fast, and it's easy to drift spiritually without ever meaning to. That's why we created this devotional: to help you slow down, breathe, open God's Word, and let Him speak directly to you. Whether you're new to faith or have followed Jesus for years, we believe God has something fresh for you in these pages.

Our hope is that each day encourages you, challenges you, and reminds you that you're not walking alone. As a church, we're growing together, believing together, and becoming who God has called us to be, one step at a time. Thank you for taking this journey with us. We're praying for you, cheering for you, and believing that these 21 days will mark the beginning of something new in your life.

Each day is written by a member of Connect Church. Slow down and take time for God to speak to you!

**Pastor Ethan Rouse**

# **HOW TO HAVE A SUCCESSFUL DEVOTIONAL QUIET TIME?**



- 1. Pick a Consistent Time**
- 2. Create a Quiet Space**
- 3. Start With Prayer**
- 4. Read Scripture Slowly**
- 5. Read the Devotional**
- 6. Journal Your Thoughts**
- 7. Do the Challenge**
- 8. End With Prayer**

# DAY 1 - STEP IN

## **SALVATION & SURRENDER**

*Proverbs 3:5-6*

Many of us think of surrender as a defeat or a loss, in the world it's seen as a negative. In fact, surrender isn't giving up. It's giving over. When Jesus invites us to follow him, he does not ask for perfection or strength. Only our willingness. In Luke 9:23, He says "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow me." Daily surrender means choosing his way over ours, even when our plans feel more comfortable or familiar. But surrender is not a burden, it's freedom.

Paul writes in Galatians 2:20 "I have been crucified with Christ, and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me." When we lay down our striving, Christ fills our life with HIS strength, HIS peace, and HIS purpose. What we release to him, he reshapes into something better. In my own growth, I think of the Pharisee, Nicodemus. At the time, he was considered a true and righteous man of God. Everyone looked to him for answers on how to live a life that was pleasing to God. Then Nicodemus heard of the one they called Jesus of Nazareth, and the miracles he was performing. He saw them for himself. He knew in his heart, Jesus was the son of God and had to speak to him. In John 3:5 Jesus says to Nicodemus, "I assure you, no one can enter the Kingdom of God without being born of Water AND of Spirit," Nicodemus had never heard these things and even a man of his education could not understand the words Jesus was telling him.

Nicodemus was filled with conviction, because he knew Jesus was speaking the truth. He needed to surrender to everything he THOUGHT he knew and no longer lean on his own understanding. Sometimes we hold tightly to our own understanding, our fears, or our desire for control.

When we surrender our will to him, he doesn't leave us wondering. He leads us into clarity, healing, and a deeper relationship.

### **CHALLENGE**

Today, take a moment and open your hands before God. Whatever you've been trying to manage alone - your future, your family, your worries. Invite Jesus into it. Let him carry what was never meant to rest on our shoulders.

Surrender is not losing. In Christ, surrender is where real life begins.

**SKY EVANS**

# DAY 2 - STEP BACK ➤

## REPENTANCE & REALIGNMENT

*2 Chronicles 7:14*

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When I really think about this verse I wonder, what does “heal our land” look like after God forgives our sin? If we pray and seek His face and ask forgiveness and really mean it, He will forgive our sins; but Jesus goes further here and says He will also heal our land. I believe healing our land starts with one household at a time turning from sin, seeking his face and being healed! If one household at a time is healed, then eventually our land is healed! Husbands, fathers or whoever is the spiritual leader of their household, it is our responsibility to ensure our households are being led spiritually. We must allow the Holy Spirit to lead us so we can, in return, lead our household for Jesus! Repentance is not a moment of shame, it is a moment of clarity! It’s the light of God revealing where our steps drifted, not so he can condemn us...but so he can realign us with His heart. Every Christian, no matter how long they have walked with Christ, will have seasons where their direction has shifted even just slightly. God’s grace does forgive us, but it also recalibrates us!

## CHALLENGE ➤➤➤

Repentance and realignment begins the moment we say, “Lord, I’m turning back to you.” It is never too late to realign your heart with the Lord’s and allow the Holy Spirit to lead you so you can lead your family! Throughout this year, take a step back, be honest with yourself and God so he can recalibrate you to be the tool he needs you to be to help lead your household, our church and our communities !

**JAMIE SELLERS**

# DAY 3 - STEP UP

## SERVING & LEADERSHIP

*Philippians 2:3–5*

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Today, the world is filled with influencers – people trying to gain followers, build a platform, and make their voice heard. Influence is often measured in likes, views, and attention. But Jesus showed us a different kind of influence, one that doesn't come from being noticed but from being faithful. His leadership wasn't about impressing crowds; it was about investing in people. Jesus led by serving. He shaped lives not through power or position, but through everyday acts of humility – washing feet, sharing meals, listening to hurts, and showing compassion.

This is the kind of influence that transforms families, friendships, and communities. You don't need a platform to lead your home. You don't need followers to shape someone's life. Leadership begins right where you are – in your living room, around your dinner table, at work, or in your small group. Every time you serve your spouse, encourage your children, support a friend, or lift up someone who's struggling, you are leading like Jesus. At Connect Church, we want to grow mature disciples whose leadership flows from genuine love and service. When you choose humility, you're not just helping someone – you're modeling Christ to the people who look to you the most. And that kind of leadership has a lasting impact.

### CHALLENGE

Choose one way to intentionally lead your family or someone close to you this week through serving. Pray with them, encourage them, meet a need, or simply be present – and trust God to use your quiet leadership to make a difference.

**CHASE ARRINGTON**

# DAY 4 - STEP OUT

## FAITH & RISK

*Genesis 12:1 & Joshua 1:9*

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I loved the Lord ... was using my talents in my church ... my husband had recently gotten saved and was finally the man I had dreamed of. I had a good job, a cozy little home, close to family, lots of friends . . . All anyone could ask for, right? Then God said, "Leave your job, your home, your family and friends, for I am asking you to go to a place to serve me in a different way." I didn't like that request. I wrestled somewhat with God, telling Him that the ministry here was doing great like it was. I prayed about it, but God reminded me of 2 Cor. 5:7 "For we live by faith, not by sight." So I humbled myself before Him and knew that HIS will for my life was more important than MY will for my life. Proverbs 3:5 "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding ..."

So we left our jobs, our home, our family and friends, and moved to Decatur, Alabama to minister at First Independent Methodist Church (Connect Church). It was a very hard adjustment for me for the first few months. But I have not regretted our decision. Sure, it took a lot of faith for me to give in to God's will, but once I took that risk and obeyed His call, we have received blessings upon blessings. Just like Abraham who left everything behind, God blessed him and the generations after him.

## CHALLENGE

What has God called you to do? Are you willing to have faith in His calling, and are you willing to take a risk for Him? He will bless you when you put your faith in Him and follow Him where He leads you. I have never regretted my decision to give up my life for Him.

**CINDY DAIGRE**

# DAY 5 - STEP CLOSER

## INTIMACY WITH GOD

*Luke 16:13*

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If you want to draw closer to God, you have to move farther away from something else. Sounds pretty straightforward, doesn't it? As simple as that is in principle, the action is often much more difficult. Years ago, in my life, I had heard something that stirred my heart about my time with

The Lord and I had made the decision to never put pleasures like hobbies, before my quiet time with The Lord each day. As noble as it seemed, there were many times I didn't want to do that! I liked my hobbies so much that it was very difficult to not speed through my reading or to lose focus on my prayer because I wanted to do something else. I didn't always get some super spiritual revelation from God. I didn't always "feel" super spiritual or "in tune" with God while reading and praying. But I didn't make that decision for those reasons –though there were many sweet moments that I did get to have with The Lord because of it. I did it because I love Him more than all of those things, and He is far more valuable than all of those things. As I drew nigh to Him he has been faithful to draw nigh to me as well. Though I don't understand everything I read, I do understand that I cannot be closer to Him without deliberately setting aside something else. Ever since I took that step away from my earthly desires and took a step toward Him, my relationship with Him has never been deeper nor richer, and I don't regret it.

### CHALLENGE

Find something in your life that isn't as important as God and then decrease it so that He can increase in your life.

**JON WRAY**

# DAY 6 - STEP AWAY ➤

## LEAVING OLD HABITS BEHIND

*2 Corinthians 5:17*

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Leaving old habits behind is not just a moment in time, it is a journey. We can think that change happens instantly, but God shapes us through our daily choices. Old habits can cling to us because they are familiar, comfortable, or once served as a coping mechanism. But once we step into the life God is wanting us to live, we discover that what once felt comforting is now a hinderance. A beaten trail is easier to travel than to beat a trail, because the path is laid out, free of obstacles, and the thorns have been cleared away. This does not mean it is the correct direction to travel, and just as an unused path grows close so do old habits die. As new

habits are exercised more, they become like a beaten path; easier to navigate, becoming more comfortable and stable to traverse. God does not ask us to stop old/bad habits: he empowers us to walk in new habits. Every time we choose patience over anger, prayer over worry, truth over shame, we practice becoming the person God sees in us. The holy spirit works through moments- nudging, strengthening, and reminding us that change is possible because he lives in us. God knows what you are capable of, transformation is not about trying harder, it's about surrendering deeper. Leaving old habits behind isn't just about behavior change- it's about heart change! "You don't have to live where you used to bleed."

1 Corinthians 10:13. You are not defined by who you once were, and you are not chained to your old patterns. In Christ, the "old has gone" even when you still feel its tug. God's grace isn't just forgiveness; it's fuel for transformation.

### CHALLENGE ➤➤➤

Take one step to change a habit you have, even just a small one. Let God shape your desires, redirect your thoughts, and renew your Heart. Trust God that his direction is True North and follow his lead to be the person he sees you to be.

**AJ LINDSEY**

# DAY 7 - STEP TOGETHER

## COMMUNITY & UNITY

*Mark 2:1-5*

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If you were to die today, who would be the six to carry your casket? It is an odd question but one that needs to be thought about. The Bible tells us a story about 4 friends bringing their paralyzed friend to Jesus.

Before they lowered him down, they lifted him up. Before he ever experienced a miracle, he experienced community. Community isn't just people you hang out with. It's not the group you talk sports with, or the people who sit near you in church. Community is the people who know how to carry you when you can't carry yourself. It's the people who refuse to let you stay stuck. The friends in Mark 2 didn't watch from a distance—they tore open a roof to get their friend to Jesus. Some people will watch you struggle. Some will talk about your struggle. But real community says, "We'll get you to Jesus, no matter what it takes."

The man didn't receive a miracle because he had great faith—but because his friends did. "When Jesus saw their faith..." shows us that your circle shapes your future.

## CHALLENGE

This week, write down the names of the six people you would want to carry your casket—not just in death, but in life (Matthew 16:24-26).

Are these the people who carry me toward Jesus?

Am I investing in these relationships the way I should?

Is there someone I need to add—someone who helps me grow?

Is there someone I need to step closer to and carry?

After you list your six, reach out to one of them this week. Encourage them. Pray for them. Tell them you're grateful for them. Strengthen the community God has placed in your life.

**ETHAN ROUSE**

# DAY 8 - STEP QUIET ➤

## PRAYER & STILLNESS

*1 Samuel 24:4-7*

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David and his men were hiding in a cave when Saul—who had been hunting David with 3,000 men—entered alone and unaware. Everything seemed to line up perfectly for David to take revenge. His men even encouraged him, saying this was the moment God had promised. From the outside, it looked like the obvious, even right, decision. David crept forward and cut off a corner of Saul’s robe—but then stepped back into the stillness of the cave. In that quiet moment, Scripture says David became “conscience-stricken.” The Holy Spirit revealed that harming Saul was not God’s will. God’s plan to make David king would not come through David taking matters into his own hands. David chose obedience over opportunity. We face moments like this too. Life presents a path that looks right. Friends and voices around us say, “This is the way.” We see signs that seem to confirm our thinking. I’ve made decisions like that—jobs, financial choices—that looked good but weren’t aligned with God’s will. It wasn’t until I stepped back into prayer and stillness that God corrected my direction. David’s story reminds us that before we move forward, we must first step back. God often speaks not in the noise, but in the quiet.

## CHALLENGE ➤➤➤

As we enter a new year, before taking any step forward—any decision, opportunity, or change—take the first step into communion with God. Ask Him, “What is Your will for my next step?” Then wait patiently for His answer.

**DONNA ARRINGTON**

# DAY 9 - STEP BOLD



## SHARING YOUR FAITH

*“You can identify them by their fruit, that is by the way they act. Can you pick grapes from thorn bushes, or figs from thistles? A good tree produces good fruit, and a bad tree produces bad fruit.”*

*Matthew 7:16-17 NLT*

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Often it is an overwhelming thought to think about stepping out and boldly sharing faith, especially with an unbelieving world that wants to falsely accuse of hate. Sometimes this makes people want to run and hide and be passive about their faith, however, we know that is not what we are called to do. What if Jesus made it simpler than just talking and there's a first step to sharing without saying a word? Good news there is.

In Matthew chapter 7 Jesus is warning of false prophets, and he says that you can spot them by their fruits/actions. Though the prophets are speaking boldly their lives don't line up with what God says. The way we live our everyday life and handle grief prompts people to ask questions and then boldly speaking and proclaiming your victory in Jesus can be done.

## CHALLENGE >>>

Pray every day that God shows you a person that needs you to share your faith and read your Bible and pick a characteristic of Jesus that you can improve on in your life.

**BRITNEY HINSON**

# DAY 10 - STEP WISE ➤

## GODLY DECISION-MAKING

*Proverbs 16:2, James 4:1-10*

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Few people actually enjoy conflict. In fact, most of us will try to avoid it at all costs. So, if you are not in the camp that enjoys fighting, there is great news for you today. God has graciously given us His word to provide help and direction in our time of need. God's will is for His children to live in unity.

James 4 reveals that conflict can easily be traced back to our motivation. Motives are so vitally important. They reveal the state of our heart toward others and also provide the fuel that leads to our actions. We can easily believe our actions are pure, when in fact, they are really self-satisfying. When we examine our motives, we can ensure our actions are driven by a desire to please God, and not by pride, selfishness, or the chasing of praise. True JOY comes when we do things in the proper order: Jesus, Others, Yourself.

Be encouraged that God's grace is abundant and His love for you has no limits. Ask Him for forgiveness, get up, and do the next right thing. You are greatly loved. God is not mad at you, He is mad about you. You are a child of the King of Kings. Be motivated to glorify your Heavenly Father today.

### CHALLENGE ➤➤➤

Examine the motivation of your heart by answering a few simple questions.

1. Does this decision/action glorify Jesus?
2. Does this decision/action demonstrate love for God and others?
3. Does this decision/action line up with God's word?
4. Is this decision/action in service to God and others, or for my own personal gain?

**MIKE GLENN**

# DAY 11 – STEP STRONG

## ENDURANCE & PERSEVERANCE

*James 1:12*

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A little over a year after giving my life to the Lord, I faced the unthinkable—the loss of my son. Nothing prepares a mother for that kind of heartbreak. My world stopped, and my heart felt shattered into pieces. I was still learning who God was, still learning how to trust Him, when my faith was tested in the deepest, most painful way imaginable. Yet even in the heaviness of grief, God's presence was unwavering. When I had no strength of my own, His strength carried me. When I couldn't see the next step, He guided my feet. When my prayers were silent tears, He heard every one. Slowly, I began to understand that perseverance isn't about forcing ourselves to be strong—it's about surrendering fully to a Father who never leaves, never fails, and never stops holding us.

Endurance is not built in easy seasons; it is shaped in the fire, in heartbreak, and in the moments when our faith is stretched far beyond what we think we can bear. God uses those moments to refine our hearts, strengthen our spirits, and deepen our trust in Him.

### CHALLENGE

Take a moment today to identify the challenge testing your faith. Bring it honestly to God. Ask Him to give you endurance, to guide your steps, and to reveal His presence in every moment. Trust Him completely—He will never leave you.

**LORETTA WALLS**

# DAY 12 - STEP LIGHT

## WALKING IN JOY

*Isaiah 26:3*

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As I reflect on the powerful phrase 'walking in joy,' I am inspired to sing, 'Down on my knees, I learned to stand, and I can't even walk without you holding my hand.' It was in that posture of humility that my journey with

God transformed from a casual acquaintance to an extraordinary adventure of joy. I describe it as casual because, at the time, life was good: I was blessed with a loving marriage and two precious children. I

loved and revered the Lord as my sovereign Savior, yet He seemed distant, and I mistakenly relied on others to meet my needs (Proverbs 28:26). But then a pivotal moment arrived on a cold January day, and my life was forever altered. In desperation, I cried out to Jesus, recognizing

that my only hope rested in Him. I knew I had to exercise my faith, recalling God's promises and trusting Him to guide my path forward. My prayers became fervent, persistent, and heartfelt pleas for direction. As I fixed my eyes on Him (Isaiah 26:3), He revealed Himself to me as not

only my authoritative Savior, but with time, also my Comforter, Protector, Provider, and joy-giving Friend. Jesus promises that true joy is a gift from Him, designed to be a boundless source of strength and peace in every circumstance. I have learned to pray expectantly, trusting that God will continue to work in my life, revealing more of His goodness as I seek Him.

### CHALLENGE

If you find yourself casually navigating life or facing uncertainties, I encourage you to abide in Him (John 15:5), remember His promises (Psalm 103:2), thank Him in all circumstances (1 Thessalonians 5:18), and rejoice in the God of your salvation (Habakkuk 3:18). As you do, your steps will grow lighter, and together we will walk in joy, our hearts overflowing with gratitude and praise.

**MARY LEGG**

# DAY 13 - STEP FREE

## FORGIVENESS & FREEDOM

*Ephesians 4:31-32, John 8:36, Matthew 6:14-15*

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Forgiveness is easy to talk about but actually forgiving someone that hurt you and never acknowledged it, much less apologized for it, is not an easy thing to do. Jesus teaches that forgiveness isn't just about releasing someone else, it's about releasing yourself. Unforgiveness keeps us stuck in the moment of our pain, replaying it like a broken highlight reel we never asked to watch.

When we hold on to bitterness, we think we're protecting ourselves. In reality, we're building our own prison. The person who hurt us may move on, but we remain tied to the offense through anger, resentment, and emotional exhaustion. That's not freedom it's bondage.

Forgiveness doesn't deny the wrong. It doesn't minimize the damage. It doesn't make it hurt any less. It simply refuses to let the damage have the final word. Forgiveness puts judgment back in God's hand and chooses peace over payback, healing over hatred.

Jesus didn't forgive us because we earned it. He forgave us because he loves us. He calls us to walk in that same love and experience that freedom that comes along with forgiveness.

## CHALLENGE

Write down the name of the person you still have resentment toward. Every day this week, pray "God, I choose to forgive. Teach my heart to follow my decision." Then take one small step and forgive them out loud, release the anger towards them, and pray a blessing over them and find freedom in forgiveness

**NICK WALLS**

# DAY 14 - STEP GUARDED

## PROTECTING YOUR HEART & MIND

*Psalm 140:1-5*

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We all love a good movie or TV show. It's a time to relax and unwind. But have you ever stopped to consider that the movie or show you're watching was created with a purpose?

In Psalm 140:1-5, David praises God for protecting him from evil and from wicked men who devise plans and set traps to trip him up on his path. In the same way, movies and TV shows are created to sell us a story—to make us feel, react, and think. Often, those stories are not aligned with God's design.

It may seem trivial, but we are at war with things not of this world. Satan will use any tool he can to separate us from God, and that includes entertainment. He uses movies and shows to desensitize us to choices that go against God's will for our lives. They can sell us a way of living that is far from what God intended.

The world wants to pull us into its chaos, but God can protect us. We simply have to stop and consider what we are watching. Don't sit down, relax, and turn off your mind. Be watchful. Look for ways the world tries to convince you that it's okay to wander from God's plan. Be mindful. Pay attention to the messages in the movies and TV shows you choose.

### CHALLENGE

Fight back. Turn off what doesn't honor God. Guard your heart and mind. Don't let the world persuade you that a life separated from God's will is acceptable or will make you happy.

**CHRISTY ZUCK**

# DAY 15 - STEP OPEN ➤

## HEARING GOD'S VOICE

*John 10:27*

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Many believers oftentimes struggle with hearing God's voice, mainly because they wait until they can audibly hear God. Well, what if I told you that God speaks in other ways than words. God can speak to you through anything; whether it's through your thoughts, a Bible verse, a worship song, or conviction. We want to hear God speak to us so badly that we forget to get to know him. How can you recognize someone's voice if you don't even know who they are? This is the most crucial point of our relationship with God, and it might shock you. It's not church, it's not worship, it's not giving money, and it's not spending long hours writing a new Sunday school lesson. While all these things are good, the most important part of the relationship is the relationship. Examples being:

    talking to God regularly, sitting in his presence, and reading about him. These are key ways to get to know him. How can you get to know somebody if you have never spoken to them? Some people let the religion part of their walk with God overpower their relationship with God.

    They let their work overwhelm them so much that they forget who they're working for! To hear God, we must know God. Recognizing the voice of God means you know him. Again (John 10:27 – "My sheep listen to my voice; I know them and they follow me.") So, if we know God, and God

    Knows us... then wouldn't that accomplish the main purpose of our walk with God? To form a relationship with him? Because when it's our turn on judgement day, we don't want to hear those words that every believer fears: "Depart from me for I never knew you!".

### CHALLENGE ➤➤➤

For a minimum of 10 minutes a day, spend some time with God. Try to sit in his presence, get in his word, and just listen for his voice. Maybe it's audible, maybe it's not. Maybe you get a strong urge to do something, and the thought is repetitive. God Speaks through repetition.

**COHEN JARRET**

# DAY 16 - STEP GRATEFUL

## GRATITUDE & WORSHIP

*Psalm 118:24-25*

*“This is the day the Lord has made; we will rejoice and be glad in it. Please, Lord, please save us. Please, Lord, please give us success.”*

*Psalm 28:7*

*“The Lord is my strength and my shield. I trust Him with all my heart. He helps me, and my heart is filled with joy. I burst out in songs of thanksgiving.”*

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Each morning when I wake up, I thank the Lord for another day and listen to the song “Good Day” by Forrest Frank. Starting my day this way matters to me because it reminds me that I need Him, that I depend on Him, and that I am deeply thankful for His presence in my life. You do too—because His mercies are new every single morning.

Every day is another opportunity to love and worship our Lord. Every morning is a fresh start with God, and even a fresh start with our families, our friends, and ourselves. Let’s take full advantage of the day God has so graciously given us, knowing He is watching over us.

## CHALLENGE

I want to challenge you: each day, speak out loud at least three things you are grateful for. Let gratitude shape your heart, your mindset, and your worship.

**DOVIE GLENN**

# DAY 17 - STEP GENEROUS

## GIVING AND BLESSING OTHERS

*2 Corinthians 9:7*

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Times are tough. Prices are insane. Groceries, gas, utilities, shelter and transportation can drain our pockets before the payroll check is even in our account. Not to mention our phone bill, insurance, taxes, and all of our other expenses. Just how are we supposed to be generous to others when we can't even make our own ends meet? God says that He loves a cheerful giver. We are to share our blessings from the Lord out of the abundance of our hearts, with praise and thanksgiving to the One who

blesses us. As my Pastor wisely tells us, "If you're going to give begrudgingly and complain about it, you might as well just keep your money!" I have a magnet on my refrigerator that says, "The greatest blessing is to be a blessing." I don't think most people truly understand that, and I actually wish the Bible would speak more about this very thing. When we realize how truly blessed, we are and how blessed we feel when we share our blessings with others, the feeling is really like no other.

### CHALLENGE ➤➤➤

Ask God to help you to trust Him to give generously. Ask Him to help you let go of some of the things draining your bank account. Thank Him for all He's done in your life then begin to give and bless with joy. The more God sees you being generous with His blessings, the more He will continue to bless you.

**JOHANNA CHILDERS**

# DAY 18 - STEP HUMBLE

## SERVANTHOOD & CHARACTER

*Mark 9:35*

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Servanthood is not simply an action—it is a reflection of character shaped by the heart of God. When Jesus knelt to wash the disciples' feet, He did far more than complete a humble task. He revealed a posture, a way of living that flows from inner transformation.

Servanthood begins where pride ends, and character begins where Christ is formed within us. True servanthood is not measured by how much we do, but by who we become while we do it. Anyone can perform acts of kindness, but a servant shaped by godly character does so quietly, consistently, and joyfully, even when no one notices. This is the kind of service Jesus modeled—a life poured out without a need for recognition. Character is shaped when we act when no one is around or watching: in the choices we make when it's inconvenient, in the restraint we show when tempted, in the compassion we extend when we expect nothing in return. Servanthood grows from these moments. It is the outward fruit of an inward journey with Christ. As our hearts align with His, our hands follow. In Mark 9:35, Jesus taught, "If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all." Greatness in the Kingdom is measured upside down from the world's standards. The world applauds power; Jesus elevates humility. The world values being served; Jesus calls us to serve. And in that calling, He shapes our character until it reflects His own.

### CHALLENGE

Today, ask God to cultivate in you the heart of a servant; willing, gentle, and steadfast. Pray for the grace to serve, not out of duty, but out of Christlike love. Write down 3 ways you can serve at Connect Church (your church) over the next year. You can help clean up after an event, help lead a small group, or pray with one who is in need of prayer. As you do, you'll find that servanthood does more than touch others; it transforms you. In becoming a servant, you discover the quiet strength, deep joy, and enduring character that come from walking closely with Jesus

**KYLE HINSON**

# DAY 19 – STEP READY

## PREPARING FOR SPIRITUAL BATTLE

*Ephesians 6:10–13*

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Every believer is engaged in a battle, whether we recognize it or not. Paul reminds us in Ephesians 6:10–13 that our strength does not come from ourselves but from “the Lord and His mighty power.” We face an unseen enemy—one who is real, relentless, and strategic. The devil’s purpose has never changed: “to steal, kill, and destroy” (John 10:10). He works through lies, schemes, and subtle attacks, seeking to pull us away from the abundant life Christ offers.

Because the enemy is real, we must take this battle seriously. We are not fighting against people; our struggle is against spiritual forces far greater than us. Satan may use people, circumstances, or temptations, but the true conflict is spiritual. This war will not end until we see Jesus face-to-face. Like Paul, we want to finish our race having “fought the good fight” and remained faithful (2 Timothy 4:6–7).

But here is our hope: though the battle is intense, the outcome is secure for those who are in Christ. Our source of strength is not human effort but the indwelling Spirit of God. “Greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world” (1 John 4:4).

### CHALLENGE

The Lord reminds His people in 2 Chronicles 20:15, “The battle is not yours, but God’s.” Today, put on the full armor God has provided. Stand strong in His power. The enemy is real, but so is your victory in Jesus.

Today, choose to fight—not in your strength, but in His.

**HAL DAIGRE**

# DAY 20 - STEP FORWARD

## VISION & CALLING

*Proverbs 29:18*

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Connect Church carries a strong vision of raising up leaders and helping people grow spiritually. Why do we hold to that vision so strongly? Because without vision, we become complacent. We drift. We end up moving through life on our own strength instead of God's direction. But when we catch the vision and calling God has placed on our lives, everything shifts. We move from wandering to worshipping, from carrying burdens to finding strength, from fear to stepping into greater things. Following God's calling isn't always easy. In fact, He often gives vision before clarity. Abraham was told to go before he was told where.

Peter stepped out of the boat without knowing what the next step would feel like. Paul received his mission long before he understood what it would cost. God rarely reveals the whole picture—He gives just enough light for the next step. Scripture says we are made in the image of God, which means He has a purpose and calling uniquely designed for us. Jeremiah 29:11 reminds us that God has plans, a mission, and a future for our lives. The question isn't whether God has a calling—the question is: Do you believe you were made for great things? Do you believe you were created for such a time as this? When God gives vision, He also gives provision. When He calls, He equips. He's not asking for perfection—just a willing heart.

### CHALLENGE

Write down your God-given vision. Take five quiet minutes and write the sentence: "I believe God is calling me to..."

Even if it feels unfinished or unclear, write what you sense. Let God build on it. Then, share your calling with someone who can encourage you. Vision grows in community. Tell a leader or trusted friend what God is stirring in you and ask them to pray over you this week.

**ETHAN ROUSE**

# DAY 21 - STEP THROUGH

## TRIALS, GROWTH, AND TRUST

### *Daniel 3*

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The problem of evil has plagued believers from the beginning. If God is all powerful and all good, then why do bad things happen? This isn't a new problem. We have examples all through scripture of believers asking the same question. Job asked "why?" Mary and Martha asked "why?" and sometimes we ask "why?" In those moments when life seems unbearable, we have to remember we aren't facing our trials alone. There is a fourth man in the fire (Daniel 3:25). It's interesting to note the Hebrew boys didn't see Him, only Nebuchadnezzar who had put them there. My "why" came when my daughter was three years old and had been having drenching night sweats and leg bone pain that would have her in tears and unable to walk. Her bloodwork had markers for leukemia and St. Jude immediately scheduled her for a consultation. We were terrified, sad, and feeling desperate. Our perfect little girl was facing a giant she couldn't see. She had a follow up blood test three days from when we first got the call. We put our hope in the only place we knew, His Word. We fasted and prayed for those three days and I realized in those moments of feeling helpless that my help came from the Lord. I told Him Stella was His before she was mine and she would be His after I'm gone. I knew that whatever the outcome was, we would trust and serve Him. When Friday arrived, we thanked the Lord and broke our fast. The results came in and her bloodwork was normal and her night sweats and bone pain were gone.

### **CHALLENGE**

The Lord heard and answered in the way we had hoped. Sometimes the answer isn't what you hope for and you're left with two options after the "why." Run to or run away from the Lord. Choose to trust or choose to deny. Choose to face your giant with the King at your side, or face it alone. Choose faith. Choose Christ.

**DEE SADLER**

- 1. STEP IN – SALVATION & SURRENDER**
- 2. STEP BACK – REPENTANCE & REALIGNMENT**
- 3. STEP UP – SERVING & LEADERSHIP**
- 4. STEP OUT – FAITH & RISK**
- 5. STEP CLOSER – INTIMACY WITH GOD**
- 6. STEP AWAY – LEAVING OLD HABITS BEHIND**
- 7. STEP TOGETHER – COMMUNITY & UNITY**
- 8. STEP QUIET – PRAYER & STILLNESS**
- 9. STEP BOLD – SHARING YOUR FAITH**
- 10. STEP WISE – GODLY DECISION-MAKING**
- 11. STEP STRONG – ENDURANCE & PERSEVERANCE**
- 12. STEP LIGHT – WALKING IN JOY**
- 13. STEP FREE – FORGIVENESS & FREEDOM**
- 14. STEP GUARDED – PROTECTING YOUR HEART & MIND**
- 15. STEP OPEN – HEARING GOD'S VOICE**
- 16. STEP GRATEFUL – GRATITUDE & WORSHIP**
- 17. STEP GENEROUS – GIVING & BLESSING OTHERS**
- 18. STEP HUMBLE – SERVANTHOOD & CHARACTER**
- 19. STEP READY – PREPARING FOR SPIRITUAL BATTLE**
- 20. STEP FORWARD – VISION & CALLING**
- 21. STEP THROUGH – TRIALS, GROWTH, AND TRUST**



# 21 NEXT STEPS

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