

OUR VALUES

We are whole life, faith filled, all in risk takers

We'll never insult God with small thinking & safe living

We are all about the local church

The local church is God's "Plan A" to reach the world - He has no "Plan B!"

We will do anything short of sin to reach people who don't know Christ

To reach people no one is reaching, we'll have to do things no one is doing

We will contribute more than we consume spiritually

The church does not exist for us. We are the church and we exist for the world

We will keep short accounts

The greatest weapon we have against the Devil is repentance and confession

We will be relentless with truth and grace

We will teach and model the hard truths of Jesus so that we can experience and model the deep grace of Jesus

We will practice irrational generosity

We truly believe it is more blessed to give than to receive

We will intentionally listen to the voice of God

We recognize that the voice we listen to the most will determine the direction of our life



GROW

A 21 DAY DEVOTIONAL ON GROWING YOUR CHARACTER



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GROW NOTES

A 21 DAY DEVOTIONAL ON GROWING YOUR CHARACTER

be in your spiritual journey.

As we grow (remain) in Christ he prepares us to bear fruit with our lives. The reason we invite God to build our character is so that He can work through us at just the right time. When you've reached spiritual maturity, God wants to send you out to communicate the Gospel message to lost people through loving words and actions. He wants to use you in His harvest field, letting Him work through you to draw other people into relationships with Him - spreading new seeds of faith into the world.

That's the goal. That we will know the love and friendship of God and that our lives can be used to bring glory to Him.

That's why 21 days is just scratching the surface. Character development takes a life time and it happens through prayer, reading God's Word, serving, listening to His voice and doing what He tells you to do. So keep growing. Keep moving forward and keep leaning into Jesus.

FEED YOURSELF

Take out your journal and complete the following instructions.

QUESTION: What steps and decisions will I make to keep growing in my relationship with Jesus?

READ: Colossians 1:9-14

ASK & JOURNAL: Lord, what is one thing you want to remind or show me that you have done in my life these last 21 days. Write down what God shows you.

PRAY: Take time to focus on your personal prayer goals that you wrote for the 21 days of prayer.

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INTRODUCTION TO THE 21 DAY DEVOTIONALS

GROW YOUR CHARACTER

When I was growing up I was often told that certain things would stunt my growth. Drinking coffee would stunt my growth. Not eating vegetables would stunt my growth. Failing to sit up straight would stunt my growth. The list goes on. Just as there are things that can stunt our physical growth there are things that can stunt our spiritual growth. There are forces, actions and attitudes that can keep us from growing into and becoming all that God wants us to be.

Take a moment and think about the issues in your life that cause you pain. What are the areas of your life that you wish you could change or be free from? Do you struggle with anger? Do you have a problem with authority? Do you tend to speak without thinking? Do you have an addiction that holds you hostage? Are there actions and attitudes you wish you could be free from? I'm sure you have a list of areas you would like to grow in.

For the next 21 days we are going to focus on growing in Christ by inviting the Holy Spirit to speak to us about the character issues in our life that stunt our spiritual growth. We don't often take the time to invite Jesus to grow our character and the result is that we never become firmly rooted in Christ.

Let me give you a few reasons on why character development is so important:

- Character makes us fruitful in this lifetime.
- Character affects the outcome of our prayers.
- Character keeps us from falling away from the faith.
- Character qualifies us for ministry and service.

- Character helps us win the battles against the devil.
- Character reveals Christ to others.
- Character determines our heavenly reward.

In order for God to develop these areas of our life means that we have to invite Him to GROW our character. For anything to grow certain things need to happen.

- We need to eat (read the Bible)
- We need to breathe (learn to pray)
- We need to keep clean (Confess our sin)
- We need a supportive environment (connection in community)
- We need to exercise (Serve others)
- We need protection (resist the devil)
- We need to be generous (give of our time, talents and treasures)

Growth takes time. The Bible says that we are to “Continue to grow in the grace and knowledge of our savior, Jesus Christ” (2 **Peter 3:18**). This implies process, time and intentionality. There is no short cut to spiritual growth but there is a path and the Bible lays out specific areas that God wants to address in our lives.

For the next 21 days we are going to take a journey together and invite God to develop our character so that our spiritual roots can go deep in order for us to grow strong and mature. Take the time to read each day’s devotional and then do the section that’s titled “**FEED YOURSELF.**” Use a journal to write down the thoughts, insights and promptings that come from Jesus. Be sure to read the prescribed Scriptures and answer the questions that follow. If you want more questions to ask Jesus after reading the Bible here are some that you can use any time throughout the 21 days and beyond.

- After reading a passage of Scripture ask Jesus one, a few or all of the following questions:
 - What **command** do you have for me in this Scripture?

DAY 21 **GROWING UP (WHAT’S NEXT)**

You made it. 21 days of leaning into Jesus and stepping out by denying yourself of food or media or whatever God showed you. Hopefully you also worked at the discipline of journaling and invited God to mentor and coach you for the last few weeks. Well done!

But you’re not finished. This is only the beginning. These 21 days were designed to build into you a pattern in your life where you can connect with your Savior. It takes time and work to build healthy relationships and it’s the same when it comes to growing in our walk with God. That’s God’s goal for your life. He wants to grow you up and mature you in His Word and in His Ways.

For 21 days we focused on inviting Jesus to grow us in our character. We were intentional about certain aspects of our life that God wants to plan, develop and grow in us so that we more fully reflect His nature and ways.

Do you remember 21 days ago when you began this journey and were encouraged by Jesus in **John 15** to REMAIN in Him. To remain in Christ means you commit to intentionally connecting to Jesus. To remain in Jesus is to spend time with Him so that your spiritual roots can grow deep and strong.

Continue to invite Jesus to cultivate the soil of your heart and to break you down in such a way that He can build you up again as He wants you to be. Part of growing in Christ means we have to let Him dump some compost in those areas that need to be addressed so that things can grow. The compost usually comes in the form of struggle and suffering. That’s what God uses to grow us and make us more and more like His Son Jesus.

Growth also take time. So keep leaning into Jesus by surrendering to Him and being patient. Remember, He is never late and always does His work at just the right time. Just as seeds remain hidden for a while underground after they’ve been planted, you need to give up your own plans and submit yourself to God’s plans for your life, inviting Him to do a deep work in your soul that’s designed to transform you. Don’t rush ahead of God’s work by relying on your own efforts instead of depending on His power working through you. Don’t fall behind God by being apathetic and missing the opportunities to which He wants you to respond. Instead, ask God to teach you how to rest patiently in sync with where He wants you to

FEED YOURSELF

Take out your journal and complete the following instructions.

QUESTION: Where am I actively serving God through His church? Why am I serving? Why am I not serving?

READ: Matthew 14:13-21

ASK & JOURNAL: Lord, how do you want to develop a servant's heart in me? Where and who do you want me to serve? If applicable ask God what is holding you back from serving? Lord, what do I need from you to begin stepping out with a greater commitment to serving? Lord, show me what serving will do in my heart and life.

PRAY: Take time to focus on your personal prayer goals that you wrote for the 21 days of prayer.

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- What **application** do you have for me in this Scripture?
- What **message** do you have for me in this Scripture?
- What **promise** do you have for me in this Scripture?
- What **understanding** of this Scripture do you want to teach me?
- What **sin** do you want me to confess?

MY PERSONAL PRAYER GOALS FOR THE NEXT 21 DAYS.

Who will I specifically pray for by name for the next 21 days?

What specific circumstances or issues will I pray and ask God to do a work in?

List any other prayer requests that you may have and pray for them daily.

crowd and began serving it to them.

They did what they could do and then Jesus stepped in and did only what He can do.

Look at how this moment ended for those disciples, “They all ate as much as they wanted, and afterward, the disciples picked up twelve baskets of leftovers” (**Matthew 14:20**).

Isn't that amazing?

That should set you free from any and all excuses you have for not letting Jesus lead your life. If you aren't serving you aren't growing. Serving positions you to see the miraculous work of God.

When I think back over my life I can tell you the names of ordinary people who took what they had and gave it to God and then watched God take what they gave and turn it into significance.

People like Sandy, Jack, Dave and Rob. I will never forget these people as they invested in me. I don't remember everything they said – but I remember when I came to church or a youth event – they were there every week when I showed up. They suspended their judgements and sacrificed their comforts for a snot nosed kid like me.

And I can tell you that my buddies and I were not always the easiest kids to teach or invest in. We often came with attitude, we didn't always listen – we made those guys lives pretty uncomfortable at times. But they stuck it through and gave to God what they had and because of them God used their lives to form mine – and I am forever grateful.

When we serve, God gives you the opportunity to become the face and the memory to someone – a child, a teenager, a seeker, a peer – who will look back on their life one day and say – *“If it wasn't for them, I wouldn't know God.”*

What if you lived your life that way? What if you made the decision to live your life doing for others what someone did for you! What if you invited God to change your view and to see what He sees? Your life would change, our church would continue to thrive and best of all someone else's life would be changed by the love of Jesus through you.

Jesus tells them to get the bread and fish and “*Bring them here.*”

I love this part of the story. Jesus looks at those guys and says “*Give me what you got. Let me see what you think is not enough.*” And then he does the miraculous. He takes that little lunch, prays and then tells the disciples to start serving the people.

What happened at this moment with those disciples and that crowd is the very thing that God has used throughout the history of His church to accomplish what he wants and He's always done it through people like you and me. The disciples took what they had and did what they knew to do and then Jesus intervenes and does what He can do and all of a sudden something beyond themselves takes place.

These disciples begin to hand out the food (**they do what they could do**) and Jesus intervenes and does **only what He can do** and thousands upon thousands of people are fed that day.

That principle and miracle has been true in your life as well. Think about it. Someone in your past invited you to church, or answered some of your questions, or reached out to you in a time of struggle or whatever. Someone did something very simple, very ordinary, that required only a little time and effort and they did what they could do. They reached out to you. That invitation or conversation or backyard BBQ or Starbucks coffee was a catalytic moment for you that was used to turn your heart towards Jesus. The only way you can explain that change in your life is that someone invested their time, looked past your issues, suspended their judgements and invested in your life and then God did something WITH you and IN you.

Someone did what they could do and God took that and changed your life. God began to change your heart and give you desires for things you never had desires for before. All of a sudden you wanted to know what the Bible says about how you should live, you wanted to help other people in need and you had burdens for things or people you never even thought about before. You now look at the world around you through a very different lens and your view has changed. What sparked that change in your life was that someone in some capacity did what they could do and then God did only what He can do – and your life was changed.

This is how the church has grown from the beginning. It's the secret to how God changes lives and we got a glimpse of it here in scripture when those disciples took that fish and that bread and nervously turned to that

PRAYER LOG

DATE**DATE ANSWERED**

DATE ANSWERED

GROW IN SERVICE

You know what these guys were saying? They were saying, “Jesus we don't have what it takes. We don't disagree with the need – in fact we recognized the need. We just aren't able to do anything about it! All we have is a kid who brought a lunch. He only has five pieces of bread and two fish and he wasn't too happy with us when I took it from him.”

mature spiritually. The writer said in **Hebrews 5:12-13** - ***“You have been Christians a long time now, and you ought to be teaching others. Instead, you need someone to teach you again the basic things a beginner must learn about the Scriptures. You are like babies who drink only milk and cannot eat solid food. 13And a person who is living on milk isn’t very far along in the Christian life and doesn’t know much about doing what is right.”***

The point is this – Spiritual growth and maturity does not just happen. It is not automatic. You and I need to do something. We get to partner with God in His sanctifying work.

And so he says when it comes to your faith make sure you develop it. How? By supplementing your faith with knowledge (**2 Peter 1:3-11**). *Knowledge here means a mental perception of the truth coupled with the ability to use the information you have gleaned to live the Christian life.*

You can’t apply what you don’t know and what you do know you need to apply.

FEED YOURSELF

Take out your journal and complete the following instructions.

QUESTION: Am I gaining knowledge of God and His Word? What am I doing with the knowledge I have of God and His Word?

READ: **Colossians 2:2-13, 1 Corinthians 8:1-3, 2 Peter 3:17-18**

ASK & JOURNAL: Lord, where do you want me to grow in more knowledge of you? Where in my knowledge of you have I not been putting into practice what I know? What do you want to teach me today?

PRAY: Take time to focus on your personal prayer goals that you wrote for the 21 days of prayer.

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DAY 1 ROOTS AND FRUITS!

On a scale of 1-10 how would you rate yourself in the following areas? 1 being, “needs improvement” and 10 being, “I amaze myself.” **(Write down a number beside each area)**

- ☐ **Love:** How tender is your heart towards God and others?
- ☐ **Joy:** Do you lean towards complaining or celebrating?
- ☐ **Peace:** Are you more prone to being content or being anxious?
- ☐ **Patience:** How do you respond when things don’t go as quickly as you want?
- ☐ **Kindness:** In your busyness do you stop to help others even if no one sees?
- ☐ **Goodness:** Is your heart growing or shrinking in this area?
- ☐ **Faithfulness:** Do you consistently do what you say you will do?
- ☐ **Gentleness:** How effective are you in speaking and acting with grace?
- ☐ **Self-control:** How often do you give into your impulses?
- ☐ **Perseverance:** Do you tend to give up quickly or press through hard things?
- ☐ **Generosity:** Do you tend to hold on to what you have or hold loosely to what you have?
- ☐ **Forgiveness:** Do you hold back forgiveness or do you practice extending forgiveness?
- ☐ **Purity:** Do you commit to being pure in your thoughts and actions?
- ☐ **Trusting:** Do people see you as honest and sincere or do they approach you with suspicion?
- ☐ **Reputation:** Are the beliefs and opinions about you positive or negative?
- ☐ **Speech:** Are you known for your wholesome talk or do you tend to lean towards gossip?
- ☐ **Knowledge:** Do you tend to think like Jesus or live with a dependence on your own wisdom?
- ☐ **Service:** Do you tend to serve other or do you wait for others to serve you?

So, how did you do? How do you feel? Are there some areas that you could improve and grow in? These are just some of the areas that God wants to develop our character so that we become more like Him. In **John chapter 15:4-8** Jesus uses a word that highlights how He develops our character.

4 Remain in me, and I will remain in you. For a branch cannot produce fruit if it is severed from the vine, and you cannot be fruitful unless you remain in me. 5 “Yes, I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing. 6 Anyone who does not remain in me is thrown away like a useless branch and withers. Such branches are gathered into a pile to be burned. 7 But if you remain in me and my words remain in you, you may ask for anything you want, and it will be granted! 8 When you produce much fruit, you are my true disciples. This brings great glory to my Father.

Did you spot it? The word that jumps out is **“remain.”** To remain is to “stay in the place that one has been occupying.” A seed will never grow if you keep moving it around from dirt pile to dirt pile. It needs to remain planted in the ground so that it can take root. That is what Jesus wants us to do when it comes to our spiritual growth. He wants us to remain in Him so that He can grow us and make us like Him. There will never be any fruit if there are no roots in our lives.

As you begin this 21 day journey of prayer make a commitment to stay connected to Jesus. Plant yourself in this devotional for the next 21 days and invite Jesus to begin a deeper work in your character so that your faith becomes rooted in Him. It's when we choose to be rooted in Jesus that we begin to see the fruit of His power in our life that is demonstrated by growing our character.

DAY 19

GROW IN KNOWLEDGE

We live in a world where we are just a touch away from any piece of information we want. You can find out anything by just picking up your phone and searching the internet. It wasn't always like that - In the old days we used to have a bunch of books called the Encyclopedia Britannica. That's where I went to research my homework. Each book weighed 36 pounds and every year they would come out with a new revised edition because the world was always changing.

But people don't buy those anymore because we live in a world where knowledge and information is just a click away.

- If you want to know how to change the coolant sensor in your sons car – all you need is **YOUTUBE**
- If you want to know what the age difference between Celine Dion and her late husband was – **GOOGLE** will tell you.
- If you want to know the address of a place you have never been – You have **MAPQUEST**
- If you want to find out about that guy or girl you like but don't have enough information – You have **FACEBOOK**

You can gather a lot information and knowledge without doing pretty much anything. And what happens is that knowledge becomes something we have access to but don't ever do anything with. **Because when it comes to maturing in Christ it's not WHAT you know but what you do with what you know!**

It's the application of knowledge that makes you wise. **Proverbs 2:6** says – **“All wisdom comes from the Lord so do common sense and understanding.”** The Hebrew word for wisdom describes someone who has “practical skills that help them thrive in life.” So as much as this may describe pastors and teachers it also describes businessman and carpenters and laborers and accountants and artists. And so wisdom is the bi-product of knowledge and that knowledge comes from spending time with God and in His Word.

It's possible to live your entire life as a Christian and never grow up or

NOTE: To learn more about this wonderful gift order the book, **“The Beauty of Spiritual Language”** by Jack Hayford at www.amazon.ca

worshipping and a witnessing. I suggest to you that you ask God to give you the gift of tongues so that you can spend more time **praying** in tongues than **preying** with our tongue. (Read Acts 2:4, Acts 19:6, Mark 16:17, 1 Corinthians 14:2)

We can so subtly burn people through the name of “*sharing concerns*,” or giving “*background information*” or “*prayer requests*” and it is from hell. One of the ways to deal with these moments when you find yourself in a situation where the conversation is turning cynical is to “pray in the Spirit!” Do not let your tongue get involved in the conversation, but let your tongue give a heavenly exaltation. You see the tongue (**James 3**) can be ignited by the fires of hell or the tongue (**Acts 2**) can be ignited by the fires of Heaven.

Proverbs 26:20 - “*Without wood a fire goes out; without gossip a quarrel dies down.*” When you are hearing gossip or words that are putting down others you can “pray in the spirit” to keep your tongue busy and you can also refuse to respond. If you do not respond when someone is gossiping or putting down others then the conversation ends. When you listen to gossip and put downs, you actually are involved in the fire that is ignited by hell. You must not listen. **How?** By praying in the Spirit and refusing to respond.

Once way to know that you are growing in maturity in your speech is to assess your life and see if people come to you to “share” or get information. If you always know the latest gossip then you are a great big wood box - you are a fire stoker for their hellish conversations. If you were in control of your life, if you are mature, then you would not be hearing that kind of talk because people would not come to you with gossip.

If you find that your speech tends to lean towards gossip then begin to use your words for prayer and encouragement. Commit this verse to memory and bring it to mind when you are tempted to gossip and use your words for evil. “*Don’t use foul or abusive language. Let everything you say be good and helpful, so that your words will be an encouragement to those who hear them*” (**Ephesians 4:29**).

FEED YOURSELF

Take out your journal and complete the following instructions.

QUESTION: Do I tend to post my frustrations on social media? Do I find myself listening to slander or gossip about other people? Do I demean others with my words and speech? Do I talk to other people when I have

DAY 2 GROW IN LOVE

In **John 13** we read about Jesus and his disciples gathering together to eat the Passover meal. They had all just arrived and were getting settled around the table when Jesus stands up, grabs a water basin and wraps a towel around his waist. He takes the basin of water and kneels down before one of the disciples and begins to wash his feet. It came as a surprise to them because foot washing was reserved for servants.

Foot washing wasn’t the nicest job in the world. Most people walked around in sandals or bare feet on roads and trails filled with animal feces. It wasn’t uncommon for people to stop and relieve themselves on the side of the road. It wasn’t out of the ordinary for a farmer’s donkey, sheep or cow to stop and leave something smelly in the middle of a path.

These were the kinds of roads and paths people would walk on all day long. So when you entered a person’s house it was customary to clean your guest’s feet. As the disciples gathered to have a meal together, for some reason no one grabbed the towel and basin to wash their feet. They are all focused on the meal. They are getting ready to eat. Jesus watches and maybe he waits a few moments to see if anyone would step forward. But they don’t and so He does.

He kneels down and grabs the foot of one of his disciple’s. He wets the towel in the basin filled with water and begins to clean their feet. Their feet are dusty. Their feet are dirty. Their feet are smelly. Dirt, feces, and dry skin between their toes. It’s a mess.

He washes while they watch. It’s uncomfortable. No one says anything. Then Jesus goes to grab Peter’s foot but he’s having none of it. He looks Jesus in the eyes and says, “*I don’t think so Jesus. You will never wash my feet*” and he shuffles aside. Jesus looks Peter in the eyes and says, “***Unless I wash you, you won’t belong to me.***” Did you catch that? Jesus looks Peter in the eyes and says, “***Unless I wash you, you won’t belong to me.***”

Jesus then tells his disciples that what He just modelled to them was what they were to do for others. “*So now I am giving you a new commandment Love each other just as I have loved you, you should love each other. Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples.*” (**John 13:34-35**).

So how are we to love? Jesus shows us in **John 13** when He washed the disciples feet and then he talks about it in **John 15**. He helps us understand love. He redefines love and what He models for us and what he tells us to do is very different than what the culture says. Jesus did not only **tell** us to love, but He **showed** us how to love and we do this by **REMAINING** in Him (see **John 15**). Jesus wanted His disciples to know that their future was to be defined by loving others the same way He loved them.

That is one of the hardest things to do isn't it? Because if we are truly going to love like Jesus and grow our character than we need to invite the Holy Spirit to redefine how we love others. Before we knew Jesus, love was simply an emotion. You love Nacho's. You love football. You love travelling. Love was simply an emotion that made you feel good or made your heart beat. But then Jesus came into your life and He redefined love. Without Him love is simply an emotion but now with Christ – **Love is a choice**. When you love only with emotion you won't love people around you that you don't like or who think differently from you or who you think are just plain crazy. You'll never love them because you will have no emotional connection to them. You won't have any feelings for them – which is why Jesus comes along and says *"I want you to choose to love. I don't want you to define love by just how you feel."*

According to Jesus, love is no longer an option but a command (**John 15:17**)

Have you ever thought of love as a command? The reason we need commands in our lives is that God knows there are things that will not come naturally to us. Loving everyone is not an easy task but it's what identifies you as a follower of Jesus.

How do you know if you are maturing and becoming more like Jesus and that your roots are growing deep? How do you know that you are actually changing? You choose to love people that you normally wouldn't choose to love. **1 Corinthians 13:4-7** is the famous chapter on love. Listen to the biblical definition of love and ask yourself as you read this, "How many of these things are options and how many of them are emotions?"

Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud or rude. It does not demand its own way. It is not irritable, and it keeps no record of being wronged. It does not rejoice about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out. Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance. - 1 Corinthians 13:4-7

DAY 18 GROW IN SPEECH

Four preachers met for a friendly gathering. During the conversation one said, "Our people come to us and pour out their hearts, confess certain sins and needs. Let's do the same. Confession is good for the soul." So they all agreed.

One confessed he was addicted to the Bachelorette and would stay home each week and watch it when he should have been at a prayer meeting. The second confessed to reading trashy novels when others thought he was reading theology.

The third guy confessed to the deep envy he had for the church building down the road...where they had a state of the art sound system and huge auditorium.

When it came to the fourth one, he was silent for a moment pondering what to say. Finally, he answered, "My weakness is gossiping and I can hardly wait to get out of here."

Our words and speech can do incredible good or cause incredible harm. Our tongue is a powerful weapon. The Bible speak of the tongue this way, *"When we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we can turn the whole animal. Or take ships as an example. Although they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are steered by a very small rudder wherever the pilot wants to go. Likewise the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell"* (**James 3:3-6**).

This little thing called the tongue that weighs about 2 ounces has the power to control your whole life. It can be used to direct or to destroy. It can direct you like the rudder of a ship and keep you on course, or it can destroy you like a fire. **Proverbs 18:21** says that *"The tongue can bring death or life; those who love to talk will reap the consequences."* What you say and how you say it can bring life or drain life out of those you speak to. Your speech can be controlled by heaven or hell. Where does your speech tend to get its power from?

In Acts chapter 2 there was another tongue of fire. This fire led to a

FEED YOURSELF

QUESTION: Who do you have a hard time loving? Why?

ASK & JOURNAL:

PRAY: Pray for the person or people you identified as being hard to love. Pray for them by name and ask God to bless them.

Keep leaning into Jesus and as He speaks to you about areas of your life go and make things right. Wherever you have misrepresented yourself go and make it right. I remember when my son was young and we were on the ferry on our way to Vancouver Island. He said he was going to go get a drink of water and then comes back with some soda. I said, *"Where did you get that?" "From the soda machine. It was right beside the water."* *"Did you pay for that?" "No. I thought it was free because it was right beside the water."*

And so we got up walked back to the cafeteria stood in line and payed for that soda. We made it right. If we did that for a \$1.25 cup of pop – how much more should we do that with the other relationships in our life and situations where our moral excellence has been compromised? I wanted my son to know that without integrity you don't have anything.

Integrity positions you to know God in a more powerful way because you get to see Him work in your life. Your life will be filled with peace and your decisions will always be right (not easy) but right and God always honors righteousness.

Take out your journal and complete the following instructions.

QUESTION: What is my integrity worth? What would I give up my integrity for?

READ: Proverbs 11:3, Proverbs 12:22, 1 Peter 3:13-17,

ASK & JOURNAL: Lord, would you use integrity to describe my life? Where in my life do I need to confess sin and wrong doing? What do you want me to do to make things right in those areas where I have not been integral.

PRAY: Lord, thank you that you desire to make me righteous. Help me live a life that is in a right standing with you and others. Help me to be honest and true in all I do and with all those I interact with.

The Apostle Peter tells us to “*Supplement your faith with a generous provision of moral excellence...*” (2 Peter 1:5). What is moral excellence? **Moral excellence is when your behavior matches your beliefs.** Another word for this would be **INTEGRITY!** It’s when your private life matches your public life.

Integrity is different than your reputation. Most people worry about their reputation when they should really worry about their integrity. Your reputation is what other people THINK you are. Your integrity is who you really are. Your reputation is not necessarily a reflection of your integrity and commitment to moral excellence. Reputation is what people see. Integrity is what God sees.

So what does God see in your life?

What’s your integrity worth?

Many of us would answer that question by replying “a lot! My integrity is worth a lot. My integrity is important to me.” And what you may really be saying is that your reputation is important to you because it’s easy to confuse the two. You see – yours and my actions tell us what our integrity is worth? Let me show you how to discover what your integrity is worth.

- If you lie on your resume to get a better job – that’s what your integrity is worth.
- If you don’t declare all your income on your taxes or don’t pay them at all – that’s what your integrity is worth. Your integrity is worth what you didn’t pay the government.
- Maybe you have applied a personal expense to a business expense. Whatever that amount is that is what your integrity is worth.
- Maybe your finances are tight in your marriage but you want that new dress. So you buy that new dress but then you hide it for 2 or 3 months and then you bring it out and put it on. Your husband says – “*Is that a new dress?*” and you say “*no – I’ve had it for quite a while.*” That’s what your integrity is worth.
- Maybe in your business you over bill or cut corners to make some money. That’s what your integrity is worth.
- Maybe you tell your wife that you love her and then you go and spend time looking at pornography on your computer. That’s what your integrity is worth.
- Maybe you are a student who has a chance to get into a certain university and so you cheat on your exams to get a good mark. That’s what your integrity is worth.

What is your integrity worth? It’s not just what you say but it’s defined by what you do.

DAY 3 GROW IN JOY

Do you ever picture Jesus laughing? I wonder what kind of laugh Jesus had? Was it loud? Did he snort when he laughed? Was it a cackle? Was He a knee slapper? It’s quite possible that you have never thought or pictured Jesus laughing. Maybe it’s because we’ve made him so serious and unapproachable that it’s hard to see Him as a man filled with joy.

Sadly we’ve been successful in sucking the joy out of Jesus.

When we don’t or can’t see Jesus as joyful we end up seeing God the same way. And the result is that we end up living our lives with a pessimistic outlook. Our circumstances will begin to define us rather than the one who created us. Yet joy is what God wants to produce in us. It’s the response He wants to grow in us no matter what we face. You see, joy is not being happy about your circumstances. Joy is what we can have in spite of our circumstances.

In **John 15** Jesus disciples, his closest friends are depressed. They’re depressed at hearing that Jesus is leaving them and going to a place where they cannot go. They’re depressed at hearing that one of them is going to betray Him and that they are going to deny Him. They don’t like that Jesus is talking about his suffering and death. This was all very depressing to the disciples. They were hopeless. They felt their whole purpose and meaning for life was gone. And they didn’t know how they were going to cope with their circumstances. And so, Jesus tries to explain why he came and what the cross is about. What the tomb is about. What the resurrection is about.

And then he says to them, “***I have told you this so that you will be filled with my joy***” (John 15:11). Jesus says, “***I have come so that you will be filled with my kind of joy.***” It’s the kind of joy that rises above our circumstances and leads us to put our confidence in the one who has promised to lead, help and deliver us. It’s a joy that is instilled in us when we know that even though our circumstances may not change we can know that God is with us no matter what.

This joy is discovered when we commit to growing in our relationship with God. Joy is a strong root that goes down deep and defines us in our ability to stand firm in the face of difficulties and struggles. Joy is more than a smile or a feeling it is a confidence that comes from knowing that God is in control when things feel out of control. Joy is not the absence of problems

but it is living in a constant awareness of God's presence.

So let me ask you a question? *What area in your life are you currently struggling to experience joy?* Is it your job? Your marriage? Your salary? Your neighbor? Your sickness? Your heartache? Go knows and sees your circumstances and often will use them as an opportunity to grow our character by producing joy in us. Our struggles are often the platform God uses to show us that they don't have to define us. Rather, we can know and experience great joy in our journey. A kind of joy that places our hope in God and demonstrates to the world that God is bigger than our problems.

FEED YOURSELF

Take out your journal and complete the following instructions.

QUESTION: Which word would better describe you? Positive or negative?

READ: Romans 12:2, 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18, Habakkuk 3:17-18, John 16:24

ASK & JOURNAL:

Lord, what circumstances in my life are keeping me from experiencing your joy? What do you want me to do so that I can live with your joy as my strength?

NOTES

DAY 17

GROW IN INTEGRITY

His mom dropped him off at the local church when he was just a small boy. She had not been able to have children and promised God that if He gave her a child she would give him back. And she did. She kept her word.

And so he was raised by the priests. He would help out around the church and they would teach him the Scriptures and show him how to pray - then one night God spoke to him audibly. He called his name - "SAMUEL." It took Sam a few minutes to figure out who was talking to him but with the advice of Eli the Priest, Samuel realized that the voice he was hearing was God's.

From that point on God would continue to speak to Samuel and he would be God's prophet to the nation of Israel. God would speak to the Nation through Samuel. He was their line and connection to God. Then one day the nation of Israel demanded a King. It wasn't God's plan for Israel at that point but God will often give us what we want even if it's not what He wants.

And so Samuel anoints Saul - *King of Israel!*

And then he does something as the mantle of leadership transitions to Saul. He stands before the nation of Israel and invites them to testify to his integrity. He gives them the chance to correct him if need be and if there is any correction needed he wants to make it right.

Then Samuel addressed all Israel: *"I have done as you asked and given you a king. 2 Your king is now your leader. I stand here before you—an old, gray-haired man—and my sons serve you. I have served as your leader from the time I was a boy to this very day. 3 Now testify against me in the presence of the LORD and before his anointed one. Whose ox or donkey have I stolen? Have I ever cheated any of you? Have I ever oppressed you? Have I ever taken a bribe and perverted justice? Tell me and I will make right whatever I have done wrong."* 4 "No," they replied, "you have never cheated or oppressed us, and you have never taken even a single bribe." 5 "The LORD and his anointed one are my witnesses today," Samuel declared, "that my hands are clean." **(1 Samuel 12:1-5)**

If you and I are going to grow and mature and be rooted in Christ we must live with **"clean hands."**

to take" (Proverbs 3:5-6).

Once again we see that becoming more like Jesus is a heart issue. Trust is a heart issue and if you want to truly trust God you are going to have to embrace moments where you stop depending on your own understanding. When we decide to “not depend on our own understanding” means to put our entire weight on God. When I jumped off the side of that mountain I put all my weight in that harness trusting it would hold me and carry me up. That’s what it means to trust God.

The moment you decide to jump is the moment God moves you from your reality to his reality. It means exchanging your comfort for his security. Your way for his way and your will for his will. The bottom line is this, If you want to know God, you're going to have to jump!

FEED YOURSELF

Take out your journal and complete the following instructions.

QUESTION: Where and what areas of my life am I not trusting you Lord?

READ: Proverbs 3:5-6, Psalm 9:10, Romans 15:13

ASK & JOURNAL: Lord where am I putting my weight on and in rather than you? Where in my life am I depending on my own understanding rather than trusting your ways?

PRAY: Lord, help me to put all my trust in you. Take time to focus on your personal prayer goals that you wrote for the 21 days of prayer.

NOTES

DAY 4 GROW IN PEACE

You hear it all the time, Beauty Queens telling the world that all they want is peace. Rock stars uniting together and writing songs that speak about peace. Middle aged hippies still living off the past of their marches and standoffs for peace. Yet our world sees less and less of it. It's been said that since the beginning of recorded history the world has been at peace less than 8% of the time.

Peace. It is the one thing that everyone wants but so few people have. I heard of a woman whose life was so busy and stressful that she looked forward to going to the dentist so she could just sit in the chair and relax. You know you have a stress problem when you look forward to someone drilling into your teeth as your relaxing place.

So how do you then live a life of peace? How do you actually rid yourself of worry and stress? The Apostle Paul sheds some light on how we can grow in peace and not be controlled by worry and anxiety. Here's what he says: ***“Don’t worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. 7 Then you will experience God’s peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 4:6-7).***

Now before you write Paul off as some out of touch religious guru, you need to know that he wrote these words from a dark and dingy prison cell. He had been falsely accused and was imprisoned for believing and following Jesus. His situation would be a good definition for worry, stress and fear.

He tells us not to “worry.” This word literally means to “*be pulled in many directions.*” That’s how a life without peace feels doesn’t it? Worry takes our minds and our thoughts on a roller coaster ride of emotions. And so Paul says to “*guard your heart and mind.*” This is the idea of building a castle or wall around your thoughts and to take them captive so that they don’t take you in all kinds of directions.

The way to build that wall around your thoughts is to pray. ***“Don’t worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done.”*** In our anxiety and worry God wants to hear from you. He wants to remind you that no matter what

you are going through you have something to be thankful for. Paul goes on and writes ***“Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honorable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise. 9 Keep putting into practice all you learned and received from me—everything you heard from me and saw me doing. Then the God of peace will be with you.”*** (Philippians 4:8-9).

Changing your thinking is key to ridding yourself of worry and filling your life with peace. It's been said that only 8% of the things we worry about are legitimate. The other 92% are either imaginary things we conjure up in our mind (which means they never happen) or they are things you have no control over anyway.

The key to growing in peace and becoming a person of peace is to put our focus on who we talk to and what we think about. Paul says in **Philippians 4:9** that we are to *“keep putting into practice all you learned and received...”* Most of our stress comes from our lack of practice. We don't practice talking to God or being thankful. When you start talking to God on a consistent basis and think on things that are good, true and lovely – then the result is that we become peaceful people.

In the early 1900's there was a pilot named Sir Frederick Handley Page. He was a bomber pilot and flew large planes during the war. While flying one day he heard the unsettling sound of a rat gnawing behind the cockpit. He knew that a rat could easily gnaw through wires, a hydraulic line or landing gear which could cause some big problems for him.

While thinking of what he could do to stop this rat from gnawing on his plane he remembered hearing that rats could not survive at high altitudes. A higher altitude would deprive them of oxygen and kill them quickly. So he pulled back on the stick and climbed higher and higher until the gnawing stopped. Once he landed the plane he found the rat dead behind the cockpit with only minimal damage to the wires.

The truth is, worry is like that rat. It will gnaw at you and work at taking you down. But if you want the gnawing to stop you need to climb higher because worry and anxiety cannot coexist with the God of peace. Worry cannot survive in the same atmosphere. It can't breathe the same air. That is what talking with God and thanking Him does. It puts us in a place where we are not controlled by our circumstances but filled with the confidence that God is in control. When you know that He is in control you will be filled with peace.

DAY 16 GROW IN TRUST

Have you ever found yourself doing something that your brain tells you, you shouldn't be doing? I'm not talking about drinking out of the milk carton or taking candy from your kids Halloween stash. I'm talking about those moments when you're faced with a choice that completely throws common sense out the window. I had one of those moments. It was the day I jumped off the side of a mountain. I was standing on the edge admiring the view when I heard a voice whisper in my ear, *“run!”* I hesitated, but then I heard it again. This time it was louder, *“GO! RUN! DON'T STOP!”* So, I did. For some reason I listened and jumped right off the side of that mountain.

I remember running hard and seeing the edge come closer and closer. Just a few more steps and I would plummet a couple thousand feet to the ground. My body was beginning to agree with my brain at this point asking, *“what are you doing Shawn?”* But that voice in my ear? It didn't stop. It just kept telling me to run and that everything would be OK. I felt unsure, but I kept running until my feet were no longer touching the ground. I couldn't believe it, I had actually jumped! Looking down I expected the ground to come fast and hard, but instead I soared upward and began to fly.

Now, before you write me off as some crazy guy who had some drug induced hallucination, what I just described to you was the day I went para-gliding. My wife bought this adventure for me because she loves me (at least I hope that's the case). The voice in my ear was the pilot that I rode tandem with giving me instructions and assuring me that everything was going to be OK.

Jumping off that mountain reminded me again about how faith in God works. I've learned that faith is fueled by jumping. It doesn't make sense which is why most people never exercise it. They'd rather stand on the ledge than jump off it. I understand that. It's normal to stand on the ledge. It's normal to want security. It's normal to seek comfort. The problem though is that God's not normal! If you want to experience Him you're going to have to get over your desire for normalcy. You're going to have to jump! The only way you will ever truly experience God is to run over the edge of your own understanding and jump into a life of faith. The Bible tells us to *“Trust in the LORD with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding. Seek his will in all you do, and he will show you which path*

Now why is God so concerned about our purity? What is the benefit of living a life of purity? Well, it's because purity is the pathway to intimacy with God. When we live a pure life we don't have to deal with the baggage of painful choices or broken promises. God knows that when we seek to live with sexual purity and purity of heart our relationship with Him and with others is set on a firm foundation. A life of purity will draw you closer to your spouse, friends, and family because it frees you from living with guilt and shame and regret. Most of all a life of purity positions you to hear, see and experience God.

**“God blesses those whose hearts are pure, for they will see God”
(Matthew 5:8)**

Think about how different our world would be if everyone committed to living a life of purity. Think how different your life would be if you committed to living a life of purity. Think about how much more you would know, experience and see God in your life all because you committed to living a pure life.

FEED YOURSELF

Take out your journal and complete the following instructions.

QUESTION: Where in my life, thoughts and actions have I watered down God's call to purity?
READ: **Philippians 1:9-11; Colossians 3:1-17, Psalm 51:10-12**
ASK & JOURNAL: Lord, what areas of my life do you see as impure?
PRAY: Lord, create in me a clean and pure heart. Renew in me the joy that comes from knowing you have redeemed me and are restoring me. Help me to run to you to find fulfillment rather than things that cause impurity in my life.

NOTES

FEED YOURSELF

Take out your journal and complete the following instructions.
QUESTION: What do you worry about? Make a list of the things you are worried about. Once you have finished that list write down as many things as you can think of that you are thankful for.
READ: **Colossians 3:15, James 3:18, Philippians 4:7**
ASK & JOURNAL:
Lord, is there any truth or correction you want to show me from these passages of Scripture?
PRAY: Take five minutes and thank God for your thankful list, then with a thankful heart tell God what you need (pray through your list of worries). Ask Him to fill your mind and heart with His peace.

NOTES

DAY 15

GROW IN PURITY

How do you understand the word “purity?” In your mind does purity have to do with sex? If so, you are partly right. We are called to live sexually pure lives – but purity means more than just sex. Purity is a commitment to live our lives thinking and acting like Jesus. Once again, it is a heart issue.

Jesus made a statement one time that sounds ridiculous to many today. In fact, what he says seems impossible to most people. Here’s what he said, *“You’ve heard that it was said don’t commit adultery, but I say people who look and lust have committed adultery already in their heart” (Matthew 5:27)*. Sounds unreasonable doesn’t it? The Pharisees and religious leaders thought so as well. Imagine how offended the religious leaders would be when Jesus told them they had problems with purity. It would be like Jesus showing up at your door today and saying, *“if you lusted this week, or engaged in any behavior or thoughts that was sexually inappropriate, if you lusted, even in your heart, you will die in 10 seconds.”*

None of us would finish this devotional.

Jesus’ is making a point regarding what it means to live a life of purity and he uses sexual purity as His example. He’s saying that *“if you think you’re sexually perfect and need no repentance because you have avoided committing physical adultery, think again.”* All of us are messed up by the Fall. We have all been made sick by sin and in order to experience freedom we have to learn and practice confession and repentance. Now if you are tempted to think that this call to purity is not an issue in your life just wrestle with this question, *“Have you have ever had a thought or fantasy or behavior that you might not want flashed up on a screen for everybody to look at?”* Your answer to that question puts us all on the same page and need for God to make us pure.

Jesus knows what we are like on the inside and so He raises the bar in order to get to our hearts and He says that lusting (*having a desire to take or have what is not yours*) is the same as adultery. Jesus shocks us into a place where we have to wrestle with this call to purity. He puts us all on the same playing field so that he can show us the way out. He knows that we will never experience the power of purity if we never acknowledge that we have impurity. It’s when we confess our impurity and acknowledge it that he sets us up to hear and receive the great truth that He forgives, restores and loves us.

God knows that when we forgive we look and become most like Him. That is how powerful forgiveness is and why God spends so much time commanding us to forgive. He knows that forgiveness is what releases us from so many other issues in our lives. The apostle reiterates this truth when he writes, *“Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of evil behavior. Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you”* (**Ephesians 4:31-32**).

Forgiveness is a great way to rid yourself of a lot of negative behavior and thoughts. It’s like the old slogan says, *“no pain- no gain!”* When you choose to forgive you may not feel all that good about it at first, but if you stick with it God begins to heal you and before you know it you’re no longer controlled or defined by the hurt that was done to you and you end up looking and acting more and more like Jesus.

FEED YOURSELF

Take out your journal and complete the following instructions.

QUESTION: Who in my life have I chosen to not forgive? Why won’t I forgive them?

READ: **Colossians 3:13, Matthew 6:14-15, Ephesians 4:31-32, 1 John 1:9**

ASK & JOURNAL: Lord, what do you want to show or teach me about forgiveness from these passages of Scripture?

PRAY: Lord, help me forgive others the way you have forgiven me.

NOTES

DAY 5

GROW IN HOPE

When I think of hope I think of the Christmas story. It’s a story full of people who exhibited hope. They lived their lives waiting for God to show up. Before the first Christmas unfolded there was a group of Jewish people who waited for 2100 years for their Savior to come. However, most of them never saw it happen. Over time many of them would give up and throw their hope aside. Hope simply reminded them of what they didn’t have rather than what could be.

I’ve been there. You probably have as well. Those moments where you hope and wait and wonder only to see your anticipation quickly turn to frustration. You lose the hope that God will show up and deliver you, help you, save you – and like so many you decide to check out.

That reminds me of the story of a little boy who was in the grocery store with his mother. As she shopped he continually asked her if she could buy some chocolate chip cookies. The answer came quickly, *“No son, they’re too expensive and I’m in a hurry.”* That did not hinder the boy’s hope of getting some cookies – so he kept asking and mom kept refusing to the point of threatening a punishment if he asked again.

Once they got in the checkout surrounded by a line of people the boy stood up in the cart, folded his hands, looked up to heaven and prayed loudly, *“Jesus, my mom won’t get me chocolate chip cookies. But you told me to pray and put my hope in you. Since my mom won’t get them would you please make it happen?”*

As the boy continued to pray people in the checkout line began to look at the mother with disappointment. Not willing to make a scene she went and got the cookies and placed them in the cart at which time you could hear the boy say, *“Thank you Jesus.”*

Here’s the point. God often does his best work when we’re in the checkout line. You may be ready to check out on God or check out on your marriage or check out on your commitments. You may be at that place where your waiting has drained the thrill from your hope. If that’s you then this message is exactly what you need.

Maybe you need to receive a new understanding of what hope is. Instead of living your life hoping FOR something maybe it’s time to put your hope

IN someone. Maybe your hope is in your job, your finances, your family, or yourself. All of those areas fail to offer any certainty and can leave you living with disappointment. Jesus gives us a hope that is certain. What he offers is for all people no matter your situation or circumstance. It is not wishful thinking or based on chance.

The Bible says in **Romans 15:13** - ***“I pray that God, the source of hope, will fill you completely with joy and peace because you trust in Him. Then you will overflow with confident hope through the power of the Holy Spirit.”*** What is the source of your hope? Where do you put your Hope? Do you tend to live your life hoping FOR things to change rather than hoping IN someone?

God’s heart is to make you more hopeful and that happens when we put our hope IN Him! **Jesus will always give you what you really need.** Your circumstances may not be what you hoped for but Jesus can give you the peace, the joy, and the assurance you need to keep moving forward. Hope in Him is certain. It’s not wishful thinking.

That’s why the Christmas Hymn *“O Holy Night”* says that *“Long lay the world in sin and error pining”*, which means that the world was longing, praying and waiting. They were looking for a Savior and God came through when they least expected it by sending us His Son. That’s how God works. He tends to leave us standing in line, waiting till the last moment to come through. It’s how he builds our faith. So, don’t give up. Keep seeking. Keep asking. Keep praying. God is never late, and when you least expect it he’ll show up and put the thrill back into your hope.

FEED YOURSELF

Take out your journal and complete the following instructions.

QUESTION: Where have I lost hope? Where do I need hope? What things besides God have I been putting my hope in?

READ: Psalm 3:2-6, 1 Peter 1:3-6; Psalm 147:11

ASK & JOURNAL:

Lord, is there any truth or correction you want to show me from these passages of Scripture?

PRAY: Ask God to fill your heart and mind with hope. If there are any areas where you feel hopeless ask Jesus why? Invite him to speak words of hope to you (write down what you hear Him say to you).

DAY 14

GROW IN FORGIVENESS

‘Are you a forgiving person?’ Seriously, think about it. Are you quick to forgive? Is forgiveness your natural reaction when someone offends or hurts you? My guess is that you’re probably like me. When I get hurt or offended the first thing I do is hold an imaginary conversation with the person who owes me an apology. Those conversations are great because I’m always right and I always win. I envision telling that person what I think and all the imaginary people listening to my imaginary conversation always agree with me. It’s pretty amazing, except for the imaginary part.

When we get hurt we tend to lose our grasp on reality. Let me explain how this works. Let’s say I fell and got a deep gash in my leg. The first thing I would do is protect my wound and make sure no one touched it. I would be very concerned about my well-being causing me to become very self-centered. That’s what happens when we get hurt. The more pain we experience the more self-centered we become. It’s true isn’t it? I know that when I’m in pain the only thing I’m interested in at that moment is... ME!

Self-centeredness is the bi-product of pain. When you’ve been hurt, abused, criticized or offended your focus becomes all about protecting your wounds. Hurt creates distance which keeps us from getting the help we need. Our energy is poured into defending ourselves rather than taking steps to becoming whole. That’s why God is so passionate about forgiveness and it’s why he tells us to forgive (**see Matthew 18:21-35**). God knows that forgiveness is what actually heals our pain. Did you catch that? Let’s read it again; “God knows that forgiveness is what actually heals our pain!” Now you may be thinking, *“That’s not true. It hurts to forgive. It’s painful to forgive.”* I agree. The choice to forgive can hurt just as much or even more than the pain we were initially dealt. It’s like going to the doctor and asking him to fix your broken leg without him touching it and resetting it simply because it hurts more when he touches it. But if you want your wound to heal you are going to have to let the doctor touch it and in the end you will let him touch it because it is the only path to healing. It’s the same when it comes to forgiveness, yet for many people forgiveness isn’t worth the pain.

We fail to realize that pain is the very thing that positions and prepares us to heal, and forgiveness is God’s loving way of beginning the healing process in your life. It’s not easy and it’s not comfortable but it’s necessary.

up traps in our lives that cause us to believe in it more than in God. It's not the same as other sins. You know when you are wrestling with a lust problem, or jealousy or anger. But when it comes to greed you are usually the last person to see it. We tend to give greed a pass in our lives and let it masquerade as me "just providing for my family," or me "just saving for the future" and we use these excuses to never live a life of generosity.

God is a giver and since we want to be like His Son Jesus we need to develop hearts of generosity. Look at what Paul writes in **2 Corinthians 9:6-7** – “Remember this—a farmer who plants only a few seeds will get a small crop. But the one who plants generously will get a generous crop. 7 You must each decide in your heart how much to give. And don’t give reluctantly or in response to pressure. “For God loves a person who gives cheerfully.”

The key to developing a heart of generosity is to give joyfully. When I give I discover the joy that comes in being a blessing and I discover the faithfulness of God who blesses me so that I can continue to bless others. If you really want to have your heart changed than hold loosely to your finances and stuff and ask God to create a heart of generosity within you.

FEED YOURSELF

Take out your journal and complete the following instructions.

QUESTION: What steps can I take to becoming more generous with my money? What excuses am I making for not wanting to deal with the previous question?

READ: Matthew 6:19-21, Luke 21:1-4, John 3:16

ASK & JOURNAL: Lord, show me where I may be hesitant to be generous or to become more generous. Lord, where in my life do I find it hard to be cheerful when I give?

PRAY: Lord, where do you want me to specifically begin being more generous?

NOTES

DAY 13

GROW IN GENEROSITY

“You cannot serve both God and money” - Jesus

I’m guessing that you may not be that excited about today’s devotional. When it comes to money most people don’t have a positive response. We don’t like people meddling in our finances. It’s a personal issue. When it comes to money and generosity most people treat it like a pharmaceutical commercial because it usually causes discomfort, tension, irritability, frustration and pain.

But that’s why we have to deal with it.

Jesus talked about the subject of money more than he talked about love and forgiveness. He talked about how we think, feel and use it more than any other topic. And it’s not because it’s more important to Jesus, it’s because He knows that money is the chief competition for our affections and our hearts. Jesus knows that finances are one of the greatest resistance points in our spiritual walk.

Money is a key area that God uses to grow our character.

In Matthew 6 Jesus made this point. *“Wherever your treasure is, there the desires of your heart will also be”* (**Matthew 6:21**). When Jesus speaks about the heart He is speaking about the essence of who you are and whatever you have as your treasure you will find your heart not far behind. Another way to say this would be that *“Whatever I choose to treasure will reveal the truest things about me.”*

Jesus is not teaching us that money is bad or evil. We need money to provide for our families. We should be intentional about saving some and there is nothing wrong with using money to take your spouse out for a nice dinner or your family on a tropical vacation. Those things are not evil. What is evil is living your life loving money!

You may not relate to that in your life. You may be thinking, *“I don’t love money!”* In fact very few people walk around saying they love money. Maybe not specifically. But what about when you worry about money, or fight over it or obsess over it – isn’t that the same as loving it? When we are preoccupied with money it will quickly reveal what is going on in our hearts. Money is sneaky. Money is crafty and money is so good at setting

NOTES

DAY 6 GROW IN PATIENCE

“The Lord is teaching me patience!” If there were a TOP TEN list for divine lessons this one would rank #1. Ask someone what they need prayer for and the most common answer is “patience.” It seems that we have a lot of impatient people following Jesus. I wonder if we may have misunderstood what it means to invite Jesus to develop the character of patience in our life. Patience has to be more than just staying calm when waiting on hold or not sounding off on that guy who just cut you off. Anyone can learn to respond in a positive way in a tough circumstance. So then, what does it mean to invite the Holy Spirit to make us patient?

Patience is what God produces in us in order for us to do what He has called us to do at just the right time! The character trait of patience is the discipline of waiting on God. It’s what keeps us from rushing ahead of God’s timing or lagging behind. A patient person takes the time to listen to God’s voice and wait on the Lord. The goal of patience is to lead us and bring us closer to God. Patience is learning to wait on God with a purpose. Patience positions us to do, to say, to act and to respond at just the right time and in just the right way.

God develops patience in our lives in the same way a pregnant women carries a baby. A mother will wait knowing that her baby will come at just the right time. She doesn’t try and make it come at 3 months or five months, she simply is patient until her pregnancy runs to full term and the baby is born at just the right time.

Patience is inviting the Lord to run His course in your life so that His will is done and your character is built so that everything in your life will work out at just the right time.

FEED YOURSELF

Take out your journal and complete the following instructions.

QUESTION: Lord, where in my life am I not waiting or willing to wait on You?

READ: Galatians 5:22, 1 Corinthians 13:4, Isaiah 40:31

ASK & JOURNAL: Lord what do you want to teach me in my times of waiting and wondering? What is it Lord that you want to teach me in order to develop greater patience in my life? What is the benefit that comes to me when I learn to wait on you Lord?

PRAY: Go to your prayer goals and pray through and for what you wrote down.

Lastly Paul encourages us to **STAY FAITHFUL!** Perseverance is the fuel of faithfulness. Faithful people don't know how to quit. They may stumble. They may fall at times but they get back up and keep going. You know what an Oak tree is? It's an Acorn that refused to give up.

So then how do you develop a life of perseverance? You do what James just told us to do. You **“consider”** your situation and approach it as an opportunity to experience the Joy of the Lord. The struggles of life are an opportunity for the root of perseverance to grow down deep and when that happens, “you will be perfect and complete, needing nothing.” **Doesn’t that sound good?** Wouldn’t you like to be fully mature, perfect, complete and needing nothing? Then don’t give up!

FEED YOURSELF

Take out your journal and complete the following instructions.

PRAY: Lord, help to keep going and not give up. Develop in me a heart of perseverance that believes you have a place you want to bring me and things you want to teach me along the way.

homework with them every night. On the weekends when everyone feels like sleeping in gets up and comes to church because she knows her kids need community and that she needs encouragement and so she invests in their spiritual development because it's a fight worth getting into. She fights this good fight because she knows that by doing so her kids will encounter and grow in Jesus. So she keeps fighting. She keeps going. She keeps persevering. She is fighting a good fight.

- **The good fight is the couple who are struggling in their marriage.** They have issues. They have hurt each other deeply – but they won't give up. Every day they get up and choose to forgive. Every day they work hard at learning to communicate better. They are fighting for their marriage and seeking to deeply consider one another and giving God the chance to restore and heal. That's a good fight.
- **The good fight is the man who is struggling with addiction.** He knows it's killing him. He knows things have to change. So he gets honest and he tells someone. He comes clean with his issue and asks for help. He starts taking the steps to living a life of freedom. He lets go of certain friends. He moves away from the temptation that has so easily entangled him and he surrenders his life and will and heart to God so he can be restored. He does whatever he has to do to find freedom. That's a good fight.
- **The good fight is the people who keep praying for their son or daughter or friend or spouse who do not know Jesus.** Their hearts are hard. They see no need for God. They keep doing everything on their own. But they keep praying. They keep believing. They keep fighting for their salvation. They live with an urgency and belief that unless God steps into their kids, their spouse, their friends lives they are never going to change. So they keep praying. That's a good fight.

What GOOD fight do you need to step into? Good fights are what help us persevere. If you aren't involved in a good fight than you will give up. You will step back. You won't mature or grow or become rooted. You may need to find a fight. You need something to keep you going. What makes you angry in this world in a holy way? What gets your blood boiling when you see it and you think "that has got to change." Whatever that is – step into it. That's God's way of growing your roots deep. He has something or someone He wants you to fight for.

The second thing Paul tells us to do so that perseverance can be produced in our lives is **FINISH WHAT YOU START!** Paul said that he "...finished the race..." He is telling Timothy that he did not give up. Things didn't always go the way he wanted or hoped for but he kept going anyway. He

DAY 7

GROW IN KINDNESS

Before you read today's devotional take a moment and read 2 Samuel 9:1-12

King Saul has died and David has taken the throne of Israel. It's been a long time coming with a lot of pain, frustration and hiding. But finally Saul is dead and David is King. The normal protocol for a new king is to make sure everyone who was associated with the old King is disposed of. When a King came into power the first thing they would ask is, *"who are my enemies. Is there anyone who is a threat to my throne?"* Then you would find out who that person or people were and make sure they were killed. The new King would specifically take a look at any people remaining from the previous regime. Whoever reigned before you, specifically if they were of the lineage of the previous King, you'd make disappear. Because what could happen is that someone could show up and say, *"Hey I'm related to the previous King and therefore I have a royal right to the throne."* David is not of the same bloodline as Saul and so this task was really important for him to take care of.

However, David breaks protocol and instead of hunting down any living relatives of Saul he finds that there is a grandson of Saul who is still alive and chooses to extend kindness to him. His name is Mephibosheth. He is living in a town called "Lo-Debar" which loosely translates **"nowhere"** or **"no word."** Now think about this for a moment. Here was Saul's grandson, the last living person left from the previous royal regime. He basically has no hope and no future, so he hides out in the middle of NO WHERE realizing that he will never again hear a WORD of encouragement or be shown kindness. He knows that he will die in the middle of NO WHERE. It's the only safe place for Mephibosheth to hide because no one spends any time or takes their vacation in "nowhere."

Mephibosheth lived his life always looking over his shoulder, wondering if the Kings men would find him and kill him. But he had some other issues that he had to live with as well. He was crippled. He had been dropped as a baby. He became crippled because someone else stumbled. His nurse stumbled and he got hurt. They both fell, but she walked away.

The story tells us that David asked if **"... anyone (was) still alive from Saul's family? If so, I want to show God's kindness to them in any way I can."** This gives us a clear look into the heart of this King. For

David, kindness was more important than revenge.

One of the lessons we can learn from this story is that – “everyone has a story.” It’s really easy to look at people and make an assumption about their situation or live with judgement towards them because of who they are or what they have done. David as King had every right to seek revenge but instead he chose to extend kindness.

Mephibosheth did not deserve David’s kindness just like we don’t deserve God’s kindness. We tend to show kindness to people because we think they deserve it. But it’s different in God’s Kingdom. His kindness towards us is undeserved. God showed his kindness to us by sending His Son Jesus to save us from our sins, even though we didn’t deserve it. God saw our need and gave us what we needed without us ever even asking. That is what real kindness is, ***it is the ability to recognize the needs of others and then take steps to meet those needs.***

Did you notice that Mephibosheth lived out his life sitting every day at the table of the King? That table could be a larger metaphor for our lives. It illustrates the places that we play, work, eat, and rest and it should remind us to always be asking the same question that David asked – “*Is there anyone that I can show kindness to?*”

- **Who can you invite to your table today?**
- **Who is it in your life that needs to be shown an act of kindness?**

May we respond to the heart of the King and ask Him to develop in us the same kindness to those around us that He has shown to us.

FEED YOURSELF

Take out your journal and complete the following instructions.

QUESTION: Where in my life and who in my life do I need to show kindness to?

READ: Jeremiah 9:24, Luke 6:35, Ephesians 4:32

ASK & JOURNAL: Lord is there a specific situation or person you want me to show kindness to? In what way would you like me to show kindness to them? Listen and obey what He shows you.

PRAY: Pray for anyone in your life that you would consider an enemy. Pray for God to bless them and shower them with Kindness.

DAY 12

GROW IN PERSEVERANCE

Have you ever given up on something? Sometimes it’s hard to keep going isn’t it? But moving forward is a key part of growing our character. God calls us not give up because He knows that when we persevere something happens in our lives that cause us to become more like Jesus.

In **2 Timothy 4:6-7** Paul is coaching a young man named Timothy on how to be an effective minister of the Gospel. The Apostle Paul was a man of incredible perseverance. Read through the book of Acts and you will see what this guy went through and yet how strong and mature he became because he did not give up. And what he says to Timothy gives us some insight how perseverance grows our roots deep and keeps our faith firm.

“As for me, my life has already been poured out as an offering to God. The time of my death is near. 7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, and I have remained faithful” (2 Timothy 4:6-7)

Paul teaches Timothy (and us) three things that will help develop the characteristic of perseverance in our lives. The first thing he tells us to do is to **FIGHT GOOD FIGHTS!** Have you ever been in a fight before? I’ve been in a few fights over my lifetime. OK, actually I’ve only been in one fist fight in my life. I was in grade 5 and it was on the basketball court during recess. I went up for a rebound and He punched me in the stomach. I was stunned. Then he punched me again. I started to cry. My feelings were hurt. Then I proceeded to put him in a headlock and began punching him as I sobbed uncontrollably. After a few seconds I let him go and then walked away.... still crying. It was not a GOOD fight!

But here’s the truth. Not all fights are bad. You and I are supposed to fight sometimes. There are some fights that we are supposed to engage in. The problem is we end up fighting the wrong fights. Too many people engage in fights that cause them to give up and give in. So then, what is a good fight and how does it develop perseverance in my life? Let me first give you some example of what the good fight is:

- **The good fight is when a single mom who is overworked, over stressed, financially lacking and personally lonely** still gets up every day and makes her kids breakfast and speaks to them in love. Who by herself gets them ready for school and reads and studies their

control. “Out of control” and “in control” people put power in their own hands. It’s only when we come under the control of something bigger than ourselves that we can begin to live a life of self-control.

A police man understands this principle. They have control and power but only because they are under the control of something bigger – the laws that govern us. That is why you and I cannot go and buy a car, paint it black and white, put lights on it and begin arresting people. That would be an out of control action. However, if we join the RCMP, get trained then issued a uniform and deployed to a community we have come under the authority of something bigger than ourselves.

When it comes to following Jesus we decide to come under the control of His Holy Spirit. This is a decision that we make to give up control of our lives so that we can be taught by Jesus Himself. It's inviting His Holy Spirit to help and equip us to "think clearly" so that we can live a self-controlled life.

FEED YOURSELF

Take out your journal and complete the following instructions.

READ: Proverbs 25:28, 2 Timothy 1:7, 1 Corinthians 10:13, Ephesians 6:12

QUESTION: Where in my life do I struggle with self-control?

ASK & JOURNAL: Lord, where do you want to discipline and correct me in regards to the area(s) in my life where I am not practicing self-control? What do you want me to do to become more self-controlled?

PRAY: Take time to focus on your personal prayer goals that you wrote on for the 21 days of prayer.

NOTES

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DAY 11

GROW IN SELF-CONTROL

Have you ever eaten a whole bag of Doritos by yourself in one sitting?
Have you ever said something that you wish you could take back?
Have you ever made an impulse purchase without thinking it through?
If you answered YES to any of those questions then you have experienced an out of control moment in your life. Those moments are quite common. We tend to follow our feelings rather than facts and find ourselves spinning out of control.

Now let me ask you a different question. **HOW WOULD YOUR LIFE BE DIFFERENT IF YOU CONSISTENTLY PRACTICED SELF-CONTROL?**

Imagine if every person in the entire world practiced self-control. Our world would be drastically different.

- We would have no addiction issues.
- There would be no immorality or affairs.
- People would live within their means and not be controlled by their finances and run over by debt.
- People would not be hurt by harsh words or be overcome with anger.
- There would be no physical or sexual abuse if people practiced self-control.

The truth is most of what we want and need in life comes from being self-controlled. But it's hard isn't it?

It's hard to control your anger or keep your mouth shut or not turn your computer on or not rack up your credit card. All those things take self-control.

The Apostle Peter tells us to, ***“Think clearly and practice self-control” (1 Peter 1:13)***. Thinking and practicing are very different than feeling and reacting. Self-control is the practice of what you know or what you think about. Knowledge tells me it's not a good idea to eat the whole bag of Doritos, self-control is the application or practice of that knowledge.

So how do you gain the kind of knowledge that helps you live a self-controlled life? If you want self-control you need to intentionally come under control. This is the key. Most people live their lives *“out of control”* or trying to be *“in control”* but neither of those approaches produces self-

much everyone he dealt with didn't deserve what He gave them. They knew that they deserved condemnation but Jesus would surprise them with His gentleness. He would correct and discipline and challenge people with the goal of restoring and renewing them. Jesus was and is gentle. Have you ever understood God as Gentle? When you understand and open yourself up to the fact that God is gentle with us something happens within us. Those hard parts of our heart begin to soften and those moments when we want to respond in a mean-spirited way becomes kinder. It always starts with the heart.

The Bible says in **Proverbs 15:1** that *"A gentle answer deflects anger, but harsh words make tempers flare."* I'm still learning this lesson but when I practice this principle and lower the volume and become less and less defensive or offended, I discover that my conversations and interactions become way more constructive.

So the challenge today is to be intentional about your tone, your words, your actions and ask the Holy Spirit to develop more deeply the character of gentleness within you.

FEED YOURSELF

Take out your journal and complete the following instructions.

QUESTION: Where in my life have I failed to display gentleness? Who in my life could I become gentler with?

READ: Philippians 4:5, Colossians 3:12, Matthew 11:29-30

ASK & JOURNAL: Lord is there anything specific you want to show me from these passages of Scripture? Any lesson you want to teach me or principle you want me to apply to my life?

PRAY: Thank God for His example of gentleness towards you and ask Him to produce in you're a more gentle Spirit. Pray for courage to show gentleness to the people in your life that you know you need to be gentler with.

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DAY 8

GROW IN GOODNESS

When was the last time you asked God to produce goodness in your life?

I couldn't think of the last time I prayed that. I have prayed for patience. I have prayed for self-control. I have asked for joy and peace and to be more loving. But I cannot remember the last time I prayed for goodness. And then it hit me. My understanding of goodness is very differently than how God defines it.

In **Luke 18** and **Mark 10**, we meet a very interesting guy. He was a young guy, a very affluent guy, and he thought he was good. He most likely had it all together. He was handsome, wore all the name brand clothes. Rode a high end camel and had a purebred donkey with surround sound stereo that he rode on the weekends. By all appearances this guy was living the good life. He had it all but still wanted more.

And so he comes to Jesus and asks him a question, **"Good teacher, what should I do to inherit eternal life?"**

Its interesting to me that his question has to do with what He needs to do to get eternal life. The success of this man has always been about having to do something to get something. That is why he is rich. He is a high achiever and so naturally in order to get eternal life he wants to know what he needs to do.

Instead of answering his question Jesus answers his with a question of His own. **"Why do you call me good?" Jesus asked him, "Only God is truly good."** Now right away we get the idea that Jesus has a different understanding of what it means to be good. Jesus goes on and answers his question by listing off some of the Ten Commandments, "You know the commandments. **You must not commit adultery. You must not murder. You must not steal. You must not testify falsely. Honor your father and mother.**"

Then the young rich guy says something to Jesus that is quite surprising. He looks at Jesus and basically lies to His face, **"I've obeyed all these commandments since I was young."** Really? Maybe he had amnesia and forgot about that time he stole the pen from the bank or lipped off his mom for telling him to clean up his room or told a half-truth in order to

make himself look better than he is. Or maybe he simply had convinced himself that he was better than he is and wanted to impress Jesus by telling Him that he had it all together.

Look at what happens next. ***“Looking at the man, Jesus felt genuine love for him. “There is still one thing you haven’t done” he told him. ‘Go and sell all your possessions and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.” At this the mans’ face fell, and he went away sad, for he had many possessions” (Mark 10:21)***

This rich young man missed the opportunity for goodness to be truly produced in his life. Because he chose to hang on to what he thought was good he missed the opportunity to discover and experience the God who is good.

Do you know how God produces goodness in our lives? By getting a firm grasp on our hearts. When we fully surrender our will to God is when goodness begins to be produced in our lives. That was the one thing missing in this guy’s life. God didn’t have his heart. What had his heart? Jesus pinpointed it. It was his money, it was his wealth, and it was his affluence. It was all about him. Goodness starts when God gets you and gets your heart and your affections. This guy’s possessions possessed him. What possesses you? What has your heart? What prevents you from surrendering your heart to God so that you can begin to be positioned to let the Holy Spirit produce the goodness of God in you?

The root of goodness begins to grow deep when we surrender our lives to God. What does that look like? It looks like a person who is becoming less and less selfish. Goodness is one of the key character traits God produces in us when we give Him control of our lives.

“But when the Holy Spirit controls our lives, he will produce this kind of fruit in us--love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness” (Galatians 5:22)

If you want to grow in goodness, you have to put yourself in the kind of environments where God can pour his goodness into you and build your soul. And you have to open yourself to the activity of God so that you can become “good for something” because anyone can be “good for nothing.” How do you become “Good for something?” You invite God through His Word to remind you of who you are. ***“For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works which God prepared in advance for us to do” (Ephesians 2:10).*** We are prepared to do good works. That’s why God created us.

DAY 10

GROW IN GENTLENESS

If you had a dashboard that indicated where you are in regards to gentleness what would it say? Would the needle be leaning far right illustrating the brashness of your life or would it lean far left describing you as gentle and meek. Or maybe you’re more in the middle. You can often be gentle but still can be known at times for responding with harsh words and actions. Where right now would the needle land on the gentleness gauge in your life? If you tend to be more brash and harsh why is that? And if you are described as a gentle person how did you wind up there? Often the way we are wired in regards to being gentle or harsh can be impacted by the way we were raised. Some come from loving calm homes while others came from more chaotic or competitive families. For others gentleness was misunderstood as weakness and so they talk and act much tougher than they want to be.

Gentleness is often the last thing on our character development list, yet the Holy Spirit wants us all to have the needle on our gauge move to the far right. **Philippians 4:5** says, *“Let everyone see that you are considerate in all you do.”* Another translation says, *“Let your gentleness be evident to all.”* When you read that verse does it describe your life? Before you answer that question don’t misunderstand the call to be gentle. To grow roots of gentleness in your life does not mean you have to stop being competitive or can no longer make tough decisions or hold strong convictions. It simply means that as we live our life and interact with people and opportunities we carry ourselves with gentleness in a way people can see.

Now you may be reading all this and don’t even know what to do with this character trait of gentleness. It may sound weak or even impossible for you to imagine yourself practicing. However, the key as with all character development has to do with our heart. It’s inviting God to work in the core of your being so that what comes out of you is what God intended and designed. When God does a work in our heart His work impacts our conversations, interactions and even disagreements. All these areas of our lives will have a display of gentleness in them.

The best way to know that the root of gentleness is growing deep in your life is to look at how you interact with people around you, especially difficult people and difficult conversations. Those moments when someone knows they should get what they deserve and instead you respond with a gentle answer or correction. Jesus did this all throughout his ministry. Pretty

to be a grump. I want to be a grouch. Sometimes I don't feel like serving my wife. Sometimes I don't feel like helping my kids out. Sometimes I don't feel like talking to people or preaching a message. Sometimes I don't feel like reading my Bible. Sometimes I don't feel like talking to God. Sometimes I don't feel like feeling!

But do you know what I'm discovering? When I don't feel like it is usually the time I need to do those things the most. And when I do those things even when I don't feel like it, God does something inside of me and He grows me up a little each time I persist in something that I don't feel like doing. That's the secret of growing in faithfulness. Faithfulness is a life long journey of moving towards and closer to Jesus and it is never to late to begin living a life of faithfulness.

FEED YOURSELF

Take out your journal and complete the following instructions.

READ: Hebrews 11

ASK & JOURNAL: Lord, show me from Hebrews 11 a truth or insight from those heroes of the faith that I can apply to my life and help me be more consistent, steadfast and faithful.

PRAY: Ask the Lord to show you a specific thing to pray for today

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God produces the character of goodness in our lives by leading us to do good things. And when you begin to do good, something starts to happen in your life. You're not so self-serving anymore. Selfish living and thinking begin to fade away.

FEED YOURSELF

Take out your journal and complete the following instructions.

READ: Luke 18:18-30, Mark 10:17-31

ASK & JOURNAL: Lord is there anything specific you want to show me from these passages of Scripture? Any lesson you want to teach me or principle you want me to apply to my life?

PRAY: Lord, show me how to practice goodness in my life today. Is there a specific good thing you want me to do for someone else today? Listen and obey.

GROW IN FAITHFULNESS

Pretty impressive.

They were consistent, steadfast and careful in keeping what they were entrusted with. If you are a follower of Jesus you are entrusted with faithfully believing that God is who He says He is even when it doesn't make sense or is uncomfortable. To grow in faithfulness is to trust God over what the culture or even our own thinking tells us. Faithfulness is believing that God works out everything for His good and glory. Faithfulness is trusting that God will work His will and ways in us. Faithfulness is believing that no matter what we face or go through here on earth is nothing compared to our future reward in heaven. In order to live with that kind of faithfulness is to be filled with the Holy Spirit and be submitted to Him.

Stop here and read Hebrews 11 (read it slowly and read the whole chapter)

I often don't feel like doing certain things. Sometimes I don't feel like being nice to people. Sometimes I don't feel like being friendly. Sometimes I want