

Immersed in God's Word, following Jesus – together

They took note that they had been with Jesus. ~ Acts 4:13

MON, March 4: Disciples Don't Worry about Tomorrow

Do not worry...

Jesus (in His *Sermon on the Mount*)



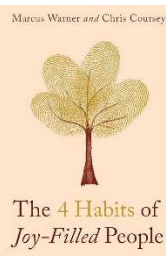
Our IMMERSION devotions take us to the middle of Jesus' teachings about worry. Worry is like a nutrient-sucking weed in the soil of the Christian's life. It robs Christians of energy that could otherwise go toward the growth of God's Word in our faith and practice of loving others – God and neighbor. There is a prayer from Wild at Heart Ministries titled *Becoming Good Soil* that shares this line: "I confess that I need to live more deeply in a habitat that allows my soul to thrive." It later follows up with a prayerful conclusion that is being used as our prayer for the week:



Prayer for the week: I give You the habitat of my life and I ask that You would bring it into alignment with the habitat that's right for my soul: Unforced rhythms of grace, learning to live freely and lightly, putting down everything that is heavy laden, everything that is ill-fitting, that doesn't fit me. Help me to be comfortable in my own skin. Help me to like me as You like me. Restore my soul. Integrate the whole person. God, I give You permission. I pray that You would cultivate the habits that are necessary so that I can be available to receive that which I can't arrange for. What do I need to abstain from? And what do I need to engage in? Teach me; I'm Your student. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Skill #4 from *The 4 Habits of Joy-Filled People*, Warner and Coursey

According to his website, Dr. [Daniel] Amen got the idea of ANTS (Automatic Negative Thoughts) after a particularly difficult day at the office. He came home only to find a swarm of ants all over his kitchen floor. As he dealt with the problem, it occurred to him that the swarm of ants mirrored the swarm of negative thoughts that often plagued his clients. His observation led to the idea that he needed to help his clients turn their brains into anteaters. The process worked so well he was soon decorating his office with anteaters. We would agree with Dr. Amen that it is a great idea to turn our brains into anteaters. We need to learn some skills and strategies for winning the battle in our minds or that battle of negative thoughts and unregulated feelings can consume us.... As Christians, Chris and I are convinced it helps to have a relationship with a God who is happy to see us and happy to go through suffering with us because it means we are never alone. It also helps to have a community of people who support each other in hard times. *pp. 148-149, 154*



Micro-Meditation: Psalm 51:1-2

Read vs.1-2 2x

Mark words or phrases that catch your attention.

Meditate: Talk with God about those words. Ask him to impress things on your heart and mind. Write them down.

1 Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your unfailing love;
according to your great compassion
blot out my transgressions.
2 Wash away all my iniquity
and cleanse me from my sin.



Pondering Point: *According to your unfailing love, O God...* How many consecutive days has God continued to love you? May His unfailing love inspire an increasingly greater love to Him and to your neighbor.

Tuesday, Mar 5: God's Mission Seen in Matthew 6:33-34

Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness and all these things will be given to you as well.

~ Jesus, Matthew 16:33

A person may choose to debate with God as to what “thriving” looks or feels like, but there is little question that God has a desire to see us thrive. Jesus speaks of wanting to give us life abundantly (John 10); God knows what we need; He has even told us not to worry about what others chase after because He will make sure that they are given to us. He calls for our focus to be seeking His kingdom and His righteousness—the rest, which we humans are often inclined to focus on, is promised to follow as we put Him first.

Prayer Prompt: For a meditative moment, listen to the Casting Crowns song *Thrive*. Here are a few of the lyrics:



*We know we were made for so much more
Than ordinary lives*

It's time for us to more than just survive

We were made to thrive

Into Your word we're digging deep to know our Father's heart.

Micro-Meditation: Psalm 51:1-2

Ps 51:1 **Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your unfailing love;**

according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions.

Teaching or Command of God:

The Holy Spirit adds: “Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more.”

And where these have been forgiven,
sacrifice for sin is no longer necessary.

Hebrews 10:17-18



THE PROMISE

Ephesians 1:7-8a

In [Christ Jesus] we have redemption
through his blood, the forgiveness of sins,
in accordance with the riches
of God's grace that he lavished on us.



Pondering Point: *According to your unfailing love, O God, have mercy on me.* Mercy can be defined as withholding of that which is deserved, such as a punishment or wrath. How does this definition fit your relationship with God?

Wednesday, March 6: Our Identity in Christ

- **In Christ all things that we need will be given to us as we seek God and His righteousness first.**

I suppose at some point a question should be asked: Do you believe that, if you seek (first) God and His righteousness, He will provide all that you need to thrive? Do you believe that He will provide you with an abundant life as promised? If so, then how do you put yourself in a position to experience this? Rather than simply stop here and turn to whatever you were going to do next, take time to ponder *with the Lord* what it would take for your soul – for you – to thrive spiritually and then by extension for the rest of you to thrive as well: physically, emotionally, psychologically and relationally.



Prayer: Father God, I want to thrive. I am not sure that You and I have the same version of thriving in mind. But I desire to align my idea of thriving with Yours that I might find what You intend for my soul and by extension every other part of me that I might experience an abundance of life under Your grace and mercy and Holy Spirit's leadership. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

Micro-Meditation: Psalm 51:1-2

Ps 51:1 Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love;
according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions.

Teaching or Command of God:

Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins".

Matthew 26:27-28



THE PROMISE

But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light,
we have fellowship with one another and
1 John 1:7 the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.



Pondering Point: *Blot out my transgressions.* To blot out means to smear out or obliterate, such as off a list or from one's memory. God keeping no record of your sins. Are you keeping a record of sins – yours or others? Let them go.

Thursday, March 7

Re-Center around God

Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.
1 Peter 5:6-7

To thrive in one's faith walk and life, consider these agricultural descriptions: To be rooted and suited and fruited.

- Rooted in Christ and His Word (see Psalm 1)
- Suited as soil for productive growth (see Matthew 13)
- Fruited as a result of a connection to Jesus (see John 15)

Sometimes (maybe *all* the time) the pathway to thriving is humility before God, trusting that He will lift you up in His time, in His way, with His mighty hand. The best way to handle any worry is to give it to Him in prayer and keep giving it to Him.



Review: Am I rooted in God? His love, joy, peace?

Am I suitable soil?

Am I bearing fruit? His love, joy, peace?



Repent: Do I need to repent? Do my roots need to run deeper? Are the best energies of my "soil" being used in connection with God's Word or spent in other areas? Is my connection to Jesus evident through the fruits of the Spirit being present or absent in your life?



Return: Pray for deep roots in the Spirit, good soil for the Father to work with, and healthy fruit stemming from your abiding in Jesus.

Micro-Meditation: Psalm 51:1-2

Ps 51:2 **Wash away all my iniquity**
and cleanse me from my sin.

Teaching or Command of God:

Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word... *Ephesians 5:25b-26*



THE PROMISE

How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!

Hebrews 9:14



Pondering Point: *Have mercy on me, O God (vs 1) and wash away all my iniquity (vs 2)* can draw allusion to our baptism. There, through Jesus, God promises total release from sin and death. Let your conscience be free to serve God without fear.

Friday, Mar 8: Discipleship Point from Matthew 6:33-34

Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness and all these things will be given to you as well. ~ Jesus, Matthew 16:33

As a follow-up of last week's discipleship point of becoming good soil, it's good to ask what it will take to put ourselves in a position for our souls to thrive, to allow God to put our souls in position to thrive. What follows is not an answer to create that environment, but a question to cause you to consider what it will take to provide such an environment. It is taken from Ransomed Heart Ministries prayer entitled *Becoming Good Soil*, particularly the line, "I confess that I need to live more deeply in a habitat that allows my soul to thrive." Ask yourself: Have I built a habitat in my world that allows or even induces my soul to thrive? What could I do differently to help my soul further flourish and prosper?



Discipleship Prayer: Father God, I want to flourish as Your child; I am willing to humble myself under Your mighty hand

and let You shape my world, my “soil,” in order to better accommodate the presence of Your word in my life. Bring it on; bring it in; let it grow; let me grow in Jesus’ name. Amen.

Micro-Group Connections: A Disciple’s Lifestyle



Micro-Group Moment (MGM):
Considering a life of **VIGILANCE** as
a case for participating in Micro-Groups:



*Above all else, guard your heart,
for everything you do flows from it.*

Proverbs 4:23



Pondering Point: There are positive and negative actions to remaining vigilant as followers of Jesus. From a **positive** or adding-into-life view, think of being in God’s Word, in worship and prayer, or in relationship with other people who are pursuing God. These are three necessities we speak about in following Jesus. From a **negative** or deleting-from-life perspective, think of limiting certain activities that vie for or get in the way of time with God, such as social media engagement, entertainment practices, or time-consuming habits (or addictions!?).

Vigilance

The quality of being
alert and watchful

- Where are you currently being vigilant with added-in parts of the Christian life?
- Where have you been negligent rather than vigilant about God’s Word, prayer, and fostering relationships?
- Where are you currently being vigilant about managing the deleting or “negative” facet of the Christian life?
- Where have you been negligent rather than vigilant about letting things come between you and God?



Concluding Prayer prompt: As is appropriate to your situation, thank God for your church family connections or ask Him to bring you into a church family through spiritual mentoring at Micro, Small and/or Large Group arenas.

Micro-Meditation: Psalm 51:1-2

Ps 51:2 Wash away all my iniquity and **cleanse me from my sin.**

Teaching or Command of God:

When the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit...



Titus 3:4-5

THE PROMISE

Ezekiel 36:25-26

I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you;



Pondering Point: Though you are a sinner, you are clean.

This is the kindness and love of God in action through your Savior Jesus. In fact, you have a new heart and a new spirit with which to praise God. So PRAISE GOD in this moment.

Saturday, March 9: Scripture's Story for the Week

Jesus
Calms the Storm
Matthew 8:23-27





Pondering Point: Read Matthew 8:23-27. Anne Murray referenced the above bible story in her now-classic song *Put Your Hand in the Hand*. Few of us have actually been on a boat with waves crashing over it; we may have to engage our imagination to connect with this story literally. But metaphorically most can likely envision a time when we felt wave after wave of troubling issues crash over us with no seeming end in sight. Even with this type of “storm” it is helpful to have the sense that you can “*put your hand in the hand of the man who calmed the sea.*” The disciples were already following Jesus when the storm hit – and had already put their lives in Jesus’ hands – a good call to be sure. But just because you’re following Jesus doesn’t mean you won’t end up in storms – nor that those storm-swept waves won’t continue to crash over you. We don’t automatically have strong faith merely because we follow Jesus. Faith practiced is faith growing.



Pray for a growing faith and -- if you have a printed copy -- do so while coloring the illustration above – and enjoy it!

Sunday, Mar 10: Call to worship God, to gather together

I will give thanks to the Lord with my whole heart; I will recount all of your wonderful deeds. I will be glad and exult in you; I will sing praise to your name, Most High. Psalm 9:1-2

Many Spirit-filled authors have exhausted the thesaurus in order to describe God with the glory he deserves. His perfect holiness, by definition, assures us that our words can't contain him. Isn't it a comfort to worship a God we cannot exaggerate? ~ Francis Chan



Prayer prompt: Father God, help us to have the kind of strength and faith that knows how to put our lives in your hands, or as the Anne Murray song says, to put our “*hand in the hand of*” our Lord Jesus. While it would be nice to have a world with no crashing waves, that might be a bit unrealistic. Help us not worry about storms, but to know that You will help us get through them when they come. That way we can focus on today and not on what we can't control in the future... in Jesus’ name. Amen.