

LOVE SCARED LONELY
PRICES WHY BUSYNESS \$ sell!
NO? \$ HEART DEBT PAIN
WORK WORTH MARRIAGE GRIEF
EYES

21+ DAYS OF PRAYER

21 AUTHORS
21 DEVOS
21 MINUTES
21 DAYS

SOCIAL MEDIA CAREER MONEY = ANXIETY
BOSS MINISTRY! # VACATION SCHOOL
OVERTIME + FRIENDS ADDICTION x DEPRESS
HELPING NETFL PARENTS SICKNESS



REVIVE CHURCH

HEY FRIEND!

If you attend Revive, you'll know some of the authors in this book. And if you're like me, as you read their stories, you can't help but hear their voices. Drew, our next-generation pastor, writes about the surprise meeting between Jesus and a fisherman named Peter. As I read it, Drew's encouraging and energetic voice echoes in my head. Brittany, who leads our first impressions ministry, writes about the man born blind. You can hear her sweet voice and sense her smiling as you read her words! And, Serenity, the youngest author in this year's booklet, brings a young adult perspective to the story of Job. I can hear her heart and her expressions as I read her words.

In the same way that I hear the voice of my friends when I read their words, I want to hear the voice of God when I read His words! I want to experience His heart and motivation for each interaction that He has with man.

For the next 21+ days, you're going to be reading about ways that God interacts with humans. Starting with Adam in the garden and continuing through some powerful New Testament stories, we get to see God speaking directly to His creation. My prayer is that each of us gets a little better understanding of God's desire to commune with us. For sure, He wants to hear our prayers.

But He also wants us to hear from Him when He responds!

I invite you to take these 21+ days seriously. Set aside the time, turn off the chaos of a screen, and read about an eternal God that shares a conversation with someone just like us. I hope by the end of these 21 days, that you not only read about His conversations, but that you have one yourself!

WORSHIPPING.
DUSTY



**"YOU WILL SEEK ME
AND FIND ME
WHEN YOU SEEK
ME WITH
ALL YOUR HEART."
JEREMIAH 29:13**

Imagine God is your roommate. Every meal together you're having a deep conversation with the Creator of the universe. Your interactions are not just amazing because you can't wait to share them with a friend or on social media, but meaningful because they go straight to your heart and make you feel both known and challenged.

What if you work at the same place? You and God carpool together discussing the projects of the day. Your cubicles are side by side and sometimes God even asks for your creative input. That feels strange, but you're honored and excited to share. And He loves your ideas! "YES! Let's do that!"

I can't imagine a better existence. Every moment feels like walking with eternity. Confidence, direction, peace and joy: they overflow out of God and into your daily life.

This is how Adam lived before the fall of man – sharing life in Eden with the Creator of the universe. Look at this snippet of God and Adam working together in the garden.

Now the Lord God had formed out of the ground all the wild animals and all the birds in the sky. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds in the sky and all the wild animals.
Genesis 2:19

I love Adam's partnership with God. Not only did God allow him to pick the names of the animals, this says God *brought* them to the man. In my American, cinema-soaked brain, I see Adam and God standing side by side. Their arms are crossed as they stare at a little furry creature with floppy ears and long back feet. It's hopping around the clearing a few feet in front of them. "What do you think?" God asks. "What about...*rabbit*?" Adam responds. "Great! These will be called rabbits." God continues, "Wait 'til you see this next one. It has feet like a rabbit, but it bounces around upright. *And* I gave it a built-in pocket to carry it's young!"

How much fun would these conversations be!? Now, I know they didn't speak English and who knows how many of the animals Adam named in that first go-round, but this amazing collaboration between God and man feels so life giving!

Through the next 21+ days, you're going to read amazing conversations between God and man. Some people were **surprised** God showed up to speak to them. Some characters were **seeking** God and found Him. Several were **set apart** by God to accomplish a huge purpose. They all got to share a heart-to-heart dialogue with God Almighty. Our goal as you read through these devotions is that you're encouraged to have more conversations with God. He is a great roommate as we abide with Him. We just have to take the time to be fully present and hear what He has to say!

Prayer: Lord, be ever present with me in the next 21 days, at home, in the car, and at work. I want real conversations with You! Help me hear You speak. Reveal Your heart to me! Amen.

START BY READING JOHN 4:1-26

The first thing I remember about Jesus was how much I loved Him; and how much I wanted to please Him – and people in general. That didn't last long as the eager-to-please little girl felt the sting of a fallen world. I allowed the pain it brought to turn me into a girl with hateful rage and resentment, not only for those who caused me pain but especially for God.

Regardless of how I felt about Him, He continued to call out to me. He showed up repeatedly, and I always took the glory. My life, even then, was knee-deep in miracles, but I still refused to let go of my anger. Walker Hayes says it best, "I was a masterful sinner in need of a Savior whose love is unconditionally crazy." No specific moment brought change to my life. It was a slow progression, a deepening of trust and love that led me to surrender because He wanted me to come willingly or not at all.

This kind of love and devotion is the way God has surprised me in my life. You may think these stories have no similarities, but I would urge you to continue reading until verse 42. The focus is usually on this unnamed woman being promiscuous, socially ruined, and not worthy of anyone, let alone Jesus. While this is the world's truth for her, I would like to change our perspective from one of social scandal to a view of the spiritual.

This is the first time Jesus reveals Himself as Messiah, right there sitting at a well, but He doesn't just come out and say it. **He waits for her.** When she arrives, He starts the conversation by showing His humanity, admitting He is thirsty. Even in her "sinner state," she has something to offer. When He does start naming her sin, it's done without shaming and condemning. She leaves feeling seen. She knew He saw her for who she was, and **HE LOVED HER!**

This affects her so much that she drops her task, forgets everything that kept her feeling isolated from her community, and tells **EVERYONE** about Messiah! Scripture says He stays to validate her proclamation, the city believes "because of the woman's testimony," and "because of Jesus' words, many more became believers."

How long has Jesus been waiting at the well for you? Are you willing to step out in your own sinful state, regardless of stereotypes, and share what Messiah has done in your life? You still have something to offer. You can choose to let go of your former life and carry the cross instead.

Then Jesus declared, "I, the one speaking to you—I am He" John 4:26

Prayer: Messiah, words could never express my gratitude that **You** waited for **me** at the well. Thank You for showing me that I have something to offer, whether I realize it or not. Help me to have the courage to step out in Your Name and tell others of the things You have done in and for me. In those moments that I falter, let me be yet another example of Your unending grace. My hands may be empty, but I offer myself to You. It's in Your Name that I pray, Jesus. Amen.

START BY READING EXODUS 3:1-17**Who am I?**

That question has lingered for centuries in the minds of many - I would venture that nearly every person on earth has pondered this at some point! While we may commonly associate this question of identity with the teenage or young adult years, variations of it creep into our thoughts throughout all phases of life. **Who am I** that I have to work in this job? **Who am I** that God wants me to share my testimony with others? **Who am I** that I have to grieve the loss of a friend? Often when we ask, "Who am I that I have to do XYZ," what we are really asking is, "Why me?" Whether this comes from a place of self-pity, low self-esteem, pride, or fear, we are focused on the wrong thing.

God said to Moses, "I am who I am. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I am has sent me to you.'" Genesis 3:14

In verse 11, we see Moses ask this question of God. Contextually, we assume that his question is based on a feeling of being unworthy (maybe you can relate to this feeling). At this time, Moses was a shepherd in a desert - not a man of great wealth or status one would expect to go

speak to the ruler of a nation. Additionally, some scholars believe that Moses had a type of speech impediment based on his later references to being "slow of speech and tongue." Regardless of his weaknesses, God used Moses in a mighty way! God spoke through Moses to Pharaoh, performed signs through him, and used him to guide His people out of slavery. It wasn't about Moses' insecurities - and it's not about ours! Go back and reread God's answers to Moses' question "Who am I..." in verses 12 and 14.

"I will be with you"

"I AM WHO I AM".

It's not about who we are - it's about **who God is**. Do you know Him? Do you trust Him to use you for **His** plans?

Prayer: Father,

Help me to know You more. Show me the spaces I have believed lies about You and please replace those with the truth. Help me to fully surrender my insecurities, my fears, my vulnerabilities - and learn to trust more deeply in You. Give me faith in knowing that You walk with me. I long to walk even more closely.

Amen

START BY READING JUDGES 6

One of my favorite stories in the Old Testament is that of Gideon and the unexpected conversation that revealed a God-given identity and transformed a dire situation into a victorious outcome.

In the sixth chapter of Judges, the story begins with the Israelites suffering intense oppression and occupation of their territory by the evil Midianites, a consequence of the Hebrews' disobedience in worshipping other gods.

The brutality and widespread nature of this enemy rendered land cultivation nearly impossible due to encampments and destruction, leading to significant destitution among the people. In a state of desperation and hunger, Israel sought refuge in the mountains, constructing shelters within crevices, caves, and fortified areas to safeguard themselves.

One day, they reached their breaking point and called out to the Lord. He heard their cries and sent a prophet to remind them of His past deliverance, as experienced in exiting Egypt, when His powerful hand had granted them the promised land, along with the command to worship no other gods.

Next, God sent an angel who found Gideon secretly threshing wheat in a winepress to conceal it from the enemy. The divine message interrupted the silence, "The Lord is with you, mighty warrior." It's important to note that he was not chastised for disobedience but instead was called by his unique, God-given, assigned-in-his-mother's-womb, identity. *Mighty Warrior!* God

assured Gideon of His presence and addressed him by this name. Similarly, as bearers of God's image, we also possess a distinct identity instilled with purpose, which not only mirrors certain attributes of God's character but also encompasses the unique influence we are meant to impart to the world.

Gideon replied logically. While he recognized the accounts of God's miraculous actions, there is a sense that he remained resigned to the belief of being "abandoned" to the Midianites. Then the Lord turned to him and said, *"Go in the strength you have, and save Israel out of Midian's hand. Am I not sending you?"* (vs 14).

It's interesting that God "turned to him." The act of turning signifies a change in God's attitude, actions, or direction and is usually in response to human actions. Perhaps God's "turning" meant he opted for an alternative method to address Gideon's pessimistic perspective.

Nevertheless, God emboldened Gideon with the assurance of His presence, informed him of his divinely-given identity, and directed him with the strength of His presence, emphasizing that He was personally sending Gideon for the task.

When the angel of the Lord appeared to Gideon, he said, "The Lord is with you, mighty warrior." Judges 6:12

Prayer: Lord Jesus, reveal to me Your intentions for my life, what You call me, the name intricately designed within me in accordance with Your flawless plan. I am so grateful for the reassuring reminder of Your Presence and support. Empower me to move forward with confidence, drawing on the strength of the identity You have given me and the boundless love You provide. In Jesus' Mighty Name, Amen.

START BY READING MATTHEW 4:18-20

I really enjoy fishing: finding a place to sit on the side of a lake or a river; stringing up my pole with a hook and bait; hearing the whizzing of the reel before the hook and bait plop below the surface; leaning back in my fold-up chair as I wait for a nibble; keeping my mind quiet and clear in the waiting. I love fishing...but, to be transparent, I am not very good at it. I am not what one would call a skilled fisherman; I am skilled at *pretending* to be a fisherman. I even have the outfit to fuel the facade, goofy hat and all. I look but struggle to play the part.

And he said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men." Immediately they left their nets and followed him. **Matthew 4:19–20**

Our passage today centers around men who were not like me. These men spent their lives on the water. They relied on their skilled craft to make a living, fishing to pay the taxes of an empire known for its brutality and heavy-handed displays of power; the Romans invented crucifixion and even had to come up with a new word—*excruciating*—to describe the pain experienced by their form of execution.

The fishermen in our passage today were dependent upon their knowledge of how and where to fish in order to protect and provide for their families. Then, in Matthew 4:18-20, the

Messiah comes to these men with a simple but life-changing call: "Come, follow me." It was simple in verbiage but heavy in application. "Come, entrust me with all you have, all you know, and give up all you thought your lives would be to live my plan for you."

You see, friends, this challenge is not ordinary by any means. If followed fully, it changes everything. And what if they follow the call? Jesus goes on to say, "I will make you fishers of men." The question we should stop and ask ourselves here is this: How many of us would truly follow? How many of us would step out in faith, risking everything - provision, family history, reputation - to follow the Messiah? No matter if you are already in the boat with the Messiah or hesitantly clinging to your fishing pole and your previous life, seek God with me.

Prayer: Lord, take us where we need to go. Lead us to deeper, more intimate knowledge of You and Your words. Give us the strength to break away from what holds us back. We trust in You and You alone. In the name of Christ Jesus, the One and Only Messiah, Amen.

START BY READING GENESIS 16:7-13

A surprise is something we don't expect—something that catches us off guard.

Today, we look at **Hagar**.

An Egyptian slave in a Jewish household: **MARGINALIZED**
A woman stripped of control over her body, future, and life:
VICTIM

- Pregnant and alone: **VULNERABLE**
- Separated from family: **OUTSIDER, LONELY**
- Lashing out in pain: **HURTING, UNWISE**

And in her fear, she **ran**—true to her name, which means “to flee.”

But in her fleeing, **God surprised her**.

- He met her in her pain.
- He saw her when she felt unseen.
- He acknowledged her suffering.
- He **blessed** her and her son.

So she called the name of the Lord who spoke to her, “You are a God of seeing,” for she said, “Truly here I have seen Him who looks after me.” Genesis 16:13

What About You?

Have you been treated unfairly?
Overlooked? Taken advantage of? Pushed aside?

Maybe you've reacted in a way that felt justified but only made things worse.

Maybe you've run—avoiding the hard thing, walking away from people who care.

Or maybe someone you love has distanced themselves from God and godly people.

Can you pause? Be still. Breathe.

Pray these words from **Psalm 139:23-24**:

"Search me, O God, and know my heart!

Try me and know my thoughts.

See if there is any grievous way in me,
and lead me in the way everlasting."

Write a letter to God—tell Him your heart.

Then, write to yourself as if God was writing to you—reminding yourself what **He** says about your situation, your worth, and your future. You may not be looking for Him, but **He is looking for you**. And when you stop—**He will surprise you**.

A Blessing for the One Who Feels Unseen

May you know deep in your soul that you are never beyond God's sight.

May the One who found Hagar in the wilderness find you.

May He meet you in your pain, speak into your struggle, and remind you of your worth.

May you have the courage to stop, to breathe, and to listen—for even in the silence, His voice is near.

May His love surprise you in the places you least expect.

May His presence be your refuge when you feel alone.

You are not forgotten,

You are fully known, fully seen, and fully loved.

Go in peace, for the God who sees you goes with you.

START BY READING JOHN 9

I've never been a fan of the dark. Even in my 40's (much to my husband's annoyance) I still try to sleep with some light in our bedroom. He refused a night light, so we settled on a REALLY bright clock! It's amazing how even the smallest break in the darkness brings a sense of peace and calm to my soul.

Maybe you understand this feeling— not in the literal sense but the deeper, soul-level kind of way. What is your relationship with darkness?

Perhaps you've walked through seasons where the darkness felt all-consuming. A loss, a deep disappointment, a silent struggle you felt no one could understand. Maybe there's a part of your past—a hidden wound, a painful memory, a regret—that lingers in the shadows. Your darkness might not be something you dwell in all the time, but a place you avoid, an area you've learned to sidestep. Pain, shame, or fear that you don't let anyone, even God, touch. You tell yourself, "It's best to leave it in the past." But what if those very places—the ones we try to avoid—are the places where Jesus most wants to meet us?

In John 9, we meet a man who was well acquainted with darkness. Being born blind, darkness was all he ever knew...until the day Jesus walked by. With a mixture of spit and earth, Jesus anointed his eyes—touching the very place of blindness, the place of need. And suddenly, light flooded in. Jesus used this man's darkness for God's glory!

Do you feel like this man—stumbling through the unknown, longing for clarity, for healing, for an answer to the darkness

around or within you? So often, we aim to hide these dark prisons in our souls, but what if the dark corners of our hearts aren't places of condemnation but invitation?

We often fear that bringing our darkness to God will lead to disappointment or rejection. But Scripture tells a different story:

- "When I sit in darkness, the Lord will be a light to me."
Micah 7:8
- "You light a lamp for me. The Lord, my God, lights up my darkness." Psalm 18:28
- "Even the darkness is not dark to You; the night is bright as the day." Psalm 139:11-12
- "Let him who walks in darkness and has no light trust in the name of the Lord and rely on His God." Isaiah 50:10

We often want to escape the darkness, to pretend it doesn't exist, to find an easy way around it. But not Jesus! He steps into it. He kneels down into our darkness. Just like the blind man, Jesus touches the very place of our blindness, our wounds, our hidden grief. **And He does not recoil.** He is not intimidated by our struggles or repulsed by our past. He comes with compassion and healing. In His hands, even the darkest places can bring forth beauty and light. Intimacy and freedom.

**One thing I do know, that though I was blind,
now I see. John 9:25b**

St. Augustine once said, "In my deepest wounds, I saw your glory, and it astounded me." What if your darkness—the very thing you fear or try to avoid—could become a display of His glorious light?

Prayer: Lord, I invite You into any dark places of my life. Would you meet me there? Bring Your healing touch, and use even this for Your glory. Amen.

START BY READING ACTS 9:1-9

Imagine for a moment, it's the end of a really long and difficult week. It feels like nothing has gone right. It's Friday, and all you can think about is the weekend and some much-needed down time. You go to lunch and, on this particular day, you just "randomly" happen to head down the street to your favorite taco spot. You are eating lunch, minding your business, dreaming of what you will do for the weekend. All of a sudden, across the restaurant, you hear commotion. Someone is choking. While you have had some basic first aid training, you are sure that somebody in this restaurant is more equipped, has more experience, and certainly has more confidence than you do. You wait for what feels like an hour, which is only a few moments. You realize that nobody is doing anything. Your heart begins to race. You grasp that this is life or death, and if you don't go help, the young lady might choke to death. The next 60 seconds or so is a blur. Suddenly everyone around you is thanking you and praising you for a job well done. You are in complete shock. You did it. You saved her life.

"I am Jesus, who you are persecuting", he replied. "Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."

Acts 9:5b-6

We often get down on ourselves. We view our lives through a filter of disappointment, failure, and all of our flaws. We see the parts of ourselves that we dislike and decide we are "worthless."

We don't feel confident to take a big step like helping a choking person. We've all heard and likely used the saying, "We are our own worst critics." Friends, this is not the person who God sees. God sees you through a different lens. One of strength, brilliance, and success. Over and over again in the Scriptures, we see God using people who, from all worldly perspectives, are messed up and unusable for anything good. People who have made mistakes and fallen short of God's glory. Here's the good news: God is so much bigger than our failures and shortcomings.

Take for example, the Apostle Paul. Before he became one of the greatest men in the Bible, he made mistakes. In Acts 9:1 we see that "Saul" (before he became Paul) on his way to Damascus, *"was breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord."* Then in verse 4 he meets Jesus. Jesus asks, *"Saul, why are you persecuting me?"* (in other words, why was he working against God). Saul's life was flipped completely upside down and, from that point on God, used him in massive ways to bring the Kingdom of Heaven to earth. No matter what mistakes we've made. No matter how bad we've messed things up, God can use us. This shouldn't surprise us. God is bigger than our mistakes and shortcomings.

Prayer: Lord, I pray that today I would have the humility to confess my mistakes, the understanding to know that You are so much bigger than my past, and the faith to believe that You can use me, despite my failures. I thank You, God, that You choose to use messy, broken people to accomplish greatness. Use me today for Your Kingdom purposes, and may You receive all the glory! In Jesus Name.

START BY READING ACTS 9:10-19

We encounter Ananias as an ordinary follower of Jesus, hearing from God and proceeding to interact with Him. While the passage does not specify this, I don't think it's a stretch to imagine that he was just going about his ordinary daily rhythms such as work or prayer. He certainly does not seem surprised by a vision and being called by name. And he immediately recognizes the voice as the Lord's. Ananias apparently feels quite free to raise his objections to what the God of the Universe is asking of him. His skepticism seems to stem not from the specificity of the instructions but rather with being sent into what feels like enemy territory.

I love that God does not rebuke Ananias for raising objections. And I am challenged by the surrender we see in this ordinary man.

I am challenged by the surrender in this ordinary man. It is reminiscent of Jesus when He prays, "Father, all things are possible for you. Remove this cup from me. *Yet not what I will, but what you will*" (Mark 14:36 ESV). If our heart is in a posture of *trusting* God and is *willing to obey* (even if what He asks feels too hard) I believe there is freedom to dialogue with Him about our hesitations and doubts. Notice the Lord does not rebuke Ananias for raising his objections. He even offers some further explanation, letting Ananias in on His divine purposes. He didn't have to do that.

When you read this in the context of the larger narrative, it is

So Ananias departed and entered the house. And laying his hands on him he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road by which you came has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit."

Acts 9:17

very clear that while Ananias was an ordinary man (not an apostle or prophet but simply a disciple, just like you and me) he was, nevertheless, set apart for an important task in the life story of one of the main authors of the New Testament (the apostle Paul). What if he had responded like Jonah initially did (run the opposite direction, refusing to do what God asked)? God's purposes would still have prevailed, but Ananias would have missed out!

Has God been asking you to do something that you aren't so sure about? Consider letting this narrative invite you into a two way conversation where you voice your concerns, fears, uncertainties, hesitations. But do this from a heart that trusts your Father: trusts that He is *good* and is *for* you and not against you; trusts that by His indwelling Spirit He will supply you with all you need to walk in obedience to Him; trusts that He may have surprises in store for you that you wouldn't want to miss out on.

Prayer: Father, Jesus, Holy Spirit, I trust You. I believe that You are for me and not against me and that you desire good for me. I am willing to follow where You lead, but I'm wondering if You would be willing to shed more light or bring some interpretation to these particular areas that are giving me pause. Could You say more about...

START BY READING JOB 31:35-37 AND JOB 38:1-4

As kids, my older brother was diligent to remind me that “life isn't fair,” justifying how often he got more treats or chose the TV shows we watched. I didn't assume I had done wrong or was less worthy in comparison, I just knew “life isn't fair.” As we grow up, however, unfairness becomes a battle; loss, judgement, finances, you name it. The struggles can become consuming. Like Job, I find myself pleading with God for justice—trying to conceptualize God's infinite wisdom within my finite brain. That desire for answers is something many of us relate to. We long to hear the reasons behind our suffering and crave justice when life feels unfair.

When Job demanded to understand his suffering, God challenged His perspective. God created the earth, laid its foundations, and set the heavens in motion—every minor detail crafted to perfection, as the stars sang in celebration. We are His image bearers within this divine creation, yet we cannot begin to compare to the architect.

In God's response, we are reminded of a simple truth. God's good is beyond our comprehension. While we strive for righteousness, we cannot match God's perfect holiness and justice. Truth calls us into humility, acknowledging that our understanding is finite, and we must trust in God's goodness even when we don't have all the answers.

“Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Tell me, if you know so much.”

Job 38:4

Job, in his suffering, had been questioning God's justice, but God reminded him that true understanding of justice, purpose, and creation is His alone.

Their conversation invites us to examine *our* hearts. When we face trials or injustice, how do we respond? Do we seek answers and demand explanations? Or do we come to terms with our limitations and acknowledge the greatness of God's plan? His sovereignty is both humbling and comforting. Suffering reminds us that God's ways are beyond our comprehension, but they are always good, always wise, and always just.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, Your ways are beyond our understanding. Help us to trust in Your infinite wisdom, Your perfect justice, and Your unfailing goodness. We acknowledge that You are Creator, and we are Your creation. May Your presence and Your voice comfort us in struggles, and may we find rest in the assurance that You are working all things together for good. Teach us humility – to bow before Your greatness, rejoicing that You alone are truly God. Thank You for being our Father and watching over our every moment.

What a gift to live a life ordained by You—an everlasting love from an everlasting God! In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

START BY READING 1 SAMUEL 3

How would you respond if God called your name, waking you from a sound sleep? Pretty dramatic, right? Yet this is how God first introduced Himself to young Samuel.

Understandably, Samuel assumed it was his boss (Eli) who was calling him. Only after the third time did Eli discern that it must be God who was calling the boy, and advised Samuel to answer and invite the Lord to speak.

Most of us would probably do much as Samuel did: attribute a natural source for a voice calling to us in the night, due to the unusual nature of Samuel's encounter.

There are still times God uses dramatic means to reach those He has called, particularly in areas of the world where there isn't ready access to the Gospel; or for those in the Western world, who are so steeped in deception and sin that they would never seek Him out.

There are increasing testimonies about Jesus revealing Himself in dreams, visions, audible voices, and miracles to those whom He is calling. Yet this isn't the norm for most.

God desires for us to hear Him, and knows and loves all so intimately, that He knows exactly what is needed for each individual to be able to hear. He has a call and purpose for each of us, just as He did in Samuel's life.

So ready is God to speak that Romans 10:1 reads, "I revealed Myself to those who did not ask for Me," and Isaiah 65:24 states, "Before you call, I will answer you."

Often as we grow in our spiritual walk, we learn how to discern God's voice. Through those times, many have heard what they have been called to do in the Kingdom. Even if we may not think we hear God, if we have chosen Jesus as Lord and received forgiveness of sin through Him, we have heard His voice already.

And the Lord came and called as before, "Samuel! Samuel!" And Samuel replied, "Speak, your servant is listening." **1 Samuel 3:10**

Samuel didn't know it was God calling his name; he needed assistance from Eli. It is often the same with us. We may not recognize God is speaking, since He commonly speaks with a still, quiet voice (1 Kings 19:11-13). We may get an inner urging or "feeling," and God frequently sends another to confirm God has indeed spoken. God helps us to hear.

Jeremiah 33:3 invites, "Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and mighty things you do not know."

Unlike Samuel, we have the Bible, the standard by which to measure what we think is from God, (whether a revelation, word, idea, or encounter). It is primarily through the scriptures that we are privileged to learn God's voice and heart!

Though we may be initially called by God in a dramatic way, scripture, prayer, discipleship, nature, and group prayer/fellowship, can help us learn to increasingly hear God's voice. It's always thrilling to hear another pray your own thoughts, have the Bible suddenly "open up" with revelation, be likeminded with others, or feel God speak through nature. I'm convinced God speaks often.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for loving me! Teach me what You have called me to. Open my ears to hear You, I long to hear Your voice!

START BY READING 1 KINGS 19:9-18

After the earthquake came a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper. When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave..."

1 Kings 19:12-13

The narrative of Elijah presents a profound study in divine manifestation and the nature of spiritual discernment. Elijah had just experienced God's holy fire from heaven after a dismal performance by the prophets of Baal. Elijah thought this would be the moment of national repentance, but it wasn't. Instead, he found himself in a state of profound despondency, fleeing the wrath of Jezebel. Elijah failed in the very point at which he was strongest, and that is where most men fail. Elijah, in his despair, begged for God to end his life and then hid in a cave.

God knew what the depressed and discouraged Elijah needed. He needed a *personal encounter with God*. However, God first responded with what he was not. Sometimes, in our moments of despair, we must first learn **where God is not** before we find out who He truly is. Elijah had just experienced God's holy fire, and yet that type of miraculous power is not how God chose to manifest before Elijah in his moment of despair. The final phenomenon was a marked contrast to the previous manifestations. God met Elijah in the **quiet whisper of a voice**,

instead of the earth-shaking phenomenon that had gone before. Yet, his presence was undeniable and powerful.

This shift from the spectacular to the subtle reveals a fundamental aspect of God's character: ***His presence is often discerned not in overwhelming displays, but in quiet, intimate communion.*** It is often the Lord's gentle whisper that brings the greatest change. The still voice of God speaking to the human heart will forever be more powerful than outward displays of power.

The divine query, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" served as a moment of profound self-examination. Elijah's response, a lament of his perceived failure, reveals a human tendency to measure spiritual efficacy by outward results. However, God's subsequent actions demonstrated that divine purpose transcends immediate outcomes.

Furthermore, God's response to Elijah's despair is characterized by both revelation and commission. The Lord did what perhaps was best of all for Elijah, He gave him some more work to do. He sent him off about his Master's business once again. This underscores the restorative power of divine engagement and the importance of active participation in God's redemptive work.

Prayer:

Lord, forgive my tendency to seek you in grand displays, overlooking the subtlety of your presence. Grant me a discerning heart, able to hear your quiet whisper amidst life's distractions. Enable me to recognize your presence in moments of stillness and to respond with humble reverence. Thank you for your continued engagement, for your restoration, and for calling me back into your purpose. Amen.

START BY READING JEREMIAH 1:1-19

Remember the first time you prayed? How old were you? Do you remember the first time someone prayed over you ... or a time when you felt an unction or impression from God? It is such a blessing to be able to talk to God; to tell Him how much He means; to acknowledge His greatness and omnipotence. Even more precious is to hear His voice - to know deep inside that He is speaking to you. Jeremiah had just such an experience; he heard God's voice.

When I was about 7 years old my parents asked me to watch our little sister while they were working in the field. I remember kneeling down to ask God for help. I had prayed every night by my bed reciting: "Now I lay me down to sleep..." But this was different; I had a specific request. It felt like talking to the wind. Prayer sometimes feels like that in the beginning of learning to pray - especially for a child. Later conversations make us aware of His presence and even, at times, become two-way conversations.

Jeremiah became familiar with God's voice. God's first call to set him apart is in Jeremiah 1. Jeremiah cried out that he was just a boy; he felt unable to answer this call. We don't know his age at the time, but we do know that this conversation with God was the first of many to follow. Throughout his lifetime, God called him to difficult circumstances. He was required to give messages of God's justice and essential warnings of invasion. His prophecies often brought physical suffering and rejection. As we study his life, we learn that the words given to him by God were accurate and proven true.

Those words were not only given for that time, but down through the ages his influence continues: in Psalm 139:14-16, King David referenced words from Jeremiah. David recognized the eternal sovereignty of the Creator who knew him before his parents gazed on him. Both Jeremiah and David received God's calling and purpose for their lives. Even today Jeremiah's conversations give us insight for understanding God: He knows events before they happen, He sees our lives and purpose even before we are born. God also calls us for a specific purpose. There is a plan; He knew it from the beginning even before we arrived! We have been set apart by Him! Ephesians 2:10 reminds us that we are His workmanship - created in Messiah Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand.

Jeremiah could not see his tomorrows... neither can we. But like Jeremiah, God has stretched out His hand with a specific call for our lives. God doesn't make mistakes... we are not too young, too old, or too inadequate. His touch and His Spirit make us qualified.

Prayer: Precious Father, thank you for the life of Jeremiah, for his obedience even when it was utterly difficult. We do not know our tomorrows, but You do. Please direct our paths; bring us to that place where You truly rule in our hearts in completeness. Help us to fulfill the call and purpose that You have for our lives. Thank you for setting us apart; separate us from anything in our lives that hinders us from fulfilling Your purpose.

"O Sovereign Lord," I said, "I can't speak for you! I'm too young!" The Lord replied, "Don't say, 'I'm too young,' for you must go wherever I send you and say whatever I tell you." **Jeremiah 1:6-7**

START BY READING THE BOOK OF JONAH

A man surviving in the belly of a fish for three days has long been the most difficult part of Jonah to digest. But there is a far more sensational claim made right from the start. This book is a conversation between the Creator of the universe and a human being. Notice the dialogue:

The word of the LORD came to Jonah 1:1

Then Jonah prayed to the LORD 2:1

The word of the LORD came to Jonah 3:1

He (Jonah) prayed to LORD 4:2

The LORD said 4:4

Jonah... begged with all his soul, saying 4:8

Then God said to Jonah 4:9

This is the boldest claim the book makes: That God not only speaks to, but listens to Jonah, as if Jonah's willingness to participate was in some way relevant or even essential to the divine plan. We see a sovereign God controlling the wind and waves and the heat of the sun. He controls everything from the great beasts of the sea to the tiniest worms of the field.

The word of the LORD came to Jonah... Jonah 1:1

He even controls life itself as a plant sprouts and grows at His beck and call. Yet the human condition is a peculiar one. The human

does not get manipulated or controlled but reasoned with. It is to the human that the word of the LORD comes. No other element can claim such a privilege. Jonah is a story about God over all nature save one, human nature, which sadly hears yet refuses to listen. Once Jonah prioritizes the “self” above the Word, the Word becomes mute, now God must communicate through circumstance. The storm is a megaphone to a deaf Jonah, affecting not only him but also those who are in the same boat. The word of the LORD does not return until after Jonah’s repentance. Once the death of the self takes place, the unlikely duo are back on speaking terms.

It turns out that God is a civil conversationalist. He doesn’t speak out of turn but always waits for Jonah’s response. God gets the first word as well as the last, but the last word here is in the form of a question, which means the ball is, again, in the reader’s court. What stage are you in in your own conversation with God? Whose turn is it to speak? Is God using His voice or circumstances to get your attention?

Prayer:

Lord, how awesome it is that you should choose to speak to me, to wait patiently for my response, and even to allow me to, at times, turn away. You are in control of all things, yet you do not force my will. Instead, you create space where my voice matters, where I am not a puppet, but a partner in the unfolding of Your will.

Grant me the humility to listen when you speak, and the courage to be open and honest as I respond. And as I engage your call to repentance, meet me in my moment of surrender.

In Christ’s name, Amen.

MARY, JESUS' MOTHER DAY 15

Alex Deon

START BY READING LUKE 1:26-38

The odds of winning any lottery are one in 300 million. Getting struck by lightning – one in 15,300. Being hit by a meteorite – one in 1.6 million. The odds of an immaculate conception are 0. God isn't just in the business of the improbable; He makes the impossible a reality.

In first century Jewish culture, Mary had little to no importance or influence in society. She was an unwed teenage girl. She was subservient to men and did not yet have a family or household to give her acclaim. She, societally, was no one. And God still chose her.

Mary was betrothed to Joseph, meaning she was on the cusp of attaining the pinnacle of her societal worth. Enter the angel Gabriel. "Greetings! [...] Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God." The Greek word translated here to favor is *charitoó*, which is also used in Ephesians 1:6; it is defined as God extending Himself to freely bestow grace. Jesus' purpose and story is overflowing with grace, evident even in his earthly conception: Giving grace to a woman. Mary was an improbable recipient of this favor. And still God chose her.

Then, Gabriel jumped from an improbable encounter to an impossible invitation. He revealed the Lord's plans to utilize her to fulfill prophecy and heal the severed connection between God and His people through the impossible: a virgin carrying the Son of God. While not inherently reflected in

Gabriel's message, this is an invitation. She was a willing participant, not a passive recipient. The Annunciation is the culmination of divine action, where God uses the humanity of Mary, and human response, Mary's acceptance. Even so, Mary was troubled. Who wouldn't be? And still God chose her.

Mary's response was a reasonable question: "How will this be?" Unlike so many questions after similar divine invitations, Mary asked a genuine question. She did not ask for a sign like Gideon, run away like Jonah, or balk at the plan like Sarah or Zechariah. Instead, she demonstrated investment by requesting explanation rather than justification. And her acceptance reflected her heart's posture: "Behold, I am a servant of the Lord. Let it be to me according to your word." She surrendered her flesh, her life to God's call. And because of this, God chose her.

Gabriel tells Mary, "For nothing will be impossible with God." A virgin carrying the human incarnation of God was made possible with God. Yet, it required Mary's willingness to heed God's call. What is God waiting for you to accept so He can use you? Read Luke 1:46-56, the Magnificat. Mary's response to her impossible call was rejoicing, humility, and thanksgiving. Her song is riddled with references to Old Testament promises, revealing an improbable education for a first century Jewish woman. How might God be preparing you now for a future call? What a gift that the improbable and the impossible cannot hold back God's hand!

Prayer: Father, we praise You for the improbable and impossible circumstances You use to bring about Your will. Thank you for inviting into Your plans. We pray for diligence in preparing our hearts for Your improbable and impossible calls. In Your powerful name, Amen.

START BY READING LUKE 3:21-22 AND MATTHEW 3:13-17

Can you picture the scene? John the Baptist was at the Jordan River, baptizing a large number of seekers, when Jesus requested that John baptize Him. John protested, saying that Jesus should baptize him instead. John had been declaring that One who was far greater was coming and that he (John) was unworthy to even lift Jesus' sandal. Why would the sinless lamb of God need to be baptized?

Old Testament High Priests were required to go through ritual cleansing before entering the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement. Perhaps Jesus, our great High Priest, underwent baptism as a symbolic washing to publicly consecrate himself for ministry. Or maybe by being baptized, Jesus was opening a symbolic doorway to a new kind of life through which He would be the first to walk.

When asked, Jesus answered, "It should be done for we must carry out all that God requires" (Matthew 3:15). This may have referenced fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies in Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel. Jesus didn't give a complicated theological explanation. It was a simple response but clearly unusual.

God may ask us to do unusual things, and we may know that He is speaking. How do you respond? React with resistance? Tap the brakes? Or need to know all the "hows," and "whys"?

God accomplishes unusual things in the way He knows is best. He does not use the same method every time and may not work in everybody's life the same way. Have you noticed? When He leads us, He does it His way! This may require more tolerance and breadth in our understanding of the different ways the Lord leads. We need to leave room for the unusual and let God work. Trust completely.

How did John respond?

He baptized Jesus! Then, as Jesus prayed, the heavens opened, the Holy Spirit descended, and God spoke! John's life purpose was fulfilled!

In 1886 during one of DL Moody's revival services, a young man stood and said, "I'm not quite sure – but I am going to trust, and I am going to obey." His declaration led to the words and lyrics of an often-sung hymn, "Trust and Obey."

Find an online version of "Trust and Obey." As you listen to the song, make it a conversation with God.

Prayer: God, am I trusting You like Jesus did, even when You call me to do unusual things? I want to do what you ask me to do. Holy Spirit I renew my commitment to trust You with everything in your life. Lead me so I can make Your heart glad and fulfill my purpose in this life.

START BY READING GENESIS 12:1-4

It's midnight, and a blazing light pierces through your window, blinding your tired eyes. A being unlike any you've ever seen is looking down at you, and in its possession is a novel-sized *Amazon Divine* package embossed with the words "Mission Details." You open the delivery to find maps, materials, and in-depth instructions telling you where to go for the next sixty years of your life with Christ. It's what many of us want: a direct, no-nonsense call from the Lord. We would leave everything in a heartbeat! But if it could be so easy, why doesn't He do it?

"But maybe I was made to be needy, to keep my soul by getting too far," says the song *Man on Fire* by Luke Bower. As Christians, we are often called with few instructions given and much faith required. Abraham received a promise and was directed toward "a land [God] will show you." David was told he would become king but spent decades fleeing and fighting for his life before inheriting the throne. Even the disciples of Jesus Christ received no GPS or earthly assurance—Christ simply asked, "Follow me."

It's a painfully simple truth: following Christ requires sacrificing our knowledge of where this journey will take each of us. It requires relinquishing our control and surrendering to His. God wants your "go" more than your "know." He wants you to have faith in the deep storms and the vast deserts. He wants to till the fields of our souls and plant His seeds to grow to fruition. The water your Father uses to grow you sits in the watering pail of faith. The water of sincere prayers, rich Bible studies, and fulfilling worship are strengthened by the continued

Abram went, as the Lord had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he set out from Harran.” Genesis 12:4

pursuit of light despite the darkness all around us. As stated in 2 Corinthians, “We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed.” We are His, therefore we go. How is Christ calling you to “go”?

Prayer: Father of Abraham, King David, and our Lord Jesus, I ask You to guide me as You have guided your people across scripture and history. Reveal to me the promises already spoken in Your Word, that I may put faith in You as Abraham once did. Be consistent with me, faithful despite my constant struggles as I seek Your call on my life. I may not know what land You are calling me to, but You have everything in the palm of Your hands. I lay down control. I pick up the cross. I follow after You. In Jesus name, amen.

START BY READING GENESIS 25:21-26

The question, "Why is this happening to me?" echoes through our lives. We often find ourselves questioning God's timing, wondering why our prayers seem unanswered, or why we face seemingly insurmountable challenges. Yet, in these moments, God invites us not to dwell on the "why," but to seek Him more deeply. He calls us to prayer, to meditation, and to patiently wait for His promises.

Isaac and Rebekah embody this call. Rebekah's barrenness was a significant trial, but Isaac's unwavering faith led him to persistent prayer. Historians suggest he prayed for nearly two decades. This prolonged waiting period tested his faith, a process God often uses for our spiritual growth. When answers seem elusive, we must anchor ourselves in trust. As Matthew Henry observed, "The fulfillment of God's promise is always sure, yet often slow. The faith of believers is tried, patience exercised, and mercies long waited for are more welcome when they come." In these times, we are called to sit and wait upon the Lord, trusting that He will reveal Himself in His perfect timing.

Furthermore, God's plans often unfold amidst difficulty. Rebekah's troubled pregnancy prompted her to seek wisdom from God, rather than simply demanding a solution. She inquired about the meaning of her situation, and God revealed His plan for her sons. Instead of asking God to remove the discomfort, she sought understanding. This example encourages us to do the same. In our trials, we should seek God for wisdom and insight, asking Him to reveal His purpose and how we can serve as vessels for His will.

The faith of Isaac and Rebekah is a powerful testament. Their story demonstrates that by remaining faithful and seeking God's

wisdom, we can witness the fulfillment of His promises. Today, let us take time to sit with God, asking for wisdom and guidance. Let us reflect on past experiences where God revealed Himself, even amidst difficulty and prolonged waiting.

Prayer: Dear Jesus, I invite You into this moment. I seek to sit with You, trusting in the hope of unanswered promises, knowing You will reveal Yourself in Your timing. I pray for growth and deeper connection with You during this waiting period. Replace my doubts with wisdom and understanding. Grant me peace, knowing Your promises are true and sure. Thank You for Your guidance. Teach me to listen patiently, with faith and encouragement, knowing You will never abandon me in difficult times. Amen.

The babies jostled each other within her, and she said, "Why is this happening to me?" So she went to inquire of the Lord.

Genesis 25:22

START BY READING 1 KINGS 3 AND 2 CHRONICLES 1:7

Wisdom is all over God's Word. In Eden, that beautiful Garden, God designed us to trust His wisdom, and not determine it for ourselves (Genesis 2:17). King Solomon wrote extensively about wisdom and tells us that fearing (or living in awe of) God is the first step towards wisdom (Proverbs 9:10). Jesus' brother James wrote in a letter to his friends that says if we lack wisdom, we should ask God, because He *generously* gives it to us when we ask (James 1:5).

By the time God spoke to Solomon in a dream, we can see that Solomon had already made some **unwise** choices. In 1 Kings 3:1, we read that Solomon made a political pact with another nation and married one of their princesses, which God had said not to do. If we keep reading, we see that Solomon followed the pagan practices of the region by making sacrifices and burning incense in the high places. This was not the calling that God had given Israel, which was to worship Him alone, to trust Him for their safety and well-being, and to show the world God's character.

But you know what is so amazing? Solomon's lack of wisdom does not disqualify him from God speaking to him. It doesn't cause God to reject Solomon or refuse to interact with him. We don't read that God tells Solomon to get his act together and *then* God will empower him. We don't even see God ask for an apology before he talks to Solomon. On the contrary, we see the amazing care and enduring affection that God has for His creation: **He initiates a conversation with a question.**

He initiates.

The very best parts of humanity's story on earth show the initiative, the

seeking, and the pursuit of God towards His people, *each* of whom He made for a purpose. Thank God that He pursues you, even when you are turned away from Him or not fully submitted to His will! Reflect on 1 John 4:19.

A conversation.

God doesn't clear His throat and begin a long, dry sermon while Solomon listens halfheartedly. God is seeking to connect with His creation, the man, Solomon. This is just one example of many in Scripture where God wants to have a back-and-forth discussion - He desires to engage with us! Ponder Psalm 17:6.

With a question.

God isn't looking for a Sunday school answer. He already knows Solomon perfectly, so God isn't even looking for the "correct" answer. God's steadfast, faithful love is what motivates His inquiry, not a desire to prove us wrong or make us feel bad. His kind and gentle questions help us to stop, reorient and understand Truth. Meditate on Romans 2:4.

As we see in the rest of the story, God gives Solomon incredible wisdom that has never been seen before or since. Solomon's life was far from perfect - but what a beautiful experience and glimpse of the heart of God for His people.

How has God initiated a conversation with you? What questions has He posed to you? You can trust that His desire is for your good. Continue the conversation with Him!

PRAYER:

START BY READING DANIEL 2:17-23

Daniel was in trouble. His life was on the line. Nebuchadnezzar was clear. Interpret my dream! Tell me WHAT I dreamed! If you won't, if you can't, you will die. How irrational! How illogical! How impossible!

Sound familiar? This is an impossible problem. Someone else is calling the shots, and they are not acting in your best interest. Maybe you've been in a "no win" situation, facing impossible odds. Or have you felt under-qualified for the task at hand? I know I have. Daniel did. Interpreting a dream is hard enough, but Nebuchadnezzar refused to tell anyone what his dream was. "If you don't tell me what my dream was and what it means, you will be torn limb from limb."

What is the world throwing your way right now? What is happening that is outside your control? What is your impossible problem? What is your typical response? Fight or flight? Lean in or shut down?

When I face a challenge, I hold on tighter and attempt to control. I believe if I work harder, I can control the outcome. Have you been there? I may feel better while I'm spinning my wheels, but activity does not guaranty results. The reality is, none of it is in my control...and my life is absolutely on the line.

So, what IS the answer? **Surrender**. How counterintuitive! When I grab and hold or hit the accelerator to get out of a sticky situation, I need to pause and recognize that I am in the

passenger's seat. Someone else is driving.

In this passage, Daniel 2:17-23, Daniel gives us a formula to handle situations like these.

1. **Daniel asks his friends to pray.** Daniel went straight to his friends and asked them to talk to God. He asked Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, to pray the Lord would show His mercy. They did and the Lord revealed Nebuchadnezzar's dream to Daniel that very night!
2. **Daniel worships the Lord.** When the pressure is on, it's easy to turn to God and ask for what we need. But after He comes through, it's easy to forget from whom deliverance came. We are not in control. He is. When you talk to the Lord, look for the ways He provides, then praise HIS name! Read Daniel 2:20-21 again. He has ALL wisdom and power. HE controls the course of world events. HE gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to the scholars. Recognize the One who carries us through impossible situations.
3. **Daniel gives credit where credit is due.** Read on a bit further in Daniel 2:27-28. Daniel tells King Nebuchadnezzar, "There are no wise men, enchanters, magicians, or fortune-tellers who can reveal the king's secret. But there is a God in heaven who reveals secrets." Not me...HIM. Not my work...HIS glory. He is in control.

Prayer: God, help me to stop holding on. Help me to surrender and talk to You. Help me to trust that you will provide what I need. I give You praise. All the glory goes to you! Regardless of the challenge, You are in control. Thank you for carrying me through impossible problems. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

START BY READING JOHN 3:1-21

Today I spent a few moments taking inventory of all the comforts I depend on in my life. My family lives in a great house with air conditioning, heat, and food in the fridge. My “mostly dependable” vehicle takes my family and me *all* over town. I have a job that is fun, and I have earned a level of respect in my industry. The world is at my fingertips on my phone. My church is an awesome place to hang out that I’m so proud of. I even have a Revive bumper sticker on my car! Pause for a few moments and take inventory of the comforts in your life.

Now let’s meet Nicodemus, a Pharisee, ruler, and teacher of the Jews. Having full knowledge of the community around him, Nicodemus sees a ripple in the surrounding “calm waters.” His colleagues and respected peers approach stories of this “Jesus of Nazareth” with disapproval and easily turn their noses up at His ability to capture the attention of the Jewish people. However, there are things Nicodemus can’t ignore: reports of Jesus healing, casting out demons, feeding thousands with crumbs, and so on. Nicodemus *must* know more, but he also can’t be seen anywhere near Jesus. So he goes by night, and, even in darkness and uncertainty, Jesus speaks directly with him.

Later, in chapter 7, Nicodemus tries to diffuse the anger of his fellow Pharisees and, finally, in chapter 19, Nicodemus brings about 75 pounds of myrrh and aloes for the burial of Jesus. Each time he is mentioned, it is specified that it is the same

Nicodemus who went to talk with Jesus at night, probably in secret.

Here in America, the Christian faith is largely celebrated. We hear Jesus praised in sports, and politics, and faith merch can be found at our local grocery store. I have *no* reason to meet with Jesus in hiding.

I don't know much about Nicodemus' life between these interactions. What I can imagine is that seeking out Jesus during the day could have threatened his lifestyle, his profession, his social standing, and his own comforts. This causes me to take another look at my own list of comforts from above. What if my relationship with Jesus threatened those comforts? For many in the world, that is a real experience today.

What if, like Nicodemus, our comforts were threatened by our faith in Jesus? Friends, I believe rather than that, my comforts actually threaten my faith. All the business of my life causes my attention to be pulled away from Jesus, who I am free to worship without threat. I still must meet with him in the night sometimes; not out of fear, but simply to squeeze it in if I bother to spend time with the Lord at all! My home, my job, my family, and car seem much more demanding than 21 minutes of prayer and devotion. I need to make a choice to put all my busy little things on the back burner to sit and converse with Jesus.

Prayer:

Lord, let me take advantage of the freedom I have, set aside my priorities, and talk with You today!

START BY READING 2 CORINTHIANS 12:6-10

Tom Stoltman, from Scotland, is a 3-time World's Strongest Man champion. He holds the world record for the heaviest Atlas stone ever lifted at over 631 pounds. Tom was diagnosed with autism as a five-year-old. However, he does not consider his autism as a weakness but a superpower and uses it as a platform to spotlight autism awareness.

Paul, in the Bible, had a thorn in his side and 3 times pleaded with the Lord to take it away from him. But the Lord said to him, "My grace is sufficient for you, for your power is made perfect in weakness." Paul followed this conversation by saying he would boast all the more gladly about his weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on him. He said, "I will delight in weaknesses, hardships, persecutions and difficulties for when I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Cor 12:10).

God's wisdom is usually contradictory to man's wisdom. For us, strength usually means being able to do it all alone, without help. It means to be able to lift heavy things like Tom Stoltman. As a follower of Jesus, though, our lowest moment is when we are the strongest. When we are at our weakest, we become more dependent on God. His strength is most evident and effective when we acknowledge our limitations and depend on Him, rather than relying solely on our own abilities and strength.

This verse also affirms that God's grace is all we need to cope with our weaknesses. His power is fully revealed when we recognize our dependence on Him. When God shows us this

power in our weakness, it becomes an example to others. His power is sufficient, and He is then able to work thru us.

Weakness, in our definition, has always had a bad connotation. The true, ultimate example of the word is the crucifixion of Jesus. While Jesus succumbed to the beatings and dying on the cross, the ultimate surrender, it was the means to our salvation.

God can use our pain (a thorn in our side) and our weaknesses to mold us. The weaker we feel, the harder we lean in, and the more we lean in, the stronger we will grow spiritually. It is counter culture to say we delight in weakness like Paul did, but here is truth: the greater our awareness of our weakness, the greater opportunity we have to lean into Christ.

Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me.

2 Corinthians 12:8-9

Prayer : Dear Father, Your grace is sufficient for me. Your power is made perfect in weakness. Help me to be content with whatever You let come my way. I confess that I often try to rely on my own strength and abilities, but I know that I am weak and in need of You and Your guidance.

START BY READING LUKE 8:43-48

God is still in the business of restoration. Even if our modern minds want to think that instances like this are only believable for first-century folks, God's character doesn't change, and He's still actively healing and helping in miraculous ways.

One of the things I love about this account is the woman's absolute certainty that Jesus was the answer. Some manuscripts add that "no one could heal her and she'd spent all she had on doctors." It's not like she hadn't been trying everything she could to manage what was in the realm of her control! But so many things just aren't within our control, and sometimes all we can do is take it to Jesus and leave it all up to God's plan and timing. That's the mindset we find this woman in: "There is nothing within my power to fix this. Only Jesus can help me. If only I could just reach Him..."

Jesus validates her mindset when He says, "Daughter, your faith has healed you." It had nothing to do with the edge of Jesus's cloak or the physical act of touching it - it was all about her complete, utter sureness that Jesus could heal her. Our beliefs drive our actions; without her faith, she would have never reached out for his cloak.

Another thing I love about this is how Jesus was an active part of her healing. He felt power leave Him as she actualized her faith position. He wasn't just passively in the area and had nothing to do with her healing other than being a beacon of power in the right place at the right time; it was a tangible moment shared between them. This is the kind of relationship Jesus offers to and

desires for each and every one of us! An actual, one-on-one experience in which we choose to put all our trust in Him, and He, in turn, heals us of our old lives in sin and calls us instead a Son or Daughter of God.

Sometimes, physical ailments and maladies will follow us all the days of our lives. Sometimes, miraculous healings occur after just one bold prayer. Just like the woman in Luke's account, we must not depend on any action that's completely within our power, but rather trust completely and whole-heartedly in the goodness of God and His plan for each of us, whether that plan looks like our picture for the future or not. God was, is, and always will be in the business of restoration, whether that's physical, emotional, or mental, and He is always actively offering a holy and beneficial relationship to each and every one of us. All that's left to us is whether or not we trust in Him enough to reach out.

How do you need to reach out to Jesus today? Write a prayer in this space declaring that He is THE answer, your only hope to what you face.

PRAYER:

START BY READING LUKE 10:38-42

The scent of freshly ground coffee wafts through the house, the table is set à la Martha (Stewart), the buffet is brimming with delectables cut in tidy triangles in case Jesus doesn't like crusts. Fresh hand towels in the powder room, spring water sweating in cups with lemon and cucumber. The glow of creamy candles flicking shadows away.

Maybe Mary answers the knock at the door. Maybe Mary shows Jesus to the seat of honor. Mary has the nerve to sit at His feet, her eyes wide open to receive when she should be helping. Again.

I grew up with the song, "Lazy Mary will you get up," sung to me many mornings as I begged for ten more minutes of sleep. Unlike my sisters, the gene for enjoying domestic duties passed me by with barely a sprinkle. I was constantly in trouble for putting off chores and reading instead. I don't know if the Mary of the Bible was anything like me, but I allow myself to imagine this was not the first time Martha had reason to complain.

I can hear Jesus tenderly shushing Martha by repeating her name twice. "Martha, Martha." He knows her heart. He gave her the gift of hospitality in the first place - none of this kerfuffle is news to Him. Mary has chosen the better way in this moment. Mary's heart is in absorb mode. Absorbing every look, every word to savor.

Surprisingly enough, something switched in my adulthood, and I am now inhabiting Martha's shoes. I'm learning to ignore the

voices of perfectionism and anxiety, knowing that for me, those come from a place of pride and deep-down fear of criticism. Yes, I still get lost in the sauce, forget the most important gift I can give anyone is Jesus, forget to make room for Him to move and watch with open eyes while He does what only He can do through the Holy Spirit of the living God.

Martha had two choices after Jesus answered her: bitter or better. We don't know which she chose. I love all the creativity and humming anticipation of preparing, but my eyes sometimes begin to measure what is "fair" as far as others doing their share...which leads to resentment and missing the point entirely. Ugh. Lord, save me from myself.

"Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, but few things are needed—or indeed only one—Luke 10: 41-42a

Prayer: Precious Lord Jesus, thank You for these two women that You loved deeply and for their important story in Your Word. We offer praise for our gifted Martha moments and pray You would give us Mary's eyes - fixed on You amidst all the details. Whatever that looks like in our lives this season, remind us that You are the treasure, Your love is the main event and the reason we toil on this earth. We lay all at Your feet and await the day when we see You face to face in glory. We ask in Jesus' name, Amen.

START BY READING GENESIS 4:1-16

The young man knelt like a gollum over the river, frantically scrubbing raw fingers until he couldn't distinguish his own blood from the stains he was trying to wash away. Hot tears blurred his vision and mixed with the blood and water. Pain felt like penance, lashing at the shame cascading over him. Hadn't he been warned? Why hadn't he seen his selfish jealousy for the viper it was instead of a friend stroking his rejected ego? He wept for his innocent little brother. He wept for his parents; he could never be forgiven. He wept for the barrier he felt now from the Presence that had urged him to overcome. He was lost. The rejection over his offering had seemed like a betrayal, but the chasm he felt now was utter hopelessness. He was intimately acquainted with the tale of his parents being driven from the garden. Even now, in his adulthood, they would weep at recalling, then stare aimlessly into an unseen distance for what seemed like eternity.

He had wanted to do better. Yet here he was, the very antithesis of a creator, undeserving of the name "image bearer"; he would be utterly cast off. A new surge of agony broke into sobs, and he shook uncontrollably as the water drowned his filthy hands. The loneliness was palpable. His soul felt like it might implode. Then, suddenly, a breeze blew across his face, the leaves rustled in the trees. *Hide!* Shame screamed, but he knew that was impossible. He braced himself for wrath, but all he felt was a voice like rushing waters, "Cain..."

I have always seen Cain as an object of rejection, someone unwanted by God. Recently, however, I have read his story differently. Though Cain's offering was not accepted, *God still spoke to him!* God coached and taught Cain how to draw nearer to Him. He warned him against the power and seduction of sin. Even *after* Cain murdered Abel, God still approached him. He received consequences, much like his parents had, but God was *still* in conversation with him. He did not utterly forsake him.

There is power in realizing that Cain had what many believers claim they lack today – the ability to hear God's voice. Cain's continual mistake was that he turned his face and heart away from God, choosing to trust his understanding above the voice and heart of God. It does not say that God forsook him. The Word says *he*, "went out from the Presence of God," indicating he was trying to get outside God's view and resigned to restlessness, as those who depart from God cannot find peace (Benson).

You and I have a similar choice. We can choose to heed God's call to resist sin and turn our faces toward Him, or we can turn our faces away and try to navigate life in our own wisdom. Scripture doesn't show God walking away from Cain. Cain chose to walk away from God.

Prayer: Precious Lord Jesus, I know You speak to me. You are always speaking. I ask that You teach me how to tune in to Your voice. Let me never put more value in my thoughts than Your Words. Keep me turning my face toward You, Lord. I desire the peace of Your Presence. Amen.







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