

A warm-toned photograph of a pottery wheel in operation. A clay pitcher is being shaped on the wheel, and a shallow bowl of water is in the foreground. The scene is lit with soft, golden light, creating a peaceful and focused atmosphere.

• PRAYER • THE CHURCH • CHRISTMAS • OUR STORY •
**JESUS
AT THE
CENTER**
• FREEDOM • OF TRANSFORMATION •

DAILY DEVOTIONAL

As we look at the seven miracles of John in this series, I'm praying that your picture of Jesus will increase. God has been working and moving in amazing ways these last several months. People's hearts, minds and souls have awakened to God in new and fresh ways, and I couldn't be more thankful and excited. I really believe the picture you have of Jesus will impact your future. If Jesus is too small in your view, you will never give your whole life to Him. Think about it: Jesus asked His first disciples to drop everything and follow Him. The call today is no different. We will only respond like the disciples did when we see Jesus as worth it—when we see Him for who He is!

Keep pressing in and believing. The most important thing in your life is to keep Jesus at the center. I hope these devotions continue to be helpful to you as you seek to keep Jesus at the center of your life. Recall the promise of God in James 4:8—if we draw near to Him, He will draw near to us. Join me in praying He'll continue to do mighty things in the future!

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a large, stylized 'B' followed by a horizontal line and a cursive 'J'.

Bryan Jones, Senior Pastor

DAILY PRAYER AND REFLECTION QUESTIONS

"... Our Father in heaven..."

Matthew 6:9b (NLT)

- What do You want to say to me today as my Father?

"... may Your name be kept holy."

Matthew 6:9c (NLT)

- What do You want to reveal to me about Your power today?

"May Your Kingdom come soon."

Matthew 6:10a (NLT)

- Help me make Your priorities my priorities today.

"Give us today the food we need,"

Matthew 6:11 (NLT)

- Is there anything specific You want me to do with my time or the people I'm around today?

"and forgive us our sins, as we have forgiven those who sin against us"

Matthew 6:12 (NLT)

- Reveal to me anyone I need to forgive or ask for forgiveness.

"And don't let us yield to temptation..."

Matthew 6:13a (NLT)

- Is there anywhere I'm vulnerable to temptation?

TASTE AND SEE

Taste and see that the LORD is good. Oh, the joys of those who take refuge in Him! Fear the LORD, you His godly people, for those who fear Him will have all they need.
Psalm 34:8-9 (NIV)

I confess that one of the things I loved doing for years was eating some of my favorite foods and then watching the Food Network. I could taste and see other things at the same time, and it brought immense culinary joy to my stomach. I learned I liked watching, but I liked eating way more. I fear that faith is nothing more than an intellectual experience for some people. They see grace, they see the promises of God, they see God's love, They see the Spirit at work around them, but it's a whole other thing to taste it, to experience it.

Leonard Ravenhill once said, *When I need the entertainment of the world, then I've lost the joy of the Lord.* This has always stuck with me because, for years, I didn't experience grace, joy and the love of God in a way that filled me up and left me satisfied. This led me to try to supplement love, joy, and peace with stuff in this world, like jobs, hobbies, success, and so on. There is nothing wrong with those things, but this thing shouldn't be where I find my joy; they are too fleeting and not deep enough to fill the greatest longings of my soul.

In Hebrew culture, when teaching young children to study the Bible, they used to put honey in their mouths to remind them that the Word of God is sweet. They were teaching them to move from just an intellectual approach. They were not teaching them to just watch others consume and enjoy the goodness of God; instead, they were invited to taste and experience. May we bite down and experience the fullness of grace. May we savor every morsel of God's Word until it fills our spiritual stomachs. May the sweetness of God's presence cause us to never settle for the food of the world. May your spiritual taste buds experience the great joy of the Fruit of the Spirit poured out in your life.

APPLICATION: Allow your mind and your heart to be filled with a promise you recite over and over today

PRAYER: Ask the Spirit of God to truly fill you! Ask the Spirit where you are settling for the food of this world. Ask Him to help you taste and see the Spirit in new and fresh ways.

TRANSFORMED FOR JOY

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.

Romans 15:13 (NLT)

For years, I struggled to follow God fully because it seemed like there wasn't a lot of joy in following Him. I understood at an early age that God was holy, powerful, wise and good. One of the last things for me to truly grasp, and the thing I still must remind myself, is that at the center of God is joy. The reason God is joyful is He knows who He is. He doesn't want us to worship Him because He is insecure. Quite the opposite, He knows how fleeting the joys of the world are. He knows there are many counterfeit joys that promise a lot, but all fail to deliver the lasting joy they promise.

The problem is the joys of this world look so real. One of the things I've noticed in a lot of TV shows is that often, everyone believes they have a genuine or real product. However, when the expert is brought in, they know what to look for to determine if it's real or counterfeit. They aren't trying to be mean; instead, they are being honest. Jesus is the expert on joy. He's the most joyful being in the universe.

I have heard it said that God isn't a killjoy. Instead, He's a keep joy. God knows that all the other joys that look real are simply counterfeits, but His joy isn't. This is why Paul prays above for us to be completely filled with the joy and peace of the Spirit. God wants to fill us to the very top with joy. I love how Tim Keller says it: *There is a joy available that the deepest grief cannot put out. No circumstance or person can take away the joy God gives.* As sons and daughters of God, we are called to reflect the life of Jesus to others. Part of that life is the joy of Jesus. You have been transformed for joy. You have been transformed to know God and delight in Him. When you make yourself available to God, the Spirit will fill you with new life, and part of that is His joy!

APPLICATION: God is a keep joy, so be faithful to Him today in everything you do and watch your joy begin to increase

PRAYER: Spend time reflecting on the joy you have in Jesus. Ask the Spirit of God to fill you with a joy that comes from Him alone. Ask God to give you an everlasting joy that isn't touched by the pains or the hardships of this world. If you know Jesus, then you know joy!

TRANSFORMED IN OUR PURPOSE

"For I know the plans I have for you," says the LORD. "They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope. In those days when you pray, I will listen."
Jeremiah 29:11-12 (NLT)

In my years as a pastor, I have seen many people make a commitment to Jesus. I have watched as they begin to read the Bible, learn to hear God's voice, and grow radically in their faith. To me, there is nothing more exciting than that. On the other hand, I have seen people make a commitment to Jesus only to slowly fall away from their faith and sometimes walk away from God entirely. There is nothing more gut-wrenching to me than seeing this. It makes me ask the question, why is it that some people flourish in their faith while others seem to fall away?

I've found that part of the answer lies in the commitment they made when they first said they were following Jesus. Those whose faith stayed on fire for God believed that God had saved them *for* something, while those who fell away from their faith believed that God had rescued them *from* something. The people who fell away said yes to Jesus because they believed God saved them *from* hell, *from* their sadness, *from* their pain, *from* their problems, or *from* the mundane nature of life. The problem with this faith is, first, it's a consumeristic faith. You don't follow Jesus because of His glory and goodness; you follow Him because you get something out of it. Second, it's a faith that really doesn't have a purpose after you say yes to Jesus. In many ways, it's a faith that is just waiting to go to heaven one day.

What's the solution? To understand that when you say yes to Jesus, you are called to live *for* Him! Notice the verse above: God says, I have plans *for* you. Plans to give you a hope and future! God wants you to live *for* Him and with Him. He wants you to know His Spirit and power. He wants you to know God as a Father. He wants you to be salt and light and live in such a way that you capture the attention of heaven and draw others to Jesus. God hasn't called you just to attend church on Sunday or wait to go to heaven. He's called you to live radically *for* Him. He's called you to walk with Him daily through His Word and prayer, and He promises that if you abide in Him, you will bear fruit for Him! Live for Him today!

APPLICATION: God hasn't saved you *from* something; He's saved you *for* daily life with Him. This is your most important purpose.

PRAYER: Ask God if He needs to expand your vision of your faith. Sometimes, we have such a small vision of faith, where God just saves us from something, but God wants us to live *for* Him and His greatness. Pray and ask the Holy Spirit to help you think about ways to live *for* Him daily. Ask Him how you can live *for* Him in your job, with your kids, with your spouse, in retirement, in your neighborhood, with your friends.

TRANSFORMED BY GRACE

God saved you by His grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it. For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things He planned for us long ago.
Ephesians 2:8-9 (NLT)

Have you ever been to a restaurant that has a small book for a menu? To me, that is overwhelming. When I went to the Cheesecake Factory, I spent more time stressing over figuring out what to order than I ever have at a restaurant! Now, imagine what the people in the Old Testament must have felt when they were given 613 laws to keep. I think it's safe to say they felt overwhelmed trying to keep up with them all. There is a big difference between religion and grace. Religion believes the lie that my performance, good or bad, dictates how God feels about me. As followers of Jesus, we are transformed by grace, which says because Jesus died our death, we can live His life! You don't have to worry about your performance because you have been saved and transformed by grace. This is the truth that sets you free.

I love how it says in the verse above that you are God's masterpiece. Think about it: appliances are mass-produced, but a masterpiece is hand-made. You have been transformed by grace, and God considers His children masterpieces. God sees you as a masterpiece, no matter what you think about yourself or what your parents, boss, or friends think of you. This is the power of grace! Mercy is not getting what we deserve. Grace is getting what we don't deserve. When you follow Jesus, you aren't just forgiven. You are a son and daughter of God who's been given the Kingdom. Your performance doesn't determine your position... grace does. Live into your identity today!

Grace transforms us away from performance and away from pride. It's God's grace alone that makes us sons and daughters. The more we start to understand this, the more it sets us free. Free to live for Him and enjoy His love. It frees us to return to God when we make mistakes because we know that grace has the final word!

APPLICATION: Live from grace, and not your performance, today!

PRAYER: Spend some time sitting and thanking God for His grace. Thank Him for mercy that doesn't punish us for our sins; also, thank Him for grace, which makes us sons and daughters of God. The more you understand grace, the more you desire to please God because you have been set free. Ask God to help you grasp how deep and wide the love and grace of God is today!

BETTER

Then Jesus told His disciples, "If anyone would come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.

Matthew 16:24-25 (ESV)

I'll never forget a story I heard about a pastor I know who grew up only ever eating burnt steak. He shared with me that all his life, his mom and dad always cooked their steaks well done to very, very well done. It was all he knew and tasted. He shared that one day, a good friend took him to a steakhouse, and he was about to order his steak well done. His friend insisted he changed his mind, but he wouldn't budge. Finally, his friend, determined for him to experience the unknown glory of a medium rare steak, said, I will buy you a medium rare steak, and if you aren't happy, then I'll buy you another steak well done. This pastor couldn't resist the offer of two steaks for the price of one! He wasn't expecting much when he got the medium rare steak, but when he had his first bite, he was undone. For his entire life, he had been eating all he'd known, and he was content, but now his eyes were open, and more importantly, his taste buds were open. Burnt steak would no longer suffice because there was a better option available.

Looking back on my life, I never would have chosen most of the things that have unfolded in my story. I would have chosen differently. I would have been content with choosing what I knew, what I was familiar with, and what I had already tasted. Like that pastor, God has placed things in front of me that I wouldn't have chosen on my own. Looking back at my life, I'm convinced of one thing—God's ways are better. The verse above shows that His thoughts are higher, and ways are better. This is incredibly freeing because none of us fully know what the future holds, and because of this, we can often be led by fear or anxiety trying to control what we cannot. The other option is to sit back at the table of life and trust that the things God places in front of you, even the painful things, are all better because they're creating a faith and life in the Spirit you couldn't have had without it. Rest knowing God knows and sees what we cannot. His ways are better. Trust Him!

APPLICATION: Surrender your plans to the Lord today and let peace rise up.

PRAYER: Spend time thanking God for the promise that His ways and thoughts are better. Take a moment to reflect on your past, even the painful parts, and let gratitude fill your heart. Ask the Spirit to give you a peaceful resilience to the future because you trust the One directing it!

FILLED TO FILL OTHERS

He went out again beside the sea, and all the crowd was coming to Him, and He was teaching them. And as He passed by, He saw Levi the son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax booth, and He said to him, "Follow Me." And he rose and followed Him. And as He reclined at table in his house, many tax collectors and sinners were reclining with Jesus and His disciples, for there were many who followed Him. And the scribes of the Pharisees, when they saw that He was eating with sinners and tax collectors, said to His disciples, "Why does He eat with tax collectors and sinners?" And when Jesus heard it, He said to them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners." **Mark 2:13-17 (ESV)**

I believe the story of Jesus is just too good to keep to ourselves. Sharing our faith isn't a burden when you realize how good the story is. When I experience a restaurant, a song, a book or a place that impacts me, I naturally tend to share it with others. Think of evangelism this way. It's not just apologetics; it's not just doctrine; it's not just about being a light; it's not just about being bold; instead, it's about telling others of something that has radically impacted our lives. The truth is people can argue theology and Bible verses, but no one can argue the power of a transformed life. Also, I rarely take it personally if someone doesn't like my restaurants, music, or books because I know how much it impacted me, and I often think it's their loss. I say that not to be harsh, but one of the greatest fears people have is sharing their faith because they fear rejection or failure. Often, I think this can be a tactic of Satan to cause us to overthink sharing our faith.

In the story above, Matthew, the tax collector, gives his life to Jesus; he becomes a follower of Jesus. Once he encounters Jesus, he believes the story of Jesus is too good to keep to himself, so he invites all his friends to hear and meet Jesus. He throws a Matthew party, and his friends are now surrounded by Jesus and His disciples. Take the stigma out of sharing your story of faith. It's your story, and some won't follow, but others, I believe, will experience the goodness of God because of your testimony. The story of Jesus is too good to keep to ourselves, so share how God has changed your life to those who are in your life.

APPLICATION: Look for the people God puts in your path today and share a few small things to point them to Jesus!

PRAYER: Ask God to give you a boldness to share how Jesus has changed your life. Ask Him to remove a fear of failure or rejection. Ask Him to give you spiritual eyes to see who God has placed in your path to share God's love with.

REFILLED

One thing I ask from the LORD, this only do I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze on the beauty of the LORD and to seek Him in His temple.

Psalms 27:4 (NIV)

I used to believe that one encounter with Jesus would be sufficient to keep me on fire for Him all the days of my life. Now let me be clear: the problem isn't with Jesus; it's with me, namely my heart, because it's prone to wander. I wish my heart wasn't naturally prone to wonder and delight, but sadly, it wanders and forgets God. Now, the second most repeated commandment is to remember, so this is a universal problem. Throughout human history, people start following God; they start with wonder, and then over time, they begin to wander away from Him. I used to think something was wrong with my faith because of my wandering heart. This was amplified by the truth that most people in the church don't air out their dirty laundry, so it seemed like people had their hearts in order, and I was the broken one. Then, I realized this is a struggle for everyone. I knew that I could pretend that I'm great or accept the reality that one second, I'm on fire for God, and then the next I forget all about Him; this is especially problematic as a pastor.

Remember the book *Where's Waldo?* I used to love that book growing up. You always knew Waldo was there, but sometimes he was difficult to find. Why? Because there is so much activity and movement on that page. I kept looking even when it seemed he wasn't there because I knew I would find him if I kept seeking him. Sometimes, my faith feels a little like the *Where's Waldo* book. Somedays, it's easy to find God as I seek Him; other times, it seems like He isn't there. Maybe it's because of all the activity and movement in my heart and mind. We can't dwell with God until we seek Him. Each day, we are called to seek God so that we can dwell and live with Him. One day, this won't be the case when we are in heaven. Our hearts will see Jesus, and we will be made new without any distractions. Until then, keep pressing in and keep seeking Jesus. Your heart will be overjoyed each morning you find Him. It may take some time, but He's with you and for you!

APPLICATION: Today, focus on remembering God is with you in each moment!

PRAYER: Ask the Spirit to give you a hunger and passion to seek Him. If you are on fire, ask Him to fan the flame in your heart. Ask Him to awaken a new love and commitment if you are in a dry spot.

ASK, SEEK, KNOCK

"Keep on asking, and you will receive what you ask for. Keep on seeking, and you will find. Keep on knocking, and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives. Everyone who seeks, finds. And to everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. "You parents—if your children ask for a loaf of bread, do you give them a stone instead? Or if they ask for a fish, do you give them a snake? Of course not! So if you sinful people know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give good gifts to those who ask Him."

Matthew 7:7-11 (NLT)

Do you ever feel like giving up? I know I do. There are days when I'm mentally, emotionally and spiritually exhausted. Nothing seems to be going my way; every relationship that I value is strained, and I feel incredibly disconnected from God. On those days, the path of least resistance looks awfully inviting.

But God.

But God is working in your waiting. But God is still faithful. But God is still for you and not against you. But God longs to bless you and shower His favor upon you. But God is on the verge of doing something you can't even begin to imagine in your life. Don't give up!

Keep asking. Keep seeking. Keep knocking. Jesus is faithful, and what He says in this passage from the Sermon on the Mount is still true today. The timing may not be what we desire. We want what we want when we want it, which usually is five minutes ago. Patience may be a virtue, but it's also a fruit of the Spirit. And we must persevere in Jesus' name! Not long ago, at our *Breakthrough* weekend, guest speaker Brian Heasley encouraged us to cultivate the art of perseverance. Let's do it!

Consider what God's Word says in **Hebrews 12:12-13 (NLT)**: *So take a new grip with your tired hands and strengthen your weak knees. Mark out a straight path for your feet so that those who are weak and lame will not fall but become strong.*

Brother in Christ, sister in Christ—we have a good Father. Trust Him. Keep asking, seeking, and knocking.

APPLICATION: What are you asking God for right now? Document it—record your prayers in a journal or note on your phone. As you continue to pray, be sure to come back and document where you've seen Him move on your behalf.

PRAYER: Father, I believe, help me in my unbelief. Help me not rely on my strength but remember that in my weakness, You are strong. Grant me patience and perseverance. I know you're working all things together for my good and Your glory. Help my faith to grow. In Jesus' name, amen.

ASK WITH CONFIDENCE

If you need wisdom, ask our generous God, and He will give it to you. He will not rebuke you for asking. But when you ask Him, be sure that your faith is in God alone. Do not waver, for a person with divided loyalty is as unsettled as a wave of the sea that is blown and tossed by the wind. Such people should not expect to receive anything from the Lord. Their loyalty is divided between God and the world, and they are unstable in everything they do.

James 1:5-8 (NLT)

Have you ever asked for something, knowing in advance that the answer would be no? Maybe it was asking your spouse if you could splurge on a big purchase. Maybe you were asking your boss for a raise or more PTO. Maybe you were just asking your child if you could have their last cookie. But you went into it already defeated in your mind, believing you'd be told no.

Do we approach God the same way, thinking the automatic answer is no? This self-defeating mindset can become a self-fulfilling prophecy because we don't actually believe that God wants to say yes. We don't think that He will actually come through for us. Underneath these beliefs lies another belief—that God is not really good and doesn't love us. We wouldn't say that aloud, but that shaky foundation can ultimately inform every facet of our relationship with God.

James, the brother of Jesus, tells us in this passage that if we need wisdom, we can ask God for it, and He will provide it. This passage is specific to wisdom, but there's a broader truth here—God will meet our needs. We need only ask. But as James explains, we must ask, believing that God will really answer. Far too often, we relegate asking God to our backup plan instead of our first course of action. Our loyalty is divided between God and the world. We'll place our hope and faith in ourselves, our bank accounts, our network, etc., until we have no other choice. No one likes to be someone's backup plan—including God! Let's make Him our first plan. Let's ask Him to meet all our needs, believing that not only He can, but He will!

APPLICATION: Where are you placing your hope and faith besides in God? Once you've identified that, ask God to help your faith grow in Him. Then, ask Him to meet any other needs you may have. It's okay to ask! Just ask, believing that He will answer!

PRAYER: God, help me to remember that You're not distant and disengaged, even when I may feel that way. Help me not to be formed by my feelings but rather by my faith in You. You're a good Father who gives good gifts to His children. Help me to approach You with confidence in my times of need. I love You—thank You for loving me. In Jesus' name, amen.

APPROACH WITH BOLDNESS

Large crowds followed Jesus as He came down the mountainside. Suddenly, a man with leprosy approached Him and knelt before Him. "Lord," the man said, "if You are willing, You can heal me and make me clean." Jesus reached out and touched him. "I am willing," He said. "Be healed!" And instantly the leprosy disappeared. Then Jesus said to him, "Don't tell anyone about this. Instead, go to the priest and let him examine you. Take along the offering required in the law of Moses for those who have been healed of leprosy. This will be a public testimony that you have been cleansed."

Matthew 8:1-4 (NLT)

This story is so easy to overlook, but it's one of my favorites in the entirety of Scripture. Jesus is fresh off the Sermon on the Mount—His longest recorded public sermon. There are large crowds following Him because the people have never encountered a teacher quite like Him. As He, His disciples and these crowds descend the mountain, a leper approaches. If you can use your sanctified imagination for a moment—see in your mind's eye everyone but Jesus shrinking back. Leprosy was a big deal—highly contagious with no known cure. It was also believed to be a punishment for sin, so the crowd might have believed that this poor man deserved his horrible condition.

The leper is quite clear in his belief that Jesus can heal him... if He is willing. We see that Jesus is willing and does heal the man. But don't miss the significance of verse three. Go back and read it again. When is the man healed—at the touch of Jesus or at His word? You see that it's when Jesus says, "Be healed!" So why did He first touch the leper? He certainly didn't need to—we see other instances in Scripture where Jesus heals from a distance simply by speaking. I believe He chose to dignify this man by reaching out and touching him. Who knows how long it had been since this man was clasped around the shoulders or given a handshake? Simple human dignities had been denied this man, and Jesus restores them.

Jesus can heal you as well. You may not have an incurable disease (though if you do, I believe Jesus is no less powerful to heal today than He was in this story from thousands of years ago). But whatever ails you, Jesus can rectify. We must approach with boldness, just like the leper in this story. Consider what the writer of Hebrews says in **Hebrews 4:16 (NLT)**: *So let us come boldly to the throne of our gracious God. There we will receive His mercy, and we will find grace to help us when we need it most.*

APPLICATION: What do you need to take to Jesus? Now is the time to live out Hebrews 4:16—approach boldly and watch Him change your life.

PRAYER: Almighty God, You can transform me and cure me. Help me to believe that to the point of action. I desire to surrender all to You. Holy Spirit, grant me the courage and conviction to do so. In the matchless name of Jesus, amen.

WHAT JESUS OFFERS

Afterward Jesus returned to Jerusalem for one of the Jewish holy days. Inside the city, near the Sheep Gate, was the pool of Bethesda, with five covered porches. Crowds of sick people—blind, lame, or paralyzed—lay on the porches. One of the men lying there had been sick for thirty-eight years. When Jesus saw him and knew he had been ill for a long time, He asked him, “Would you like to get well?” “I can’t, sir,” the sick man said, “for I have no one to put me into the pool when the water bubbles up. Someone else always gets there ahead of me.” Jesus told him, “Stand up, pick up your mat, and walk!” Instantly, the man was healed! He rolled up his sleeping mat and began walking!
John 5:1-9a (NLT)

I can’t. These two small words reveal so much about what we believe. Growing up, my dad outlawed this expression for me. He said, *can’t never could do nothing*. Is this grammatically correct? No—not even close. But he was trying to help me see that this response would cause me to miss out long-term on things that perhaps I couldn’t fathom at that point in time.

In the story above, a paralyzed man is approached by Jesus. He is asked directly: *would you like to get well?* What an incredible question asked by the most incredible person ever to live. And what is this man’s response? *I can’t.* This man is lying near the pool of Bethesda. We don’t know if it was especially hot or cold, but both would have been revered for restorative properties. According to some traditions, there was a belief that an angel would stir up the water, and whoever got in it first when it was stirred up would be healed of any affliction.

Obviously, the paralyzed man would not have been in a good position to beat others to the pool. His response about his circumstances was accurate—but Jesus didn’t ask him about his circumstances. The man’s response reveals that he is more focused on his circumstances than on Jesus, who is standing right in front of him. And while we might read this today and think how foolish this man was to do so, the sad reality is we do the same. We’re often so fixated on what’s happening around us that we miss what Jesus can and will do in and through us if we simply focus on Him.

Do you remember when Peter walked on the water beside Jesus? The story is in Matthew 22:14-31 if you care to refresh your memory. Peter is walking toward Jesus in a supernatural, physics-defying, miraculous way. Everything is going just fine until he begins to turn his attention to the wind and waves. He takes his eyes off Jesus and begins to sink. Let us keep our eyes on Jesus and what He offers so that, like Peter in that story and the paralytic in the one above, we, too, might be rescued by the Savior.

APPLICATION: Read Hebrews 12:1-2 throughout the day. Ask God to help you keep your eyes on Jesus. Consider even listening to the classic hymn *Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus*.

PRAYER: Jesus, You are greater than my circumstances. Help me to keep my eyes on You. In Your name, amen.

INTERCESSION

When Jesus returned to Capernaum several days later, the news spread quickly that He was back home. Soon the house where He was staying was so packed with visitors that there was no more room, even outside the door. While He was preaching God's Word to them, four men arrived carrying a paralyzed man on a mat. They couldn't bring him to Jesus because of the crowd, so they dug a hole through the roof above His head. Then they lowered the man on his mat, right down in front of Jesus. Seeing their faith, Jesus said to the paralyzed man, "My child, your sins are forgiven."

Mark 2:1-5 (NLT)

We believe that transformation takes place through asking God. We see this happen over and over in the Gospels—people approach Jesus and ask Him to heal them. It's beautiful and wonderful and amazing. But I think even more powerful is when someone intercedes on behalf of another.

In the passage above, we see four friends who are deeply committed to interceding on behalf of their paralyzed friend. They are determined to get their friend into Jesus' presence because they believe He can bring healing. When they finally arrive at where Jesus is staying, getting to the front of the crowd is impossible. In that moment, they had two choices: give up or persevere. Thankfully, these were committed friends who persevered. They took apart the roof and lowered their friend to Jesus—amazing!

Who are you that committed to getting to Jesus? While the people in your life may not suffer from a physical ailment like the man in this story, we all know people afflicted by brokenness. The only real healing they can experience comes from Christ. But sometimes, we let fear prevent us from boldly proclaiming the message of our Savior. What if I offend someone? There's a non-zero chance that you might. But, and this is important, there's a 100% chance that person will one day stand before God. So, we live on a mission to introduce people to Jesus before it's too late.

Oswald Chambers said this about intercession: *God brings you to places, among people, and into certain conditions to accomplish a definite purpose through the intercession of the Spirit in you. Your part in intercessory prayer is not to agonize over how to intercede, but to use the everyday circumstances and people God puts around you by His providence to bring them before His throne, and to allow the Spirit in you the opportunity to intercede for them. In this way God is going to touch the whole world with His saints.*

APPLICATION: Transformation happens when we ask God to move. Let us intercede on behalf of those He has placed in our path! Who can you lift up in prayer today?

PRAYER: God, show me who I can reach for You. Grow within me a passion for helping people experience transformation through knowing Your Son, Jesus. Use me as Your hands, feet and voice. In Jesus' name, amen.

PERSPECTIVE

What is causing the quarrels and fights among you? Don't they come from the evil desires at war within you? You want what you don't have, so you scheme and kill to get it. You are jealous of what others have, but you can't get it, so you fight and wage war to take it away from them. Yet you don't have what you want because you don't ask God for it. And even when you ask, you don't get it because your motives are all wrong—you want only what will give you pleasure.

James 4:1-4 (NLT)

You don't have to teach newborns how to be possessive or jealous. They figure it out pretty early on, all on their own. We've all seen a child snatch a precious toy away from another child—it's not pretty. The screams of *mine* may die down as they get older, but underneath it all, there's still strong possessiveness over what is ours.

And yet, everything we have is given to us by God. Sometimes, we lose sight of this simple truth. Every blessing in our lives came to us from Him (see James 1:18). And yet instead of living a life of gratitude, thanking God for what He has given to us, we often are fueled by bitterness and jealousy, fixated on what someone else has that we don't.

Think about social media. It can be a wonderful tool for connection, yes. But it can also be a pit you tumble into—looking at everyone else's *perfect life*. You see their happy family, pictures from exotic locales, maybe their new big purchase. You start to wonder why what you have isn't as great as what they have. Beware the doom scrolling that fuels our jealousy.

James tells us that, ultimately, we don't have what we want because we don't ask. How simple is that? We can ask God for what we want—He longs to bless us! It's all too easy to try to work for what you want, leaving God completely out of the equation. This is an exhausting, ultimately fruitless way to live. But there is an important factor—our motives. James mentions that our motives matter. We tend to fixate on things that will bring us pleasure rather than things that will bring God pleasure.

Let's ask God to make our motives His motives. Let's ask Him to give us a heart for what He is passionate about. And as He continues to make us more and more like Him, a process called sanctification, let's ask Him to give us the desires of His heart. Because then our desires will be aligned!

APPLICATION: Where are you struggling with envy, bitterness or jealousy? Ask God to change your heart on this. Then, spend some time thanking Him for all that you do have. Seek to align your desires with His.

PRAYER: God, thank You for everything You've blessed me with. I don't deserve it, but You are a gracious God. Help me not to become bogged down by focusing on what I don't have. Transform my heart more and more each day so that my desires would line up with Yours. In Jesus' name, amen.

STRONG AND COURAGEOUS

“Be strong and courageous, for you are the one who will lead these people to possess all the land I swore to their ancestors I would give them. Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the instructions Moses gave you. Do not deviate from them, turning either to the right or to the left. Then you will be successful in everything you do. Study this Book of Instruction continually. Meditate on it day and night so you will be sure to obey everything written in it. Only then will you prosper and succeed in all you do. This is My command—be strong and courageous! Do not be afraid or discouraged. For the LORD your God is with you wherever you go.” **Joshua 1:6-9 (NLT)**

There are some passages in the Bible that you may find difficult to parse through. Some of the prophetic visions in the Old Testament come to mind—certainly, portions of Revelation. But the passage above from Joshua is definitely not murky or unclear. God calls us to be strong and courageous. And while these words were spoken to a specific person at a specific point in history about a specific situation, there’s certainly application for us today.

Joshua is told by God that He will honor His promise made to His people. God still keeps His word today so we can be strong and courageous. Joshua is told to be careful to obey the Word he had been given. We, too, can build our lives on God’s Word, allowing us to be strong and courageous. God promises to be with Joshua and His people wherever they go. Jesus promised the same thing to us (see Matthew 28:20). His presence certainly allows us to be strong and courageous.

Even reading all of that, you might not feel very strong or courageous. But here’s the good news—this isn’t something we do in our own power. We rely on the strength and power of the One we serve. There’s nothing impressive about us. It’s all about Him. He reigns supreme over all creation. Paul says it like this in **Romans 8:31 (NLT)**: *What shall we say about such wonderful things as these? If God is for us, who can ever be against us?*

God is for you, not against you. He wants to work powerfully in and through your life. Consider these comforting words from Paul in **Philippians 1:6 (NLT)**: *And I am certain that God, who began the good work within you, will continue His work until it is finally finished on the day when Christ Jesus returns.*

APPLICATION: Ask God to make you strong and courageous in His power. Pray over whatever situation you’re struggling with right now. Turn it over to Him.

PRAYER: God, I am wholly dependent on You. Help me to draw upon Your strength rather than trusting in myself. Give me a greater awareness of Your Holy Spirit’s guiding every day. In Jesus’ name, amen.

SURRENDER YOUR WAY

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 to take.

Proverbs 3:5-6 (NLT)

Have you ever dealt with someone who has a *my way or the highway* mentality? To be gracious, it's nice sometimes to interact with someone who is passionate about their position and can communicate what they believe. On the other hand, when someone is so entrenched that they can't even consider that their way might be suboptimal or completely wrong, it can be quite difficult. And when two of those people get together—watch out!

The truth is we've all been that person at some point. We believe that our way is the right way. We demonstrate this when we deviate from what God's Word instructs. When we go our own way, we reveal our lack of trust in the Lord. We're saying that we think we know better than our very Creator.

Jesus Christ is the Way, the Truth and the Life. No one can come to the Father except through Him. There is no other name by which we can be saved. That means He gets to determine the boundaries and what is true. We live in a day and age when truth is deemed relative, and seemingly no absolutes are left. But that's simply not the case. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever (Hebrews 13:8). That means what He set down as truth in His Word thousands of years ago has not shifted.

So, let us trust Him. Rather than relying on our own cunningness, cleverness, or understanding, let's rely on Him. Before we consult with our social media followers or coworkers, let's consult the Author and Finisher of our faith. He is faithful—when we seek His way, He will guide our path. Consider the following from Timothy Keller: *It is not the strength of your faith but the object of your faith that actually saves you. Strong faith in a weak branch is fatally inferior to weak faith in a strong branch.*

The object of our faith is the King of kings and Lord of lords. Let us not have strong faith in our own way but instead trust in Jesus.

APPLICATION: What decision have you been processing through this season? Have you sought the Lord in this? Ask God to show you the path.

PRAYER: God, help me to surrender to Your way. I want You to order my steps and guide my path. Help me to remain faithful to You and Your Word even when everything around me pulls in the opposite direction. In Jesus' name, amen.

SURRENDER THROUGH SACRIFICE

Some time later, God tested Abraham's faith. "Abraham!" God called. "Yes," he replied. "Here I am." "Take your son, your only son—yes, Isaac, whom you love so much—and go to the land of Moriah. Go and sacrifice him as a burnt offering on one of the mountains, which I will show you."

Genesis 22:1-2 (NLT)

What's most precious to you in all the world? If we're talking possessions, it might be a special edition of some collector's item. Maybe your car or your home. To go beyond the physical, I'm sure we would all say our loved ones. Parents, spouses, children—these are good gifts from God that should be highly esteemed and treasured.

But do we value them more highly than God Himself?

That's the question that we see on display in Genesis 22. Abraham, who waited a literal century for his son Isaac, is being tested. This is his trueborn son, the child of the promise, the one through whom God has promised to bring a nation too vast to count. And now God is saying to sacrifice Isaac. How would you respond? You may think you wouldn't know unless you were in that moment, but I do. I honestly think I'd say no. I'm not proud of it, but as strong as my faith is, I can't imagine that level of obedience to God.

If you continue to read the rest of the story, which spans the rest of Genesis 22, you see that God ultimately intercedes just as Abraham is about to make the sacrifice. Instead of Isaac, it's a ram that is sacrificed. This story stands as a crystal-clear foreshadowing of the Father ultimately sacrificing His Son to redeem His people. Where Abraham is stopped at the last moment, God carries through on His sacrifice.

We see Abraham willing to surrender in sacrifice that which is most dear to him. We see the Father ultimately do this on our behalf. So, then, we must ask ourselves—what are we sacrificing for God? He likely hasn't called you to as radical a scenario as Abraham, but He certainly has called you to sacrifice. Are you willing to be obedient? Jesus said the following in **Matthew 16:24-25 (NLT)**: *Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If any of you wants to be My follower, you must turn from your selfish ways, take up your cross, and follow Me. If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for My sake, you will save it."*

Give up your own way. Surrender. Sacrifice. Lay down what is yours to take up that which God bestows, which is infinitely richer and more satisfying.

APPLICATION: What is God calling you to sacrifice? Spend some time in solitude and silence, asking Him. Then, take the step that He reveals.

PRAYER: Father, make me willing to obey You. Help me to lay down that which I would value more than You. Be honored in my life, in what I think, say and do. In Jesus' name, amen.

SURRENDER YOUR PRIDE

So humble yourselves before God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come close to God, and God will come close to you. Wash your hands, you sinners; purify your hearts, for your loyalty is divided between God and the world. Let there be tears for what you have done. Let there be sorrow and deep grief. Let there be sadness instead of laughter, and gloom instead of joy. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and He will lift you up in honor.

James 4:7-10 (NLT)

What does it truly mean to be humble? Unfortunately, I think we often get it wrong. It doesn't mean thinking of yourself as a doormat for everyone to step right over. The Hebrew word is *anavah*, which literally means to occupy your God-given space in the world. Creator God uniquely hand-crafted you on purpose with a purpose. You matter! We can't shrink back and live to less than what He has called us to. This may seem on the surface to be humility, but it's not. We also must be cautious not to become puffed up with pride, as we know that to do so leads to a calamitous fall (see Proverbs 16:18). Let's live into the fullness of who He has crafted and called us to be! To do so, we must start with the proper perspective in our relationship to God.

In the passage above, James encourages us to humble ourselves before the Lord. When we do this, we are drawing near to Him. And when we do that, He will draw near to us. Part of that humbling process is having a brokenness over what has separated us from God in the past. All too often, we can be flippant, dismissive, or even amused. James encourages us to mourn our previous time of rebellion instead.

Theologian and author Tim Challies has this to say on the subject of humility: *Is there any trait more odious than pride or more precious than humility? Is there any trait whose presence we so highly honor in others and whose absence we so readily excuse in ourselves? Truly, pride is the chief of sins and humility the highest of virtues. Yet the Christian has the joy of seeing the Holy Spirit put pride to death and bring to life the beauty of humility.*

APPLICATION: How are you coming close to God? In what practical, day-to-day ways are you submitting and surrendering to His Lordship? If you can't think of any, it may be time to really take stock of your relationship with Him. Pray through Psalm 139:23-24.

PRAYER: Lord, humble me. Even if that process is difficult or painful, help me to walk in your way. Break my heart for what breaks Yours. Thank You for drawing near to me as I draw near to You. You are good and faithful. In Jesus' name, amen.

SURRENDER YOUR STUBBORNNESS

So Naaman went with his horses and chariots and waited at the door of Elisha's house. But Elisha sent a messenger out to him with this message: "Go and wash yourself seven times in the Jordan River. Then your skin will be restored, and you will be healed of your leprosy." But Naaman became angry and stalked away. "I thought he would certainly come out to meet me!" he said. "I expected him to wave his hand over the leprosy and call on the name of the LORD his God and heal me! Aren't the rivers of Damascus, the Abana and the Pharpar, better than any of the rivers of Israel? Why shouldn't I wash in them and be healed?" So Naaman turned and went away in a rage. But his officers tried to reason with him and said, "Sir, if the prophet had told you to do something very difficult, wouldn't you have done it? So you should certainly obey him when he says simply, 'Go and wash and be cured!'" So Naaman went down to the Jordan River and dipped himself seven times, as the man of God had instructed him. And his skin became as healthy as the skin of a young child, and he was healed! 2 Kings 5:9-14 (NLT)

We've all dealt with someone who is incredibly stubborn. They're difficult to work with because they leave little to no room for a different way of thinking. Before we climb up on our high horses, I'm sure you and I have been that person sometimes. While remaining steadfast is at times admirable, devolving into blind stubbornness is often detrimental to our relational health.

In the story above, stubbornness was nearly detrimental to Naaman's physical health as well. A revered general in the Aramean army, he has traveled from afar to see the prophet, Elisha. He's seeking a cure for his leprosy, which in those days had no cure. He has come with rich gifts to bestow upon the prophet Elisha in exchange for healing. But when Naaman makes it to Elisha's house, he's instantly offended. First, Elisha sends a messenger out to Naaman instead of coming out himself. And his message is perceived as humiliating—go bathe seven times in the Jordan River.

Naaman expected more. He wanted some flashy, miraculous event with pomp and circumstance. He thinks that washing in the dirty Jordan River is beneath him. After all, he could have just taken a bath back home! And in his anger and stubbornness, he almost turns away. Thank goodness he had officers to help him see what he was missing. In the end, he humbles himself and is cured.

What is your stubbornness causing you to miss out on? Are you so entrenched in a way of thinking or acting that you might be missing what God has for you? Consider the words of the Lord in *Isaiah 55:8-9* (NLT): "My thoughts are nothing like your thoughts," says the LORD. "And My ways are far beyond anything you could imagine. For just as the heavens are higher than the earth, so My ways are higher than your ways, and My thoughts higher than your thoughts."

APPLICATION: Ask God to open your eyes to where you've been missing what He's doing. Spend time thanking Him for His goodness, sovereignty and power in your life. Then read *Philippians 2:5-11* on humility.

PRAYER: God, thank You for how You guide my life. Help me not to miss what You're doing because of my stubbornness. You are the sovereign Lord; help me to remember that I am not. In Jesus' name, amen.

SURRENDER YOUR LIFE

And so, dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to give your bodies to God because of all He has done for you. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice—the kind He will find acceptable. This is truly the way to worship Him. Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect. **Romans 12:1-2 (NLT)**

In biblical times, sacrifices were a regular occurrence. Some of this is lost on us because that's not the world that we live in now. Probably, as you've read in the Old Testament, you've come across burnt offerings or grain offerings or the types of animals to be sacrificed and very specific instructions for how to do so. Thank God that the sacrifice of His Son stands good for all time, as the writer of Hebrews points out in **Hebrews 10:11-12 (NLT)**: *Under the old covenant, the priest stands and ministers before the altar day after day, offering the same sacrifices again and again, which can never take away sins. But our High Priest offered Himself to God as a single sacrifice for sins, good for all time. Then He sat down in the place of honor at God's right hand.*

So, while we don't have to sacrifice a ram or a bird or anything like that today, we are still called to make a sacrifice: our lives and bodies. We give ourselves to God because He gave Himself for us. To surrender the totality of who we are to Him is our true act of worship. What good is singing a song in service on a Sunday with your eyes closed and hands lifted if you're not actually worshipping Him as Lord of your life in your day-to-day?

So how do we do this? We let Him transform the way we think. This means we will often be out of step with what culture says. That's okay—we should think and act differently from those around us who have not been transformed by the Spirit. We study His Word and determine to obey what He has ordained, even if that's directly at odds with the popular thinking of our day.

APPLICATION: Is there any part of your life that you've been holding back from God? He doesn't want 90% surrender—He wants all of you—your thoughts, words and deeds. Consider what you may be withholding from King Jesus and then ask Him to help you bring it under His authority.

PRAYER: Most merciful God, we confess that we have sinned against You in thought, word and deed by what we have done and by what we have left undone. We have not loved You wholeheartedly; we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. We are truly sorry and humbly repent. In Jesus' name, amen.

SURRENDER YOUR INDEPENDENCE

"I am the true grapevine, and My Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch of Mine that doesn't produce fruit, and He prunes the branches that do bear fruit so they will produce even more. You have already been pruned and purified by the message I have given you. 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. 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."

John 15:1-5 (NLT)

From the time we're little kids, we strive for independence. Try to help a toddler too much, and they'll tell you emphatically, *I don't need help!* As we move into our teen years, the desire for independence grows. We can't wait to show our parents that we're fully grown and ready for the real world. Even as full-blown adults, we can be stubbornly independent. We'll refuse help because it might make us look weak or less than. In truth, it's a sad way to live.

When it comes to living as a disciple, nothing is sadder than trying to do that independently from Christ. That should seem obvious, but stop and think for a moment. How often do you try to operate independently of Jesus? You'll want to accomplish certain things for Him, but you're in no way connected to Him. Naturally, you grow frustrated—how could you not? But in truth, it's like getting mad at a lamp for not providing light when it's not plugged in. The lamp must be connected to a power source to function as it's designed. And so do you.

The final words in the passage above are a sobering reminder. Apart from Jesus, we can do nothing. It's right there in black and white. So why do we continue to live the Christian life apart from Christ Himself? He is the vine; we are merely the branches.

Scottish poet and hymn writer Horatius Bonar said: *Be much alone with God, and take time to get thoroughly acquainted. Converse over everything with Him. Unburden yourself wholly—every thought, feeling, wish, plan, doubt—to Him... He wants not merely to be on good terms with you, but to be intimate.*

What a beautiful picture of abiding in Him. Don't delay—start today!

APPLICATION: What would it look like for you to be more connected to Christ? What's preventing you from doing so? What needs to be stripped out of your life? What spiritual disciplines might you consider undertaking? Ask God to show you.

PRAYER: God help me to abide in You. Help me not to lag behind You in my laziness, but help me also not to spring ahead of You in my arrogance and desire for independence. Be with me and help me to find the joy of simply being with You. In Jesus' name, amen.

TOTAL SURRENDER

My old self has been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. So I live in this earthly body by trusting in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me. I do not treat the grace of God as meaningless. For if keeping the law could make us right with God, then there was no need for Christ to die. Galatians 2:20 (NLT)

It's beautiful to read the Gospels and see all the lives Jesus transformed. He restored sight to the blind. He healed the sick. He cured paralysis. He raised the dead. He welcomed outcasts and social misfits. John tells us that He did so much that writing it all down would be impossible (John 21:25). In Jesus, these people found the compassion of God and an invitation to a better Way.

Jesus is still in the business of transforming lives. When we enter relationship with Him, our old selves are laid to rest, and we begin new life in Him. I have always loved how Paul says it in **2 Corinthians 5:17 (NLT)**: *This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!*

In Christ, you are not who you once were. You are a new person. Hallelujah—glory to God! He is not just Savior, but Lord. This means He calls the shots and charts our path. All our life is about Him. And He has given us the Comforter, His Holy Spirit, to live inside of us and guide us.

Consider the lyrics of the classic hymn, *I Surrender All*:
*All to Jesus I surrender... All to Him I freely give
I will ever love and trust Him... In His presence daily live
All to Jesus I surrender... Humbly at His feet I bow
Worldly pleasures all forsaken... Take me, Jesus, take me now*

May we live wholly surrendered to the One who is worthy of our worship.

APPLICATION: We're transformed in our surrender. Take stock once again—is there anything you're still holding back from Him? Ask Him to help you release it. Then take some time to listen to *I Surrender All* and make that your prayer.

PRAYER: God, help me to surrender and submit wholly to Your Will. Reign sovereignly in me. Help me to surrender all to You daily. In Jesus' name, amen.

DAILY COMFORT

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God. For just as we share abundantly in the sufferings of Christ, so also our comfort abounds through Christ.

2 Corinthians 1:3-5 (NIV)

I love the verse above. God is the Father of compassion, and did you pick it up, the God of ALL comfort? As kids, when we got hurt, we were prone to run straight to our parents. This was good because a good parent could provide good comfort, but even the best parent can't provide all comfort. If you're anything like me, much of my life, I would look to different things to provide comfort when things weren't going great. Some were good, and others weren't. I would go to people who loved me and were in my community, but other times, I would look to success, business or hobbies to comfort me by keeping me distracted. It provided some comfort, but certainly not all comfort. Some people love Jesus but run to other things instead of going to Him first. An old hymn writer confessed that he would run to his wife first instead of God. We should bring others in, but the invitation is to bring God in first because no one can care and speak life into us like Him.

I've heard people say when things get really hard or difficult, *I just need to drink* or *I just need to go to bed*. Don't let a bottle, a bed or even a book become your source of comfort. Go to God, find all comfort, let Him fill you up, and transform that pain or disappointment into something good. Then, once you've experienced that comfort, you can comfort other people and invite them to find comfort in God first and then you or others next. We don't have to wait until the other side of heaven to find comfort. God is waiting for you to invite Him in today. Sit and be with God. The way out is the way forward, but remember, God will go with you.

APPLICATION: Go to God first and let Him comfort you!

PRAYER: Ask the Spirit if there is anything you are looking for to comfort you. Ask the Spirit to help you be still. Give God what He brings to mind. Imagine you are handing God what is hurting or causing pain. Ask Him to replace that pain with His love and peace.

DAILY CONTENTMENT

I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. **Philippians 4:12 (NIV)**

The natural default setting of the heart is discontentment. A couple of years ago, I realized I was teaching something that wasn't true. For years, I thought I was supposed to be content in the Lord. Recently, I realized that the Bible only speaks about discontentment when it talks about the circumstances. Notice that Paul was content in his circumstances but desperate for the Lord (Philippians 3:8). We are not supposed to be content for the Lord; we are supposed to seek Him. We are supposed to hunger and thirst for Him. When this happens, we learn, like Paul, to be content in our circumstances. Content with our jobs, content with our bodies, content with money, content with circumstances. This doesn't mean you won't have goals, but it means your identity isn't wrapped up in these things.

I recently met with someone who had so much pressure to succeed in their job. The fear of failure was crushing for them. They were desperate in their circumstances. As I met with them, I asked them how their relationship with God was going. They shared they'd put it on the back burner. The way to deal with worldly discontentment is to become desperate for the Lord. Said another way, when you become desperate for the Lord, you will become content with your circumstances because things are put in proper perspective.

I've learned you can't be passionate for the Lord and your circumstances long term. One will win out. The human heart only has the capacity to crown one thing king of your life. That's why people drift away from God if they aren't intentional to seek Him. Slowly, they become more desperate for something or someone else, and God moves to the back burner. May you choose only to crown Jesus, and may He be the center of your life, now and forever. You won't follow perfectly, but commit to being desperate for Him. Then, you will find the secret of joy and contentment in this life.

APPLICATION: When things compete for your attention today, remind yourself that Jesus is better.

PRAYER: Ask the Spirit of God to show you anything that is before God in your heart. Don't be defensive. Just sit and think about what you spend most of your energy and effort on. Think about what occupies most of your thoughts. Think about what you fear. Then repent of putting those things before Him and ask Him to help you live for Him.

DAILY BLESSINGS

Elisha said, "Go around and ask all your neighbors for empty jars. Don't ask for just a few. Then go inside and shut the door behind you and your sons. Pour oil into all the jars, and as each is filled, put it to one side." She left him and shut the door behind her and her sons. They brought the jars to her and she kept pouring. When all the jars were full, she said to her son, "Bring me another one." But he replied, "There is not a jar left." Then the oil stopped flowing.

2 Kings 4:3-6 (NIV)

I love this story because it shows God loves to pour out blessings on His people. There are two dangerous approaches to the Kingdom. First is a prosperity gospel where we think God's chief purpose is to make us healthy, wealthy and wise. The disciples were following Jesus, and He led them straight into a storm. We must remember God is most interested in our inner spiritual life because that is what we take with us for eternity, while every earthly blessing gets left behind. A second dangerous way is to have a poverty gospel. Almost in an overcorrection to the prosperity gospel, people believe that it is spiritual to suffer or be poor. A biblical response is a provision gospel. God loves to provide for His children. Think about it: I love bringing gifts to my kids. If I thought the gifts were affecting them negatively, I would stop giving them. I also wouldn't say to my kids, *I only want you to love me, and so because of that, I will never give you a gift.* The point is simple: a good father loves to provide for his kids. There are a lot of factors that determine the kind of gifts.

Mark the principle down and remember it: your heavenly Father loves to give good gifts. The story above shows it. This woman is at her end, and Elisha, the prophet, tells her to collect as many empty jars as she can find. She does, and then she starts to pour the oil. Did you notice when it ran out? When she ran out of jars. God kept pouring and pouring out His blessings! Why? Because He loves to provide for His children. I love what Charles Spurgeon says: *If she borrowed few vessels, she would have but little oil; if she borrowed many vessels they should all be filled, and she should have much oil. She was herself to measure out what she should have; and I believe that you and I, in the matter of spiritual blessings from God, have more to do with the measurement of our mercies than we think. We make our blessings little, because our prayers are little.*

Don't be afraid to ask God for daily blessings. He loves to provide for His children.

APPLICATION: Today, take a promise God gave in the Bible and ask Him for it in your life!

PRAYER: Thank God for His blessings! Ask God to help you fall more in love with Him than His blessings, but ask for whatever specific thing you need from God. Thank Him for His provision.

DAILY REST

Then he lay down under the bush and fell asleep. All at once an angel touched him and said, "Get up and eat." He looked around, and there by his head was some bread baked over hot coals, and a jar of water. He ate and drank and then lay down again.

1 Kings 19:5-6 (NIV)

This is one of my favorite Bible stories because it shows God's kindness and care. I'll never forget that I was talking to a leader of one of the largest churches in the United States, and I asked him how to create a culture where people never want to leave the staff. His response startled me; he said, *Bryan, I used to think like you. I dreamed of having a staff that stayed together for years, but when you speak like that, people pace themselves, but if you think of working with people for a season they can work harder.* His point troubled me because he was basically saying people are like positions. They serve their purpose; then you move them on. Jesus doesn't want to use you for His purposes and then move on to the next person. His mission to impact the world has never changed, but neither has His compassion. God is always on mission to heal, redeem, and draw near others towards Himself, but He cares about your soul and your heart.

Elijah is burned out. Notice God doesn't say take a rest so you can back out there. He cares for him. What Elijah needed most was a Cracker Barrel and a Holiday Inn, and God provided both. Sometimes, the most spiritual thing you can do is say no to another thing, take a nap, or go to a good meal and just be with friends and God. There are seasons when running hard is good and necessary, but God wants us to slow down and make sure our hearts and souls are healthy. For years, I wore my exhaustion as a badge. I still work as hard, but I try to slow down regularly and be with God. To take a walk about just to drink it all in. To sit and taste my food, to smile at kids, and to delight in His good gifts. God cares about your soul; sometimes, the better thing to do is rest, eat, and simply be with Him. Give yourself permission to do that. Taking breaks reminds us that God is doing fine running the universe while we sleep and rest. He is God, and we are not; rest in that truth today. He's got this, and He's got you.

APPLICATION: Text your plan to rest to a friend and ask them to check in with you!

PRAYER: Ask the Spirit to guide you on how to rest and replenish each week. Ask Him to practically guide you in how that can work in your schedule. Sit for a moment and ask the Spirit to remind you that He can handle all your tasks better than you can!

DAILY GUIDANCE

Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to Him, and He will make your paths straight.

Proverbs 3:5-6 (NIV)

Years ago, in Illinois, I went to my first-ever corn maze. There was a huge field filled with cornstalks around. You start on one side and try to reach the other. I got lost from my group and somehow made it our first. At the edge of the corn maze was a massive tower you could climb that looked out over the whole field. At the top of the tower, you could see the correct path to take that you couldn't see when you were in the corn maze. I called someone from my group and told them to listen very carefully to my directions. I told them when to go right, left, or straight; because I'm a good person, I only led them down a couple of wrong paths for fun.

This picture is how I often think of the Spirit of God, although He never leads us down wrong paths. He has a vantage point that we don't see. Sometimes, we see so many different paths, and it can be a bit overwhelming. I'm learning that God wants to guide me on the big decisions in my life; however, I'm learning He also wants to give me daily guidance. He cares about my meetings, tasks, family, and everything else. I try to get in the habit of slowing down for a few seconds and asking God to guide my decisions, and I am always amazed that He speaks when we listen. Prayer is a two-way conversation. We don't just rattle off our list of needs or requests, although God is never opposed to those things because He loves hearing from His children. The truth, though, is I need to hear from God more than He needs to hear from me. I need His wisdom, His direction, His vantage points to guide my steps. May we be faithful to bring every decision to Him, knowing He wants to guide us daily.

APPLICATION: Start today, bringing every decision to God and letting Him guide your steps.

PRAYER: Ask the Spirit to guide you. Practice getting still and paying attention to what the Spirit might be saying to you each day. Write down a list of things you are doing today and ask Him to speak to each decision.

DAILY POWER

“So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.”

Matthew 6:31-34 (NIV)

We are prone to worry and weakness. We have great moments of boldness and tenacity, but the unsavory secret is that most of us worry, and fear often outweighs our strength. The other day, I was carrying Selah upstairs to bed, and Grey jumped on my back. Tristan did as well. I could carry one at a time, but the weight of two and three was difficult to carry. Spiritually, God has designed us this same way to get power for one day at a time, not two or three. It's important to know this isn't because God is limited in His ability to give us continual power, or it's not like He made us without a well-thought-out design; rather, He knows that daily power means daily encounters with God. Remember, the second most repeated commandment in the Bible is *remember*. Some days, I wish God wired me where I had enough power for a week or a month, but I'm glad He didn't because He keeps me depending on Him.

When we seek God, He doesn't just give us provisions. He gives us power. Power to trust, power to take a step of faith, power to be bold, power to be at peace. God doesn't just want to provide for you daily; He wants to give you power. A power that comes from life in the Spirit. A power that can only come when we are plugged in. I think there is a reason some Christians don't have power. I think some of us believe just getting around God gives power, but it's our connection with Him that brings power. I cannot put my phone near the power outlet; I have to plug directly into it. God wants you to plug into Him daily, and when you do, you will find His power radiating from you. He is the source!

APPLICATION: Plug into the power of God daily.

PRAYER: Ask the Spirit to guide and help you follow Him. Give Him your worries and ask Him to fill you with His power as you connect with Him today!

DAILY JOY

Nehemiah said, "Go and enjoy choice food and sweet drinks, and send some to those who have nothing prepared. This day is holy to our LORD. Do not grieve, for the joy of the LORD is your strength." **Nehemiah 8:10 (NIV)**

I keep thinking about what I heard a pastor once say: *when I need the entertainment of the world, I've lost the joy of the Lord.* The truth is I often associate God with a serious, stern, intense presence. Those things are true to a degree, but He is also the most joyful being in the whole world. You don't need to supplement other things to find joy. When creating a balanced meal, people will say you need protein, several vegetables, and fruit, and my balanced diet includes dessert! The point is you need multiple things to make a complete meal. Sometimes, I think we have a similar approach to God. We believe we need certain things to supplement joy, but you don't. He is our true joy if you slow down enough to be with Him.

Make no mistake, because, in a culture of immediacy, God seems to be slow joy. He is a crockpot of joy. You have to take your time, reflect, and drink in His presence. So many of us settle for the other sources of joy because they are far more immediate. The food fills our stomachs, the TV shows fill our minds, the hobbies capture our attention, and so on... But wherever your source of joy is, remember, it's fleeting. You will be hungry again soon, you will need more shows, and you need more stuff to fill you up, but God's joy is slow but lasting. Sometimes, I just sit in His presence, and at the moment, it feels hard and, honestly, like nothing is happening. When I'm done, I feel a peace and joy that surprises me from simply sitting and focusing on Him or reading the word. Friends don't settle. Drink deep from the well of daily joy that comes from the Spirit. New life awaits.

APPLICATION: Try to take 10-15 minutes today and just focus on a Bible verse.

PRAYER: Ask God to give you supernatural joy! Ask Him what is cutting into the joy you currently have. Sit in a Bible verse and repeat it over and over again until it fills you with joy and peace.

WHEN I AM AFRAID

O God, have mercy on me, for people are hounding me. My foes attack me all day long. I am constantly hounded by those who slander me, and many are boldly attacking me. But when I am afraid, I will put my trust in you. I praise God for what He has promised. I trust in God, so why should I be afraid? What can mere mortals do to me?
Psalm 56:1-4 (NLT)

King David, the primary writer of the book of Psalms, a man after God's own heart and a great warrior, acknowledged being afraid. When David was anointed to be king, Saul was still the current king. Saul was afraid that David would take away his job, so he told his men to hunt down David and get rid of him. David ran away and ended up in the hands of the Philistines in Gath, the people of Goliath whom David had killed. His friends wanted to kill him, and his enemies wanted to kill him. That's likely the situation David was in when he wrote Psalm 56.

David recognizes some very real problems that would cause anyone to be concerned. People are spreading lies about me behind my back, and others are attacking me to my face. I'm not sure who is with me and who is against me.

Then David admits he is afraid. He says, *When I am afraid*. As he confesses his fear, he expresses his trust in God.

What I fear may be very real and rational, but who is more powerful than God? What reason do I have to fear if I'm trusting the God of the universe?

I may be afraid today, I may be weak, and what I fear might actually happen. But do I trust the God of the universe who wants to show His power in me?

APPLICATION: What is something you fear or are concerned about today? Admit it to God and trust it to Him.

PRAYER: Father, I admit my fear about _____ and trust it to You.

GOD IS WITH US

"And don't be afraid of the people, for I will be with you and will protect you. I, the LORD, have spoken! ... They will fight you, but they will fail. For I am with you, and I will take care of you. I, the LORD, have spoken!"

Jeremiah 1:8, 19 (NLT)

Some say that fear is a lack of faith, but it may be more accurate to say that fear is misplaced faith. We all place our faith in something, but fear rises when we trust in something or someone we don't truly believe can take care of us.

Before I became a follower of Christ, I was a scared, anxious boy. When I trusted my life to Jesus, I began to sense two messages from God's Spirit as I got to know Him through reading the Bible and praying. Those messages were: *I am with you*, and *I will take care of you*. Though the anxiety didn't immediately go away, it immediately began to subside, and anxiety didn't keep me from facing my fears.

The knowledge that God notices me, that He is with me, and He will take care of me has given me assurance to take steps of faith when I might typically be too cautious to move forward. God is with you today!

APPLICATION: Read the words of Jeremiah 1:8 and 19 again and receive it as a message from God to you.

PRAYER: Father, thank You for being with me. Grow my trust that You will truly take care of me.

GOD'S POWER OVER FEAR

For God has not given us a spirit of fear and timidity, but of power, love, and self-discipline. 2 Timothy 1:7 (NLT)

Are you afraid of failing at something, afraid you're not good enough, so you're extra cautious? I quit my 7th-grade basketball team because I thought I wasn't good enough and missed the fun of playing basketball.

The fear of what people might think or the feeling, *but what if I fail or don't do it right?* This is not from God. God has not given us a spirit of fear and timidity.

That fear either comes from the fact that you're trusting in someone or something other than God, or it's coming from your mind or someone else, but it is not from God.

Though God has not given us the spirit of fear, He knows that fear is very real for us, and He has given us some things to counteract our fear.

God has not given us a spirit of fear, but if we trust our lives to Jesus, He has placed the Holy Spirit in us and given us a spirit of power. We have the power to overcome any fear, but the question is: Am I trusting His power or my own power?

It's okay to admit your fear and weakness because then you're more likely to trust the power of Christ to work through you.

God is the most powerful being in the universe, so I'll trust Him to take care of me and work through me. Even though I tell myself that, it's possible that I may still feel fear. So, even in my fear, I can ask His power to be strong in my weakness.

APPLICATION: Ask God to show you where you are afraid of failing.

PRAYER: Father, remind me of who You are. Show me the steps You want me to take today, and help me rely on Your power instead of my strength.

LOVE DRIVES OUT FEAR

Such love has no fear, because perfect love expels all fear. If we are afraid, it is for fear of punishment, and this shows that we have not fully experienced His perfect love.
1 John 4:18 (NLT)

I might believe God has all power, but is that power really for me? I'll believe His power is available to me if I believe God really loves me. 2 Timothy says that God has not given us a spirit of fear but a spirit of love. He has put His Spirit in us so that we may know His love for us. Why would you trust someone? Because you believe they have your best interest in mind, because you believe they love you.

What would it take for you to believe that I really love you? What if I gave you all my stuff? All my money, my home, my car, my clothes, my food—would you believe I loved you?

What if I gave you myself—what if I was available to you 24 hours a day, taking care of every request? What if I was like your own personal Secret Service agent, willing to take a bullet for you? What if I had your back? Would you believe that I loved you?

What if I even gave my wife and children to you to be placed in your service, even to die for you? Would you believe that I loved you? Would you trust me then?

It's one thing to accept with our minds that God did that for us, that He provides what we need, that He promises to be with us 24/7, and that He actually sacrificed His only Son so that we could be with Him forever so that we could experience how much He loves us. We might believe that God loves some people that much, but do we really grasp, do we really feel that God loves us that much?

My fear is evidence that I have not fully grasped the depths of God's love for me and that I have a need to experience His love even more.

I realize I don't fully grasp how much God loves me. But I have received a taste of God's love, and that is what began my journey of trusting Him and my journey of transformation.

When we experience the love of Jesus, it transforms us—our perspective changes. Our fear decreases.

APPLICATION: List the reasons to believe that God really loves you.

PRAYER: Father, thank You for loving me. Bring to my mind the ways that You show Your love for me.

SEEK THE LORD

I sought the LORD, and He answered me and delivered me from all my fears.
Psalm 34:4 (ESV)

God has given us a spirit of self-discipline to keep on seeking Him because once He overcomes one fear, then it's pretty common that another will pop up. Keep on seeking Him and keep on seeking to experience His love so that your faith in Him grows. How do we do that?

I know my wife's love by the way she looks at me, by the things she says about me, how she hugs me, how she responds to me when I talk with her, how she cooks for me, gives me gifts, spends time with me, plans things for us to do together. My steps to help me experience her love further are to thank her for her love, to interact with her, and to find ways to express my love to her.

My trust in God grows as I think of all the ways He loves me, and I thank Him for that. Keep seeking God by thanking Him for what He's already done for you.

As I consider what God has done for me, my belief grows. As I thank Him for what He's done for me, my trust grows, and my fear shrinks. The Bible says it's God's will that I thank Him in all situations: *Be thankful in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you who belong to Christ Jesus.*

1 Thessalonians 5:18 (NLT)

APPLICATION: Make a list of things God has done for you and thank Him for each one.

PRAYER: Father, remind me of what You've done for me. Thank You that every good thing comes from You.

GOD IS MY HELPER

So we can say with confidence, "The LORD is my helper, so I will have no fear. What can mere people do to me?" Hebrews 13:6 (NLT)

Unfortunately, I feel like I'm well acquainted with fear. My wife likes to go hiking, and so do I, but she likes to hike up mountains and on the edge of cliffs, and I'm not quite as interested. Once, when we were hiking on a mountain trail, we came to a point where there was a drop-off on both sides, and the trail was getting very narrow. My wife was just skipping along, and I was trying to follow her, but the trail reached a narrow point where my fear of falling froze me in my tracks. I couldn't take another step. She had to come back to me and walk with me through that narrow passageway to help me get through it. Fear can freeze us and keep us from God's best for us, especially when we face it alone.

We may not realize we experience fear, but if you evaluate some of your behaviors, you might notice some indicators of underlying fear. Like when we react in anger or frustration, with excessive emotion, or try to control everything and everyone around us.

Overcoming fear comes down to where we place our trust. I believe that if we trust anything or anyone other than the Holy Spirit of God, there will come a day when we either feel fear or show evidence of fear. Do I trust my own power? Or do I trust the power of God?

Most of us tend to trust ourselves first. Consider the notion that God is with you today and that He is your helper to walk with you through everything in front of you today.

APPLICATION: Speak this phrase throughout the day: *The Lord is my helper.*

PRAYER: Thank you, Father, for being with me and being my Helper today.

GOD IS MY DAD

For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. So you have not received a spirit that makes you fearful slaves. Instead, you received God's Spirit when He adopted you as His own children. Now we call Him, "Abba, Father." For His Spirit joins with our spirit to affirm that we are God's children.

Romans 8:14-16 (NLT)

God is my Father. He's my Dad! I'm one of His children! I have His Spirit living inside of me.

As a young child, I remember getting out of bed in the middle of the night to get a drink of water from the bathroom sink. When I crossed the hall to go back to my room, I thought I saw a person (in my mind, a monster) at the end of the hall, so I sprinted to my parents' room and jumped up in bed beside my dad. I can still remember the grunt my dad made when I jumped on top of him! When I told him there was a monster in the hall, he walked with me out in the hall, turned the light on, and showed me that the monster was actually his coat hung across the top of the closet door.

I felt protected in my father's arms and reassured by the perspective he gave me when he turned on the light. We can also enjoy a sense of protection and perspective when we trust our heavenly Father with the challenges we face.

When I trusted my life to Jesus Christ, God adopted me as His very own child and put His Spirit inside me. He wants to shine the light of His love in our hearts so that we can sense that we're loved by Him. He wants to illuminate our minds with His Word so that we view situations with His perspective. He wants us to know Him as our Father, so we will trust His power and enjoy the peace that comes from knowing He is with us and is working for our good.

It's good to acknowledge our fears and confess those fears to God. Then, we can trust God's power to overcome whatever is causing our fear. It's an opportunity for God to remind us of His protection and give us His perspective.

APPLICATION: Confess to God something that's making you anxious or afraid.

PRAYER: Ask God what He wants to say to you as your Father.

GOD'S POWER IN ME

As Jesus was walking along, He saw a man who had been blind from birth. "Rabbi," His disciples asked Him, "why was this man born blind? Was it because of his own sins or his parents' sins?" "It was not because of his sins or his parents' sins," Jesus answered. "This happened so the power of God could be seen in him."
John 9:1-3 (NLT)

Have you ever asked yourself the question, *Why? Why am I like this? Why am I suffering this setback or facing this challenge? Why is this happening to me?* There are many possible answers we could give. Maybe I'm suffering the consequences of something I did wrong. Or perhaps the consequences of others' actions have affected me.

Jesus gives a different perspective. In the story of the man who was born blind, Jesus said there was no one to blame. The man's blindness was an opportunity for the power of God to be seen in this man's life. Blaming yourself or someone else for your situation is not the best step toward lasting transformation. You are who you are, and you're in that situation so that the power of God can be seen in you. Everything about us and everything that happens to us is an opportunity for God to display His power.

Does that mean God will heal me or change my circumstances? Maybe, but maybe not. The blind man was healed. But when Paul, a follower of Jesus, begged for God to take away his problem, God said this: *Each time He said, "My grace is all you need. My power works best in weakness." So now I am glad to boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ can work through me.*
2 Corinthians 12:9 (NLT)

How can I be an allowor of God's power today?

APPLICATION: When faced with a challenge today, ask God how He wants to show His power in you.

PRAYER: Father, thank You for allowing me to trust Your strength in the midst of my weakness.

ALL WE NEED

“But while I am here in the world, I am the light of the world.”

John 9:5 (NLT)

By His divine power, God has given us everything we need for living a godly life. We have received all of this by coming to know Him, the One who called us to Himself by means of His marvelous glory and excellence.

2 Peter 1:3 (NLT)

Have you ever held an acorn or some other type of seed in your hand? It's usually fairly small, but inside an acorn, or seed, is everything needed to reach the potential of becoming a tree or plant that displays the handiwork of God. The seed realizes its potential through the process of being planted in the earth, watered by the rain, and nurtured by the sun.

The blind man in John 9 lived in physical darkness, but everything he needed to experience light was found in Jesus, the light of the world.

In Jesus, we find everything we need to become the person God created us to be and to experience life with God. We begin to realize that potential as we plant our lives in Jesus by getting to know Him and allowing Him to nurture our growth through His Word and His love.

APPLICATION: What is your step to know Jesus better today? Watch for how He reveals Himself.

PRAYER: Father, I bring my need to You and trust You to show Your power in me.

TRANSFORMATION THROUGH SURRENDER

Then He spit on the ground, made mud with the saliva, and spread the mud over the blind man's eyes. John 9:6 (NLT)

And so, dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to give your bodies to God because of all He has done for you. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice—the kind He will find acceptable. This is truly the way to worship Him. Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect. Romans 12:1-2 (NLT)

The blind man in John 9 took a step of surrender to Jesus. How do we know that? Because he allowed Jesus to touch him and spread mud on his eyes. And not just any mud; it was mud that Jesus made with dirt and His own spit.

I know some women who use mud as a facial treatment, but I don't know anyone who puts it on their eyes to improve their sight, especially not mud made with spit!

What a humbling act of surrender expressed by this blind man. In front of a crowd, he risked appearing foolish and allowed Jesus to rub spit mud on his eyes, trusting that Jesus knew what He was doing, even before he knew the transformation that was about to happen.

The mud made from the mouth of Jesus and applied from the hands of Jesus brought a miraculous transformation to this blind man who simply trusted Jesus.

How can we allow the mouth and hands of Jesus to transform us today? Hearing from God's Word, the Bible, is a great way to receive what God has for us from His own mouth. Each day, we can let God spread the mud of His Word on us, words from the very mouth of God.

APPLICATION: Surrender your life and mind to God by reading His Word and listening for what He wants you to know and do.

PRAYER: Father, I surrender myself to You today, trusting You to do Your work in me. Show me what You want me to know and do.

TRANSFORMATION THROUGH COOPERATION

He told him, "Go wash yourself in the pool of Siloam" (Siloam means "sent"). So the man went and washed and came back seeing! John 9:7 (NLT)

For God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases Him. Philippians 2:13 (NLT)

The blind man in John 9 listened to the words of Jesus, and when he cooperated with Christ by doing what He said, a miracle happened. The blind man was changed. He could see!

Listening to God's Word is one step in our transformation, but doing what He says is another step toward seeing His power at work in us.

There is work for us to do when cooperating with Jesus in our transformation. We work to communicate with God by reading the Bible and listening for what God says to us. We work to obey God by applying what we hear from Him, just as the blind man did. God's work is to change us to become more like Him; our work is communicating and cooperating with Him. As we continue the practice of listening for God through His Word and prayer, and doing what He says, we will see God begin to change us.

God is already working in you. He's the One who has given you the desire to read this today. Let the change come!

APPLICATION: As you read God's Word today, ask Jesus what He wants you to know and do.

PRAYER: Father, thanks for being with me. Give me the strength to express my trust by cooperating with You today.

GOD CAN USE OUR STORY

He told them, "The man they call Jesus made mud and spread it over my eyes and told me, 'Go to the pool of Siloam and wash yourself.' So I went and washed, and now I can see!" ...

"I don't know whether He is a sinner," the man replied. "But I know this: I was blind, and now I can see!" **John 9:11, 25 (NLT)**

When we get together, I want to encourage you in your faith, but I also want to be encouraged by yours. **Romans 1:12 (NLT)**

The blind man in John 9 had a story of how Jesus changed his life that might go something like this: *Here's what I know. I was blind. A man named Jesus put mud on my eyes and told me to wash it off in the pool. When I washed, I could see! I don't know everything about Jesus, but I know I'm changed after meeting Him. I was blind, and now I can see.*

You are the expert witness on what has happened to you. Though there may be many questions you can't answer about Jesus, or others may disagree with your views on the Bible, it's hard to argue with someone's first-hand experience.

As a young boy, I was totally self-centered and scared to be alone. I would cry if my mom picked me up after school late. But when I trusted that Jesus died on the cross for me, forgave me of all my sins, and rose from the dead to assure me of eternal life, I was changed. I told my mom I would ride the bus or walk home from school because I knew Jesus would take care of me in this life or in the life to come. I began to have a concern for other people that wasn't there before. Jesus was changing me.

Your story of transformation can help someone consider that God can work in their lives as well.

APPLICATION: What has changed about you since you trusted Jesus? What work would you like Jesus to do in you today?

PRAYER: Father, thank You for the peace You give when I trust You. Show me opportunities to tell of what You've done for me.

TRANSFORMATION THROUGH RELATIONSHIP

When Jesus heard what had happened, He found the man and asked, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" The man answered, "Who is He, sir? I want to believe in Him." "You have seen Him," Jesus said, "and He is speaking to you!" "Yes, Lord, I believe!" the man said. And he worshiped Jesus.

John 9:35-38 (NLT)

Put on your new nature, and be renewed as you learn to know your Creator and become like Him.

Colossians 3:10 (NLT)

The blind man who received his sight was changed by Jesus, but that was just the start of his transformation. Becoming the person God created us to be comes from a continued relationship with Jesus Christ.

When I met my seminary roommate's sister, I thought she was quite attractive, and I was very interested in dating her. But I wasn't sure if I could pursue a relationship with her because she resembled her brother, one of my best friends. When we had the opportunity to ride in the same car on a group trip, we began conversing. As we reached our destination, I told her, *I used to think you resembled your brother, but now I don't think you look like him at all!* My perspective changed as I got to know her better, and she eventually became my wife. My relationship with her transformed me.

I received a new nature when I trusted Jesus, but the transformation continues as I get to know Him better. As I hear God's voice through His Word and in my mind, and as I experience the love of Christ, my perspective will be changed, and I will become more like Him.

APPLICATION: What have you come to know about Jesus that has changed you?

PRAYER: Father, thank You for the _____ You give that has made me more _____.

TRANSFORMATION STARTS WITH ADMISSION

"If you were blind, you wouldn't be guilty," Jesus replied. "But you remain guilty because you claim you can see." John 9:41 (NLT)

If we claim we have no sin, we are only fooling ourselves and not living in the truth. But if we confess our sins to Him, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all wickedness. If we claim we have not sinned, we are calling God a liar and showing that His word has no place in our hearts.
1 John 1:8-10 (NLT)

Have you ever said phrases like this: *I'm not like that. I would never. How could you think that about me? I'm doing fine. It's not that bad. Everything is wonderful. No one needs to know.*

After the man born blind was healed in John 9, Jesus told the religious leaders who were skeptical of Him that they remained guilty because they claimed they could see. In other words, if you think there's nothing wrong with you, you won't take the steps to change.

A key to transformation and becoming the person God wants me to be is to admit my sin, difficulty, and hurt—admit my negative characteristics.

First, admit it to yourself because the truth will set you free.

Second, admit it to God because His forgiveness and cleansing will renew your soul.

Third, admit it to a person you trust because you'll find healing and encouragement to allow God to continue His transformation of you.

Because of my sin and who I think I am, I want to hide from others. I fear people knowing who I really am. My isolation causes me to stay away from anyone who can help me. But confession brings me into the light and opens the door to transformation.

APPLICATION: Ask God to show you one area He wants to change in you. Confess that to Him and someone you trust.

PRAYER: Father, thank You for loving me. Examine me and show me what You want to change in me. Help me confess it to You.

NEW TEMPLES

Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.

1 Corinthians 6:18-20 (ESV)

It's a shame this verse only gets associated with sexual immorality. This might be one of the most amazing verses in the Bible! In the Old Testament, the presence of God would dwell in a temple, in a place called the Holy of Holies. People would travel to the temple because God was amongst His people but not with them. God was personal because He identified with the people of Israel. He made Himself known. There was a sense of God's presence, but it still felt a bit distant, like a leader or boss you could never get time with. Years ago, I worked at a very large church and didn't meet the senior pastor for the first few years. He was around, and I saw him, but we didn't interact. I was around him, but we didn't know each other.

The priests were always offering sacrifices at the temple because God was holy, and our sins separated us from Him. The Israelites saw God was amongst them, but they couldn't get too close; their sin and His holiness would have been a deadly combination. Fast forward thousands of years later, Jesus is considered the Lamb of God who came to take away the sins of the world! His temple would be a tomb, His throne would be a cross, and His crown would be thorns. Jesus' death doesn't just give you forgiveness; it makes you and me the new temple. In the same way, God used to dwell in the physical temple, in the Holy of Holies. You are now that temple! Let that sink in. The fullness of God lives in us, is available to us, and walks with us if we let Him! The death and resurrection of Jesus make us the new temples of God.

APPLICATION: Remember, you aren't just set free; you are a temple of the Holy God!

PRAYER: If you are holding onto any sin, then remember what Jesus did on the cross. He was slain for you. God forgives your sin because Jesus paid its penalty; rest in that. Ask God to give you peace in knowing He is with you today!

NEW DESIRES

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!
2 Corinthians 5:17 (NIV)

One year in New York, I saw someone trying to sell some sunglasses on the street. A friend with me quickly pointed out those are counterfeit. They look like the real thing, but they aren't. How do you really know if you are a follower of Jesus? One of those ways isn't about perfection; it's about desire. The Pharisees looked great on the outside, but Jesus reminds us that their faith was counterfeit. Transformation really happens on the inside. You get new desires, and if you try to keep living the old way, your conscience starts to convict you. I always remind someone if they are miserable when they are sinning, it's a good sign. Their desires have changed.

Becoming like Jesus is a process, and we never arrive, but God's Spirit places new desires to follow, love and serve Him. Have your desires changed throughout the years? Do you want to honor Christ? This is important for us to ask honest questions. We must be faithful to the new desires He places in us because we will grow numb after a while, and our hearts will become as hard as the people did in the wilderness. Your job isn't to whip up devotion, strive with adrenaline, or willpower. Your job is to act on the desires God gives you.

Be faithful to wake up and meet with Him each day, be faithful to come to church, be faithful to serve Him, Be faithful to give of your resources. He's the One who placed those desires in you, but you must act on them. Our obedience to God increases our desires for Him. The desires are the Spirit of God in you, making you new. You will still have some old habits that will rear their heads, but your spirit and heart have a new operating system. Let the Spirit work through you that which He has started in you. Let Him have His way today!

APPLICATION: Act on what God has placed in your heart today.

PRAYER: Ask God how to act on the desires He has placed on your heart. Thank God for His nearness and that He creates new desires. Write down the things God is calling you to be obedient to today and act on them.

NEW FUTURE HOMES

Then I saw "a new heaven and a new earth," for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and He will dwell with them. They will be His people, and God Himself will be with them and be their God.

Revelation 2:1-3 (NIV)

I'll never forget the first home Steph and I bought. We were living in an apartment then, and an amazing home we could afford became available! We went under contract, but during the inspection, we found out the house had mold all in it. I remember being devastated because we thought this was such an amazing place. We rented for another couple of years, and then an even better home became available. I realized God had been preparing a better place for me all along, even though I had no idea. Jesus, before He ascended to heaven, shared with His disciples that He was going to prepare a place for us. We don't know all the details of what it will be like, but I tell you, it will be even better than you could imagine.

We often have these false views of heaven that don't always seem better: endless cloud sitting, harps, angels, constant singing. Heaven will be a place of activity; notice the verse above says it will be a city. Heaven will be a place of adventure and fulfillment. Heaven will be a place that we will never want to leave, even though you can't picture it right now. I used to feel guilty because I didn't always desire heaven, but remember, Paul says no eye has seen or can comprehend fully what God has better. Just remember that heaven is a better place. Remember, God has something even better than what you have now. This should bring encouragement if life is amazing right now and if it's difficult. It will be better because Heaven is where you and I will walk with God!

APPLICATION: Keep your eyes fixed on the unseen today.

PRAYER: Thank God for what awaits. If it's an amazing season, remind yourself that your future home is even better than what you have now. If it's a difficult season, ask the Spirit to encourage you that a better home awaits.

NEW POWER

By His divine power, God has given us everything we need for living a godly life. We have received all of this by coming to know Him, the One who called us to Himself by means of His marvelous glory and excellence.

2 Peter 1:3 (NLT)

There is a phrase I say a lot, but I'm not sure it's quite sunk into my heart. I say this phrase: *the same power that raised Jesus from the grave lives inside of me*. Think about this: tons of men have claimed to be God throughout history. In fact, 38 men have claimed to be Jesus, the Messiah. There have been many people who have performed a miracle or proclaimed to. However, only One has ever risen and conquered the grave. Buddha doesn't claim that. Mohammed doesn't claim that. Only One has ever claimed that kind of power: Jesus of Nazareth. Now, that verse has been welded to me. Faith is a journey, but part of victory in Jesus is realizing the power that we have through Him. For years, I tried to conquer demons, sin, and strongholds with adrenaline and my own strength, and it seemed like I always inevitably lost. I was good for a while, but I didn't have the strength to overcome what I was facing.

Nowadays, my way forward is what John the Baptist said: *I become less, and He becomes more*. Said another way, I take hold of His power by surrendering mine. What would your life look like if you really believed the same power that raised Jesus from the grave lives inside you? How would it affect the way you pray? How would it affect the way you face the sin in your life? How would it affect the way you speak about Jesus to those around you? The question isn't whether His power is available to you, but rather, are you aware of the power living inside you? The more we know Him, the more we live like Him. Draw near to Him today.

APPLICATION: Trust that God's power is living inside of you today.

PRAYER: Spend a few moments thinking about the power of Jesus. Think about His miracles. Let your heart be filled with awe at His power. Then let the Spirit remind you that He is with you! Ask the Spirit to open your eyes to your power in Jesus.

NEW HOPE

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.

Romans 15:13 (NLT)

I want to submit to you that every destructive act in the Bible or in your life is preceded by one thing: discouragement. No one says *I'm going to leave my spouse. We have the best marriage.* No one says *I'm going to quit my job; it's the best job on Earth,* and no one says *I will find a new church. This one is just too good!* We give up on things when we don't have hope things will get better. David slept with Bathsheba, but did you ever notice when it happened? The Bible says in 2 Samuel 11, in the time when kings normally go to war. What was David? He was king, and you must imagine he's feeling restless that his men are out there. It was in that season David did a destructive thing. For years, I struggled with an addiction to pornography because I didn't have any hope things would change. I felt an overwhelming sense that certain things in my life wouldn't improve, and that discouragement drove me to a destructive behavior. What changed in me? Hope through the Spirit. Hope that I can find deeper peace in this life. Hope that my mistakes didn't define me. Hope that each day brought new mercies from God!

Lift your eyes up, friends. Lift your eyes to Heaven, for that is where hope comes from. Resurrection life isn't a one-day event; it's a right-now thing. Jesus has risen and conquered the grave, and a new hope lives inside you. Don't look with physical eyes at what you have seen; let the hope of the resurrection life awaken in you. The disciples saw Jesus die with their physical eyes, but if they had looked with spiritual eyes, they would have hope well up within. Let God give you a deeper hope today!

APPLICATION: Take hold of every thought that leads to discouragement in your life.

PRAYER: Ask the Spirit what you are discouraged about. Ask Him to bring that to mind today. Ask Him to give you a hope that new life is available. Spend time asking the Spirit to remind you where He has already shown up in your life!

NEW MISSION

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be My witnesses, telling people about Me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” Acts 1:8 (NLT)

Tony Evans wisely once said, *you can be so heavenly minded you are no earthly good, or you are so earthly minded that you are no good.* This is such a rich thought. We are called to live with one foot in each world. If I’m all in this world, I have lost sight of the next world. I have lost sight of the Kingdom. If all I do is try to pull away from this world and shelter, I cannot be the light that God has called me to be. God doesn’t need us, but we are His plan. Think about it: you are God’s plan to reach the world around us. God has strategically placed you exactly where you are to make a difference.

God’s mission isn’t just for the elite or all-stars; it’s for everyone! Acts 1:8 is a missional invitation for every man, woman and child. There is no greater purpose than to live for Jesus. We often think we must quit our jobs to travel around the world or work at a church full-time, which isn’t true. God has placed you exactly where you are in your jobs, neighborhoods and families to impact those around you. To shine your light everywhere you go! May you awaken to the call that God has on your life. May you awaken to the purpose God has given you to be a light for Him where you go!

I’ve noticed sometimes we talk about impacting the world. I love the heart behind this, but honestly, it feels a bit overwhelming to do that, and sometimes these thoughts can paralyze us. I have now shifted my thinking. God has called you and me to impact our world. He has placed me where I am, so I will simply impact those around me. I’m not going to spend hours, days, and months wondering how I can impact the world; instead, I will impact my world. Every trip to a grocery store, every walk around the neighborhood, every trip to my kids’ school events, and even a trip to the DMV can be an opportunity to live out the love of Jesus. It’s not always easy, but it’s not complex. You are called to love God and people!

APPLICATION: Look for opportunities in front of you today to be a light.

PRAYER: Ask the Spirit to give you spiritual eyes to be a light to those around you. Ask Him how you can shine that light on them. Ask the Spirit to place someone on your heart!

NEW BODIES

For we know that when this earthly tent we live in is taken down (that is, when we die and leave this earthly body), we will have a house in heaven, an eternal body made for us by God Himself and not by human hands. We grow weary in our present bodies, and we long to put on our heavenly bodies like new clothing. For we will put on heavenly bodies; we will not be spirits without bodies. While we live in these earthly bodies, we groan and sigh, but it's not that we want to die and get rid of these bodies that clothe us. Rather, we want to put on our new bodies so that these dying bodies will be swallowed up by life.

2 Corinthians 5:1-4 (NLT)

I love where it says we groan and sigh in our current bodies. For years, I could eat what I wanted, fall and not ache, run and not grow exhausted, and go on very little sleep. Now, things have changed for me. The other day, I pulled a muscle in my neck while sleeping!

Whenever I tell someone older than me about an ache or pain, I usually get, *Oh, you wait, it doesn't get any better!* If I'm honest, there are times I fear getting older. I fear more of the groaning and sighing. I fear the slower movement and increased exhaustion that seems to grow each year. Then I come to verses like the ones above, and I remember that the resurrection of Jesus promises new bodies. We don't have to be afraid of the future. We don't have to be fearful because we know what awaits us.

The other day, I had some sickness, and while I didn't enjoy getting sick, I knew that this season would pass and I would be back. This should be our approach to aging. This season will pass, and one day soon, we will have new and improved bodies! As you get older, you get a wisdom and rootedness you couldn't have when you were younger. There is nothing to fear because God, in His goodness, has made a way. Let every ache and pain when you are young and old cause you to keep your eyes on what matters most: eternity. I love what Jonathan Edwards says: *Lord, teach me to live with eternity stamped on my eyelids. The best day on this earth can't hold a candle to the worst in heaven.*

APPLICATION: Today, through every bump and bruise, look towards heaven!

PRAYER: Ask the Spirit to make you excited about what awaits. Ask Him to give you hope and confidence that everything will be made better one day. Ask Him to provide you with a deep joy that He is with you now in every moment, good and bad!



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