

KINGDOM MEN|WOMEN

DAILY DEVOTIONAL

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What does it look like to live as a Kingdom man or woman?

Over the next five weeks, we'll explore that question through the lives of ordinary people who learned to trust an extraordinary God. We'll walk alongside Esther as she finds courage to step into God's purpose, Gideon as he discovers strength beyond his own, Aquila and Priscilla as they faithfully use their everyday lives for Kingdom work, and Hannah as she trusts God through disappointment, prayer and surrender. Along the way, we'll discover that becoming Kingdom men and women begins not with what we accomplish, but with knowing the heart of our Father.

And we can't know the Father apart from Jesus.

That's why we must keep Jesus at the center—the center of our identity, our relationships, our decisions, our homes and our church. The world constantly invites us to define ourselves by what we achieve, possess or control. Jesus offers something better. He invites us to find our identity in Him, depend on His strength and live for His Kingdom.

Let's keep our eyes on Jesus, listen for His voice and follow wherever He leads. And together, let's become men and women whose lives unmistakably point to our King.

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

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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?

KNOWING THE FATHER

I am writing to you, dear children, because your sins have been forgiven on account of his name. I am writing to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning. I am writing to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one. I write to you, dear children, because you know the Father. I write to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God lives in you, and you have overcome the evil one.

1 John 2:12-14 (NIV)

One of the great invitations of the Christian life is not simply to believe in God, learn about God or ask God to help us through life. It's to know Him. To walk with Him. To enjoy His presence. To increasingly discover who He is—and, as men and women of His Kingdom, to learn to live under His rule in the ordinary moments of our lives. Yet we can spend so much of our energy focused on our circumstances. When things are going well, we're happy. When plans fall apart, people disappoint us, or life takes an unexpected turn, we become discouraged, frustrated or anxious. Without realizing it, we can begin to believe that if we could get our circumstances right, we would be okay. But Scripture offers us something much deeper than better circumstances. It offers us God Himself.

And maybe one of the greatest things we can discover is this: God's not merely the One who helps us have a better life. *Knowing God is the life we were made for.* This is part of what it means to live as Kingdom men and women. We live under another King, with another source of peace, another definition of what matters and another confidence about where our lives are headed.

APPLICATION: Instead of measuring today by whether things go the way you hoped, measure it by whether you are learning to know God and follow Him more deeply. In whatever happens today—the good, the difficult and the unexpected—look for opportunities to trust Him, enjoy His presence and live as someone who belongs to the King.

PRAYER: Father, help me to want You more than I want comfortable circumstances. Teach me to know You, trust You, enjoy Your presence and live faithfully under Your rule in whatever today brings. Let knowing You become the deepest joy and greatest treasure of my life. Amen.

OH, TO BE YOUNG AGAIN!

I write to you, dear children, because you know the Father. I write to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God lives in you, and you have overcome the evil one.

1 John 2:14 (NIV)

Oh, to be young again! What would it be like to go back in time and mentor your younger self? For me, it would be my early twenties. I lacked the guidance of an earthly father and made mistakes. I look back and see a young man in me with little to no spiritual maturity.

In 1 John 2:14, what was John trying to say about age? He mentions Children, Young Men and Fathers. Is he referring to age in years or age in faith? I think maybe both. I'm very blessed to have a great circle of friends. Some are just starting college, while others are enjoying the spoils of retirement. It's safe to say I probably wouldn't ask my college-aged friends for retirement advice, nor would I ask my older friends about current pop culture. Now, let's look at the same circle of friends and how it relates to being young in faith. I came to Christ later in my adult life, and I needed guidance. Some of my biggest influences were friends who were much younger than I was, but further along in their spiritual walk. Just as we are at different ages, we are also at different levels of spiritual maturity. This is where age in years becomes less important.

1 Timothy 4:12 (NIV) says: *Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith and in purity.* This is great news, because even if you're young in your faith, you have an important role in the kingdom of God. Our King is kind, showing us grace at every stage of the journey. In this case, He is calling men (and women) young in their faith to keep going! We need you too!

APPLICATION: Make time to grow spiritually. Reading in the Word, praying and fasting are all great ways. Make quiet time for God. Sit in the silence and listen for His Spirit to guide you.

PRAYER: Father, thank You for Your grace—something I don't deserve and could never earn. I pray that You would continue to mature me through Your Spirit. Amen.

PASS IT ON

...so we cared for you. Because we loved you so much, we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well.

1 Thessalonians 2:8 (NIV)

...children... young men... fathers...

1 John 2:12-14 (NIV)

There comes a point in our journey when following Jesus becomes more than just about us. What God has built into us is meant to be passed on to others. In 1 John 2:12-14, John speaks to three groups: children, young men and fathers. Children know the Father. The young men are strong. But when John speaks to the fathers, he repeats one simple description: *You know him who is from the beginning*. There's something beautiful about this description of spiritual maturity. John doesn't say the fathers know everything and have it all together. Instead, spiritual fathers are those who have walked with God long enough to know Him.

They've seen His faithfulness through both beautiful and difficult seasons. They've prayed prayers that were answered and others that seemed to go unanswered. They've walked through wilderness places, fought battles, experienced failure, received grace and discovered again and again that God can be trusted. They have become sages, something our world desperately needs. And that is part of our calling as Kingdom men and women. People are coming behind us who haven't traveled as far yet. They are fighting battles we have already fought. They are asking questions we have wrestled with. They are entering wildernesses we recognize. They need our stories of God's faithfulness. They need someone who can say *I've walked this road. Let me tell you what God taught me*. Someone who can remind them when they're afraid that God can be trusted. Someone who can encourage them when they stumble to get back up and keep walking. Maybe spiritual maturity isn't simply measured by how far we have traveled with God. Maybe it's also measured by whether we're helping someone else make the journey.

Don't waste what God has taught you. Pass it on.

APPLICATION: Think about someone who isn't as far along in their journey with God as you are. Come alongside them, listen to them, share what God has taught you, pray for them and help them take their next step toward Jesus.

PRAYER: Father, thank You for everything You've taught me along the way. Give me someone I can encourage and strengthen and help me faithfully pass on what You have given me. Make me someone who not only walks closely with You but also helps others learn to walk with You, too. Amen.

FIGHTING THE BATTLES THAT MATTER

In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one.
Ephesians 6:16 (NIV)

There is a battle going on all around us. There are no swords, uniforms or battle lines. Instead, our enemy often works quietly—through temptation, discouragement, distraction, deception, fear, accusation and compromise. Beyond the struggles around us, there's a deeper, more crucial battle going on inside us. A battle for what we believe, what we love, what we think about, what we pursue and whom we will trust.

This battle affects every part of our lives.

Oddly enough, sometimes fighting the enemy looks surprisingly ordinary. A while back, someone said something about me that wasn't true. My first instinct was to defend myself, straighten them out and make sure everyone knew my side of the story. I could feel myself rehearsing the conversation in my head—what I would say, how I would say it and how I would prove them wrong. But somewhere in the middle of all that, I realized there was a bigger battle going on. The real battle wasn't between that person and me. The enemy was trying to pull me toward anger, resentment and pride. I could feel this was the real battle I was up against. So, I decided to fight that battle God's way. I prayed for the person. I asked God to guard my heart. And I chose to let it go. Nothing dramatic happened. No miracle. No great victory anyone else could see. But that day, in one small ordinary moment, the enemy didn't get what he wanted.

As Kingdom men and women, we live in enemy territory. Let's stay close to Jesus so we end up fighting the battles that really matter.

APPLICATION: Ask God to help you recognize where the real battle is taking place in your life today. Instead of spending your strength fighting people or circumstances, stand firm in Christ, fill your mind with truth and choose to live today as someone whose loyalty belongs to Jesus the King.

PRAYER: Father, open my eyes to the battles that matter. Help me recognize the enemy's lies, resist temptation and stand in Your truth. Keep me close to Jesus, remembering that the strongest life is not focused on the enemy, but on Christ—the One in me who is greater than the world. Amen.

FORGIVEN AND FREE

I am writing to you, dear children, because your sins have been forgiven on account of his name.
1 John 2:12 (NIV)

In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace.
Ephesians 1:7 (NIV)

What does it mean to forgive? As humans, we use forgiveness in two ways. We can ask for it and offer it. To ask for it means you were in the wrong. But what does it mean to *offer* forgiveness? It's the ability to forgive someone else's transgressions when you weren't necessarily at fault. Wow, that may be a little harder to comprehend! Either way, both are essential for becoming the men and women God designed us to be.

I remember a time when I needed someone's forgiveness. I bought a pair of safety shoes for work. After wearing them for a week, they seemed to be falling apart. I took them back to the store, and the salesperson started giving me the runaround, explaining that some of the quality issues were normal. I wasn't having it. In short, I ended up making a fool out of myself when it wasn't necessary. He exchanged the shoes; I got in the car, and I left. I thought it was over... but then the Holy Spirit entered! It became clear. I had to turn around, go back and ask for forgiveness. It was one of the first times I can remember wanting to make it right. I apologized for my attitude, and he was very gracious and forgiving.

But what about another type of forgiveness that we don't deserve and can't earn? In today's Scriptures, we see that forgiveness is freely given to us by someone else. Do you know who I am talking about? You guessed it, Jesus! The life and works of Christ were meant to give us the gift of salvation. He was sinless, yet bore our sins, shed His blood and died—all so we could be redeemed. Living in Christ's forgiveness is the way we're able to forgive others and grow as men and women of God.

APPLICATION: For just a moment, put aside how you feel about forgiveness and focus on how God views it. Maybe there's someone in your life who needs to hear from you. Can you ask for forgiveness, or can you offer it to someone? Ask God's Spirit to lead you.

PRAYER: Father, thank You for Your Son. For without Him, we couldn't experience Your love. Teach us to forgive as You forgave us. Amen.

THE WORD OF GOD LIVES IN YOU

Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. **Colossians 3:16 (NIV)**

I can remember a time when traveling by car was very different from what it is today. No modern navigation or GPS meant I had to plan the route before leaving on a long road trip. I can remember rolling down the interstate with a road atlas and several folding maps lying across the front dashboard. Getting lost meant pulling over and trying to figure out where I missed a turn or exit. What a hassle! But modern navigation has simplified the process of traveling by offering step-by-step directions and providing rerouting if we miss a turn. To put it simply, it keeps us from getting lost.

But how do we keep from losing our way spiritually? In Matthew 4:1-11, the Holy Spirit leads Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted by Satan. The Spirit would empower Jesus with the Word of God, allowing Him to resist all temptation through Scripture. In John 14:26, we see how God offers us the gift of His Spirit to empower us just as He did Jesus in the wilderness! Because of Christ's sacrifice on the cross, we're not only forgiven and made new, but the Word of God now lives in us. I don't know about you, but that's good news! Tough seasons are guaranteed. Hardships such as a diagnosis, lost employment, marital strife or a prodigal child are part of life. But as believers, the Word within us calms the storm, guides our steps and keeps us anchored.

APPLICATION: Learning to hear the Holy Spirit takes some effort. Commit to finding time in your day to meditate and listen. Ask God what He wants you to know. Strengthen yourself in God's Word by developing a Bible study plan that works for you. Faith is like a double-edged sword. It has to be continuously sharpened to be effective.

PRAYER: God, thank You for Your Word. Thank You for Your Spirit, who guides us and keeps us grounded. Thank You for Jesus' work on the cross; without His sacrifice, we would not have access to Your Spirit and would be eternally lost. I am forever thankful. Amen.

A TEACHABLE SPIRIT

*Listen to counsel and receive instruction,
That you may be wise in your latter days.*

Proverbs 19:20 (NKJV)

Since high school, I have sought the friendship and counsel of older women, drawn to the wisdom and spiritual strength that many seasoned Christians possess. Their life experiences and tested faith have guided me, helping me dive deeper into my relationship with God. The story of Esther illustrates the value of being open to wise guidance.

Esther is unique in that it is the only book that never mentions God. We first meet Esther as an orphan adopted by her cousin, Mordecai. When King Xerxes of Persia seeks a new queen, Esther is brought to the palace with other young women. She undergoes beauty treatments and, with her charm and grace, wins the favor of Hegai, the eunuch in charge. Esther eventually wins the King's favor, becoming his new queen.

Mordecai remains a supportive figure, visiting the harem daily to check on Esther and to offer guidance. She communicates with him through messengers and adheres to his wise counsel, such as remaining silent about her Jewish identity, and alerting the King about a plot against him. Her humility and obedience to Mordecai's advice are evident.

As time passes and Haman, the King's second in command, plots against the Jews, Mordecai reminds Esther that her royal position does not guarantee her safety. He challenges her with the pivotal question, ...*who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?* (Esther 4:14). This moment highlights the importance of being receptive to wise counsel, encouraging her to act.

Esther responds by fasting and praying, ultimately deciding to use her influence as queen to save her people. Her success would not have been possible without the counsel and support of Mordecai and others. This story underlines the significance of remaining open to wise counsel and being prepared to step up when called upon, reinforcing my belief in the value of mentorship and wisdom offered by those with more experience.

APPLICATION: Have you ever ignored advice and later regretted it? Being teachable is important at any age. Growing as a man or woman of God involves seeking knowledge, accountability, and accepting challenging counsel. How is God challenging you today? Are you open to His teachings and the help He provides?

PRAYER: God, we thank You for Your wise counsel, for You are the Wonderful Counselor. Grow in us a teachable spirit to discern Your voice and to act obediently when You call us to step out faithfully. Amen.

PREPARATION OVER IMPULSIVITY

*Good planning and hard work lead to prosperity,
but hasty shortcuts lead to poverty.*

Proverbs 21:5 (NLT)

Esther was a young girl when she was adopted by her cousin, Mordecai, and taken to the palace by King Xerxes. Despite her elevated position, approaching the king without an invitation was illegal and could lead to death. When Mordecai urges her to plead for mercy for their people, Esther hesitates, citing the law and the fact that she hasn't been summoned in thirty days. However, Mordecai disputes her excuses with a powerful reminder: *Who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?* (Esther 4:14b).

Esther's actions from this point forward mark a significant transformation in her character. No longer willing to remain passive, she decides to take proactive steps through careful preparation. One aspect that often goes unrecognized is her intelligence; instead of impulsively pleading for the king's support, she seeks God's guidance first and commands Mordecai to join her in fasting for three days. Afterward, dressed in her royal garments, she stands in the inner court of the palace, facing the king's hall. Although she must feel fearful inside, the king notices her and is pleased, extending his peace to her with the gold scepter in his hand. When he asks her what her request is, Esther invites him and Haman to a two-day banquet she has prepared. Esther is observant and keen; she knows her husband enjoys being wined and dined, so she carefully prepares to please him. The time she takes to set the scene for her request to the king allows God to work in ways she cannot see.

Don't underestimate how God can use waiting and preparation to His advantage. Before Esther approached the king, she felt hesitant and anxious, but after fasting, she was spiritually strengthened. Aware that her decision could lead to death, she famously told Mordecai: *...if I perish, I perish* (Esther 4:16). Her faithfulness in relying on God was not wasted. Once the king showed her favor at the throne, she realized God was with her and guiding her every step of the way as she carried out her plan, and ultimately God's.

APPLICATION: How do you cope when God feels distant? Remember, He is always at work, even when His presence feels absent. Take a moment to pause and reconnect with Him through prayer, fasting or worship.

PRAYER: Dear God, thank You for always working in my favor. May I remain faithful even when times are uncertain or unclear. I ask that You open my eyes so that I may see You moving around me. Amen.

HOLY BOLDNESS

*The wicked flee when no one pursues,
But the righteous are bold as a lion.*

Proverbs 28:1 (NKJV)

Esther's life has mostly been governed by men. From Mordecai to Hegai and eventually King Xerxes, she navigated a world where women were not celebrated for being outspoken or bold. This is evident in the fate of the king's first queen, Vashti. Her refusal to appear before the king at his drunken request led to her removal as queen, which initiated the search for a new, compliant queen.

Fast forward to Esther's situation: her strategy to seek the king's mercy for the Jewish people is proving effective so far, yet she remains aware that any displeasure from King Xerxes could lead to death. During the second day of the banquet she has arranged for the king and Haman, her inner confidence—rooted in her faith in God—empowers her to make her request. She reveals her identity as a Jew and the imminent danger facing her people due to Haman's orders. Scripture even specifies that she is reclining on a couch (Esther 7:8) while Haman begs for his life. The assurance she displays in her posture is unmatched.

Esther could have remained silent to protect herself, but she didn't. She took a bold step she had never taken before: she spoke out at the right time. She traded passive silence for courageous advocacy when justice and her people were at stake. Often, women confuse silence with submission, but biblical boldness is not about constantly speaking or seeking people's approval. It is about standing firm in truth because of confidence in God.

Esther also shows us that boldness does not always mean speaking. When Haman begged for his life, she allowed his actions to speak for themselves. Jesus likewise remained silent at certain moments when He was accused (Matthew 27:12-14). His silence was not submission or weakness, but intentional restraint. Sometimes strength means speaking when God calls us to speak; other times, it means remaining silent. Esther was willing to sacrifice herself for her people out of duty and love, just as Jesus did for us.

APPLICATION: Has fear ever held you back from helping others or standing up for what's right? When we place our confidence in God, we need not be afraid. Take a moment to pray and reflect on what you may need to let go of to embody the holy boldness God calls us to display in our lives.

PRAYER: Dear God, I pray for a holy boldness today. To speak up or remain silent, I pray that I allow the Holy Spirit to lead me according to Your will. Amen.

RISKY OBEDIENCE

*The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD,
Like the rivers of water;
He turns it wherever He wishes.*

Proverbs 21:1 (NKJV)

I'm not a risk-taker, but the most daring thing I've ever done is walk in God's will for my life. This journey has brought uncertainty and required me to relinquish control, yet in remaining faithful and obedient, I've found profound peace. It's easy for our faith to become stale in the routine of everyday life, which is why it's crucial to stay expectant for God to move.

Esther likely never anticipated her faith to be challenged so dramatically. She stepped out of her comfort zone, risking her life to save her people. Some commentators criticize her indirect and cunning methods to expose Haman as morally questionable, but survival often demands unconventional approaches, particularly in the Persian court. Though not every method may align with His approval, He sometimes permits actions to fulfill His greater will. Esther exemplified the faith of Abraham and Jacob—an obedience that requires confronting fear and stepping into the unknown.

Mordecai also displayed faithful obedience by refusing to bow down to Haman, despite the king's decree. Scripture states, *Day after day they spoke to him, but he refused to comply...* (Esther 3:4). Mordecai risked everything by honoring God alone.

Risky obedience differs fundamentally from holy boldness; it involves acting in *response* to God, even when the stakes are high. Esther and Mordecai's willingness to step forward wasn't an act of rebellion but of obedience amidst their fears. They chose to surrender despite uncertainty, trusting that their actions would serve a purpose greater than themselves. The divine favor they received was not luck; it was God's assurance and guidance in their lives.

At times, obedience may lead us into uncomfortable or dangerous situations, but we should not shy away from the call God has placed on our hearts. As Romans 8:31 declares, *What then shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?*

APPLICATION: Have you been faithful to the calling that God has placed in your heart? Whether it's taking a step of faith, serving others or having a difficult conversation, it can be daunting. Take a moment to sit in God's presence today, surrender your fears and receive His peace and confidence.

PRAYER: Dear God, may my heart be obedient to You. With every step of faith I take, open my eyes to see You opening doors and making a way in my life. May all the glory and honor be given to You, God, for You guide my steps to prosperity. Amen.

THE BEAUTY WITHIN

Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as elaborate hairstyles and the wearing of gold jewelry or fine clothes. Rather, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight.

1 Peter 3:3-4 (NIV)

Esther's physical beauty initially captivated King Xerxes and those around her, but time inevitably alters appearances. God's interest lies not in outward looks, but in the inner beauty of the Holy Spirit we embody.

After Haman's downfall, Esther pleads with the king once more for mercy on behalf of the Jews. This moment is pivotal; she no longer presents herself as a calculating queen but as a devoted wife, weeping at the king's feet. For the first time, King Xerxes glimpses Esther's true heart—a courageous, self-sacrificing leader for her people, not just a pretty face. The king grants her and Mordecai the favor to *write another decree in the king's name on behalf of the Jews as seems best to you and seal it with the king's signet ring.* (Esther 8:8).

Esther's beauty may have opened the door to the palace, but it was her courage and reliance on God that saved His people. The world may tell us that our greatest value is found in remaining beautiful, youthful or relevant, but Scripture tells us something far more lasting. Our worth was never meant to be rooted in what fades. True beauty is found in the presence of the Holy Spirit within us—the Spirit who renews us from the inside out and makes us useful to God in every season of life.

APPLICATION: God is not limited by what the world considers beautiful, desirable or significant. If the Holy Spirit dwells within us, we carry a beauty that cannot be diminished by age, circumstance or the passing of time. And that is a beauty worth cultivating. Pause and thank God that He sees you beyond what the world does.

PRAYER: Dear God, as our outward beauty changes with time, may we become increasingly captivated by the beauty of Christ being formed within us. May we care less about preserving what is temporary and more about cultivating what is eternal. Amen.

MAINTAINING CHRIST'S IDENTITY IN A GENTILE WORLD

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.
1 Peter 2:9 (NIV)

God's name is not mentioned anywhere in the book of Esther, but His plan was evident everywhere. We see Him work quietly behind the scenes rather than through overt miracles or direct revelation. Esther navigated a world she did not choose and a culture that continually pressed upon her identity. Yet when the moment came for her to choose between preserving her position or identifying herself with God's people, her faith compelled her to act. Through fasting and prayer, she surrendered her fear and sought God's direction, challenging us to discern, trust and follow His leading even when we cannot clearly see or hear Him. We may be surrounded by values, beliefs and priorities that compete for our attention, but our circumstances do not determine who we are.

Like Esther, we may not always recognize what God is doing in the moment, but we can trust that His purposes are unfolding even when He seems hidden.

Esther's willingness to risk her life for the salvation of her people points us toward the greater story of Jesus Christ. She approached the king, knowing that doing so could cost her life, yet she willingly laid down her safety for the sake of others. Her sacrifice offers a small glimpse of the greater sacrifice of Jesus, who did not merely risk His life but willingly gave it to save His people from a far greater death.

Our identity in Christ must remain stronger than the identities our culture offers us. We may live in a world that does not recognize God, but that does not mean we have to live as though He is absent. Like Esther, we can remain faithful in the hidden places, trust Him when He seems silent, and boldly step forward when He calls us to reveal who we are.

APPLICATION: Esther's story reminds us that living among a culture that does not know God does not require us to lose our identity in Him. Pause and reflect: Who or what are you placing your identity in today?

PRAYER: Dear God, thank You for remaining present even when we cannot see or hear You. Help us today to stand up against the false identities of the world, and to rest confidently in the presence of Your Son, Jesus. Amen.

UNLIKELY HEROES

Then the angel of the LORD came and sat beneath the great tree at Ophrah, which belonged to Joash of the clan of Abiezer. Gideon son of Joash was threshing wheat at the bottom of a winepress to hide the grain from the Midianites. The angel of the LORD appeared to him and said, "Mighty hero, the LORD is with you!"
Judges 6:11-12 (NIV)

Mighty hero? Can you believe the angel called Gideon a mighty hero? In the Bible, a hero is a courageous warrior, yet Gideon hid and wrestled with doubt. God was revealing Gideon's true potential even when Gideon saw himself as the least in his family.

Remarkably, Gideon was already showing a warrior's heart when he asked, *Show me a sign; let me know if it's really the LORD who is speaking to me* (Judges 6:17). A true warrior seeks clarity and acts on trustworthy commands. Gideon wanted reassurance that these instructions were truly from God, not misleading whispers from the enemy.

As we grow into Kingdom Men and Women, we are also called to respond to God's voice. Like Gideon, we are invited by the Spirit to embrace the identity of mighty warriors and trust God's plans for us. We may feel overwhelmed, unprepared or unsure of our ability to face what lies ahead. Yet God told Gideon to go with the strength he already had rather than wait until he felt fully equipped.

Gideon's victories did not come through his own power, but through his willingness to obey God. Just as God stood with Gideon, He stands with us in our battles. Through Christ, unlikely warriors can experience victory and extraordinary possibilities.

Are you holding back, waiting to feel equipped, knowledgeable or worthy enough to pursue your God-given destiny? God invites you to begin today: use the strength you have and live boldly as a beloved child of the Kingdom.

APPLICATION: Think of three areas in your life where you feel weak or inadequate. Take a moment to invite God into those spaces, asking Him to use these very weaknesses to foster your growth as Kingdom men and women of Christ Jesus. Embrace the belief today that through these challenges, you are indeed regarded as a mighty hero for the Kingdom.

PRAYER: Father, please guide us in understanding how you wish to use our unique qualities, even as unlikely individuals, to spread your message. Open our eyes to the growth and learning that come from these experiences. Amen.

SIGNS OF CONFIRMATION

Gideon replied, "If you are truly going to help me, show me a sign to prove that it is really the LORD speaking to me. Don't go away until I come back and bring my offering to you." He answered, "I will stay here until you return."

Judges 6:17-18 (NLT)

In the 1970s, a song declared, *Signs, signs, everywhere signs*. That could have been Gideon's theme song. His doubts and fear seemed to get the best of him when the angel appeared. Yet Gideon stepped out in courage, asking for a sign that it was truly the Lord speaking. He wasn't questioning God's power or ability to speak; he was seeking confirmation. Gideon responded with humility, and God honored his request.

Gideon didn't stop there. Later, he asked for more confirmation by laying out a fleece, and again God honored him. Most importantly, the angel assured Gideon he would remain until Gideon returned, reminding us that God is a God who stays.

I have often found myself asking God for signs that I am on the right path. I receive one, then turn around and ask again. Maybe that's you today as a Kingdom man or woman. Perhaps you are waiting for a clear direction or seeking confirmation like Gideon.

From experience, I have seen God give direction in many ways: through words from an unlikely person, a familiar Scripture that suddenly jumps off the page or a reminder of how He showed up in the past. Can God assure us through big events? Absolutely. God is not limited. But I also believe He asks us to slow down and notice the small signs of His direction that prepare us for greater things we may not yet be fully ready to handle in the present. Gideon is a powerful example. Through faith, he sought the Lord, and God used him mightily. In uncertain times, Gideon experienced God's faithfulness. Let's stop, look around and see that the Lord is good and still at work.

APPLICATION: Get silent for a moment and ask God to show you where He has been present in your battles of life, how He has protected you, guided you and grown you, transforming you into the Kingdom child He loves greatly.

PRAYER: Remind us, God, of your faithfulness when we start to doubt and become fearful of what lies ahead. Encourage us to have the bravery to seek You when we need confirmation. Amen

A NEW ALTAR

That night, the LORD said to Gideon, "Take the second bull from your father's herd, the one that is seven years old. Pull down your father's altar to Baal and cut down the Asherah pole standing beside it. Then build an altar to the LORD your God here on this hilltop sanctuary, laying the stones carefully. Sacrifice the bull as a burnt offering on the altar, using as fuel the wood of the Asherah pole you cut down."
Judges 6:25-26 (NLT)

Have you ever been asked to do something you knew would create pushback or even threaten your safety? Gideon faced this after following the Lord's direction to tear down an altar to Baal. He feared what the townspeople—and even his own family—might do. Yet Gideon's father, Joash, defended his son, pointing out that if Baal were truly a god, he could defend himself.

It's encouraging to see God's promises unfold. In Judges 6:23, God told Gideon not to be afraid and assured him he would not die. Later, God fulfilled that promise, turning the tables on those who wanted to harm him. Gideon demonstrated courage in the face of fear. He understood the possible consequences but chose to trust God's promise and embrace faith over fear.

As Kingdom men and women, we are also called to tear down the altars of false gods in our lives. Maybe it is pride, self-image, unhealthy relationships or fear of what others might say or do. Perhaps it is an altar connecting you to people, places or things that are harming your walk with Jesus. Trading those altars for one that glorifies God will not always be popular. It may bring inward and outward resistance. But remember, we have a heavenly Father who speaks for us, speaks over us, defends us and faithfully fulfills His promises. When God calls us to tear something down, we can trust Him with what follows.

APPLICATION: Ask yourself, *What do I consider to be an altar?* Then ask God to reveal the altars in your life. Sometimes, tearing down altars takes time; start today, one block at a time. They will come down, creating space for an altar to Jesus.

PRAYER: Jesus, create in us a clean heart, highlight the altars in our lives that block proper relationship with you and give us the bravery to tear them down. Amen.

KINGDOM STRENGTH

The LORD told Gideon, "With these 300 men I will rescue you and give you victory over the Midianites. Send all the others home." So Gideon collected the provisions and rams' horns of the other warriors and sent them home. But he kept the 300 men with him. The Midianite camp was in the valley just below Gideon. That night, the LORD said, "Get up! Go down into the Midianite camp, for I have given you victory over them!"

Judges 7:7-9 (NLT)

There's an old saying: *there's strength in numbers*. But in Gideon's case, strength came through obedience and trusting God's direction. Put yourself in Gideon's place and remember a time you tried to fight a battle in your own strength. Gideon probably thought his chances were good with 32,000 soldiers, but God reduced his army to just 300. That must have seemed discouraging. Yet God told Gideon to go with the strength He had. He wanted Gideon to understand that his own strength was not what mattered; the power behind him did. God was giving Gideon everything he needed to succeed. He told him, *"I have given you victory over them!"* God spoke in the present tense, not the future. His victory was never dependent on the size of his army, but on the faithfulness and power of God. He wanted Gideon to live from a place of victory, not defeat.

As humans, we often feel expected to be strong enough, smart enough and prepared enough to overcome whatever we face. Whether that standard comes from others or us, our strength eventually runs out. But when we ask God to demonstrate His strength through us, two things happen: God is glorified, and we are renewed. The Psalms remind us that God gives strength to His people. Where are you fighting in your own strength and finding you cannot win? Let a shift happen today. Depend on God and lead with the Kingdom strength only He can provide.

APPLICATION: Open your mind today about the battles you are facing. Are you attempting to have victory through your own strength or God's? Seek God and ask Him to demonstrate what Kingdom strength looks like and thank Him for His power and the victory He has already given!

PRAYER: Father, remind us today that victory was won not by our strengths but by our weaknesses! Thank You for fighting for us and reminding us of Your power and love. Amen

POST-VICTORY COMPLACENCY

If you think you are standing strong, be careful not to fall.

1 Corinthians 10:12 (NLT)

So we must listen very carefully to the truth we have heard, or we may drift away from it.

Hebrews 2:1 (NLT)

Gideon made a sacred ephod from the gold and put it in Ophrah, his hometown. But soon all the Israelites prostituted themselves by worshiping it, and it became a trap for Gideon and his family.

Judges 8:27 (NLT)

It's very easy for us to fall into the trap of being so caught up in enjoying a victory in our lives that we let our guard down and do things that seem right in the moment, only to find later that it reveals a moment of our own complacency. Gideon found himself in this very kind of situation. What he had planned for good, to honor God, had turned into a new idol for the Israelites and a trap for both Gideon and his family. For a moment, Gideon's focus turned to trying to honor God with stuff, when all God was seeking was Gideon's continued obedience. The God of the entire universe doesn't need our worldly stuff; He seeks a relationship with us, one marked by humility, dependence and active participation in His work.

As citizens of Heaven, men and women alike, we must protect ourselves from complacency. God wants us to live in victory. He also wants us to be prepared and fully aware of the next battle we will face. So, we stay connected to God through the Spirit Jesus has given us and watch our steps so that we don't trip and fall. We remember the victories Christ has given and seek His preparation as we journey. We continue this in faith and obedience, tearing down all idols that keep us from honoring God. Complacency often shows up in the quiet moments of life, when things are just going on, so we must stay on guard!

APPLICATION: Examine your life today and ask God to reveal where you may be complacent or have begun to build idols that block your progress in kingdom work! Seek Jesus to show you your steps to protect you from spiritual complacency.

PRAYER: Father, may the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in Your sight. My Lord, my Rock, my Redeemer! Amen.

KINGDOM LEGACY

That is the story of how the people of Israel defeated Midian, which never recovered. Throughout the rest of Gideon's lifetime—about forty years—there was peace in the land. Then Gideon son of Joash returned home.

Judges 8:28-29 (NLT)

As soon as Gideon died, the Israelites prostituted themselves by worshiping the images of Baal, making Baal-Berith their god. They forgot the LORD their God, who had rescued them from all their enemies surrounding them. Nor did they show any loyalty to the family of Jerub-baal (that is, Gideon), despite all the good he had done for Israel.

Judges 8:33-35 (NLT)

When we take our last breath here on earth, we all leave behind a legacy of some kind, good or bad. The truth is, shortly after we have left this life, our legacy is sadly and quickly forgotten by many, by human standards. Gideon, through his obedience, had built a legacy that honored God and showed God's faithfulness and power. So much so that 40 years of peace took place in the land. Gideon's legacy was a living legacy, but once Gideon had passed, the Israelites wandered back into their old ways, worshipping Baal. The most shocking thing is they forgot all about God, about the victory He had given them over the enemy and how God had rescued them. They were no longer Kingdom-focused but self-focused; they found themselves spiritually complacent and lazy.

When we call ourselves citizens of heaven and followers of Christ, we commit to living a life centered on Jesus. We also commit to live out a legacy that continues after we have taken our last breath, pointing to Jesus. It is not guaranteed that our family, our friends or even our co-workers will continue a legacy that's God-honoring. We are responsible, as individuals, to live today as kingdom men and women, leaving the outcomes to God. We are called to learn to be obedient and faithful to His legacy in the places He has called us to today, tomorrow, and beyond!

APPLICATION: Are you building a legacy that honors God or yourself today? Where or what is the idol that people will remember more than anything else? Choose today to live out the calling to be Kingdom-focused, Kingdom-driven and committed to leaving behind a Kingdom Legacy!

PRAYER: Jesus, I want to honor You today with my life and use it to point to who You are, Your strength, Your power and Your legacy. Amen.

A MATTER OF FOCUS

Then Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. There he became acquainted with a Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, who had recently arrived from Italy with his wife, Priscilla. They had left Italy when Claudius Caesar deported all Jews from Rome. Paul lived and worked with them, for they were tentmakers just as he was.

Acts 18:1-3 (NLT)

My good seminary friend, Bill Murray (not the movie star, but a pastor), used to remind me that while the world is interested in the somebodies, God is interested in the nobodies. The world is captivated by wealth, power and influence. God tells us to keep our eyes on the poor, the widow, the orphan, the needy and those who don't hold impressive positions.

One of the couples I most look forward to meeting in heaven is Aquila and Priscilla. As far as we know, they never wrote a book or preached a sermon. Paul does not refer to them with an official church title, and Scripture says nothing about their wealth or social standing. Yet Paul mentions them six times in four New Testament books. God clearly wants us to learn from their lives.

We first meet them in Acts 18. Emperor Claudius had expelled the Jews from Rome, forcing Aquila and Priscilla to leave behind their home, their business and the life they had built. Travel in those days was expensive, exhausting and dangerous. They had every reason to become discouraged or bitter. Instead, they chose to focus on what God was doing rather than on what they had lost.

When Paul arrived in Corinth, they welcomed him into their home and business. They didn't simply become friends. They invited him to live and work with them, making their home the ministry headquarters for Paul's mission in Corinth. I doubt they realized how significantly God would use their ordinary acts of faithfulness. God delights to accomplish extraordinary Kingdom work through ordinary believers who simply make themselves available. Aquila and Priscilla were faithful where God planted them. They viewed their work as worship and their home as a tool for ministry.

APPLICATION: Your *day job* is not separate from your calling. Unexpected moves, hardships and interruptions may be God's providence. Instead of dwelling on what you've lost, ask God how He wants to use you right where you are. You don't have to be famous to make an eternal impact.

PRAYER: Father, help me see every circumstance as an opportunity to serve You. Give me a willing heart, an open home and faithful hands. Use my work, my relationships and my everyday life to point others to Christ. Amen.

THE POWER OF AN OPEN HOME

Give my greetings to Priscilla and Aquila, my co-workers in the ministry of Christ Jesus.... Also give my greetings to the church that meets in their home.

Romans 16:3,5 (NLT)

When my wife and I started seminary right out of college, we had been married six months and had no money. We lived in a twelve-foot-wide mobile home for eight years to reduce housing costs. Yet God put on our hearts to open our little home for Bible studies, dinner parties, counseling and hosting friends coming through Fort Worth. It was one of the sweetest times of our lives.

Yesterday, we saw Priscilla and Aquila open their home to Paul in Corinth. Later, in Ephesus and Rome, Paul greeted the church that met *in their home* (Romans 16:5; 1 Corinthians 16:19).

Their home keeps being a strategic and integral part of their story. In the first century, there were no church buildings and few inns. In our day, we might call it an *underground church* movement. Buildings did not define churches; people did. Their living room became a classroom, their table became a fellowship hall, and their home became missionary housing and mission headquarters.

The original Greek word for hospitality is a compound word meaning *love of strangers*. Biblical hospitality is not about entertaining people; it is about leveraging your home for God's Kingdom. Paul commands all Christians to *practice hospitality* (Romans 12:13), and it is one of the qualifications for church leaders. *Don't forget to show hospitality to strangers, for some who have done this have entertained angels without realizing it* (Hebrews 13:2, NLT)!

Many have abandoned this practice. It is easier to meet people at a restaurant or gather at the church than to open our homes. Hospitality requires sacrificing our time and money, and people can sometimes be annoying. This is why Peter tells us to offer hospitality to one another *without grumbling* or complaining (1 Peter 4:9). I don't think God is persuaded by our excuses. Ask Him how you might open your home for Kingdom purposes and watch what God does through you. There is power in an open home. This was the habit of Priscilla and Aquila, and it can be our habit as well.

APPLICATION: Show hospitality; invite a neighbor or a friend from church over for coffee or dinner, host a party or Bible study. Ask God how He wants to use your ordinary home for eternal purposes.

PRAYER: Use my home as holy ground. Help me overcome my reluctance to invite others into my home. Open my eyes to how You want to use what You have already given me. Amen.

A MARRIAGE WITH A MISSION

Give my greetings to Priscilla and Aquila, my co-workers in the ministry of Christ Jesus.
Romans 16:3 (NLT)

Some married couples have a lot of similar interests and love doing the same things. Unfortunately, that is not our marriage. When people say opposites attract, they use us as an example. She likes yard work; I think it is a pain. She likes crocheting; I like golf. She is a homebody; I like adventure and travel. She thinks a wonderful Saturday is straightening and organizing the garage; I'd rather have a root canal. She likes movies with a story and drama; I like to see things blow up. Learning to navigate and celebrate these differences is one reason we love our Brookwood marriage classes like Re|Engage and Becoming Passionate Teammates.

Paul teaches us that being single can be a great blessing and help in serving God (1 Corinthians 7). If you are single, you're an important part of our church family. We love you, need you and need your spiritual gifts. If you are married, God wants to use you and your marriage in His work.

As different as we are, one thing that draws us together and has brought joy to our lives is having a marriage committed to mission and ministry. Have you noticed that every time Priscilla and Aquila are mentioned, they are mentioned as a couple? Paul calls them *my co-workers in the ministry of Christ Jesus*.

They were all in for Christ together. They opened their home together, worked together and started churches together in Corinth, Ephesus and Rome. They both taught Scripture and doctrine to Apollos and both risked their lives for Paul and the Gospel (Romans 16:3-5).

While it's important to find fun things you and your spouse both enjoy, I have noticed that the strongest Christian marriages are those built on serving Christ together. Thank goodness this does not mean you must do everything together, even at church. You and your spouse have different spiritual gifts, personalities, strengths and weaknesses. Yet God wants to use you not just as individuals but as a team to serve and minister to others.

APPLICATION: In addition to asking God to bless your marriage, ask Him how He wants to use it. Discuss with your spouse how you might minister together as a couple, drawing on each other's strengths and gifts.

PRAYER: Lord, sometimes life and marriage can be difficult. I know my spouse and I are so different, but please show us ways we can work together and support one another to further Your Kingdom. Allow us to build a legacy as a couple. Amen.

SOME THINGS NEED TO BE SAID

Meanwhile, a Jew named Apollos, an eloquent speaker who knew the Scriptures well, had arrived in Ephesus from Alexandria in Egypt. He had been taught the way of the Lord, and he taught others about Jesus with an enthusiastic spirit and with accuracy. However, he knew only about John's baptism. When Priscilla and Aquila heard him preaching boldly in the synagogue, they took him aside and explained the way of God even more accurately. **Acts 18:24-26 (NLT)**

Mary and George found themselves in a difficult situation. They loved their small group. One week, a newer member was asked to lead the Bible study, and the longer he taught, the more uncomfortable they became. He was educated, smart and passionate about the Lord. Much of what he taught was good, but some of it was simply not biblical. On their way home, they wondered what they should do. Like most people, they hated difficult conversations and were afraid of how he might respond. Ever been there?

Priscilla and Aquila found themselves in a similar situation. A dynamic new preacher had come to town, and while others were excited to hear him, they knew he was lacking some important truths. They had been discipled by Paul, and they knew this needed to be addressed. Notice, however, what they did not do. They didn't confront him publicly, embarrass him or cause a scene. They didn't gossip about his errors or attack him personally. Scripture says *they took him aside and explained the way of God even more accurately*. They chose both grace and truth.

We also have to give Apollos credit. He was teachable. He didn't allow his education, eloquence or reputation to keep him from receiving correction, even from a woman. Priscilla was right there with Aquila, helping instruct him. This couple understood Scripture and theology well enough to help a gifted teacher grow in his understanding.

How well do you take correction? If I'm honest, when I'm confronted or corrected, even by my wife, my first response is often defensiveness. Peter tells us to clothe ourselves *with humility toward one another* (1 Peter 5:5), but that's easier said than done. We all need to be teachable. Sometimes love requires us to speak up when someone needs correction. The goal isn't to win an argument or prove we're right. The goal is to help someone grow. I still don't like hard conversations, but some of the most important spiritual growth in our lives will come through truth shared with grace.

APPLICATION: Is there someone you need to speak with? Have you received a correction recently with humility?

PRAYER: Father, give me courage to speak truth and the humility to receive it. Amen.

WHO WOULD YOU RISK YOUR LIFE FOR?

Give my greetings to Priscilla and Aquila, my co-workers in the ministry of Christ Jesus. In fact, they once risked their lives for me. I am thankful to them, and so are all the Gentile churches. Also give my greetings to the church that meets in their home.
Romans 16:3-5 (NLT)

We don't know the details of what Paul is talking about. We only know that this couple put their lives on the line for him. That tells us everything we need to know about their commitment to Christ and their friendship with the apostle.

A popular American teaching known as the prosperity gospel is spreading around the world. These pastors teach that God promises health, wealth and prosperity to His faithful children, especially if you give generously to one of their ministries. Hardship? Trials? They teach that those point to a weak faith or some hidden sin. What shocks me is how many Christians buy this nonsense. The entire New Testament screams the opposite. Jesus was blunt: *"If the world hates you, remember that it hated me first.... Since they persecuted me, naturally they will persecute you* (John 15:18-20, NLT)."

The early church faced three hundred years of brutal persecution. Millions of believers still get jailed, beaten or killed for following Jesus today. Here in the USA, we've got it easier than most, but being a real follower of Christ has never been a ticket to ease, comfort and pleasure.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer famously said, *When Christ calls a man, He bids him come and die*. Unlike many around the world, most of us will not be called to risk our lives for the Gospel or a friend. Priscilla and Aquila did. I wonder how many of my friends would do that for me in a similar situation? Am I that kind of friend? Being a true servant of Christ and standing up for the faith is costly, but nothing is more worthwhile.

Priscilla and Aquila were faithful during extremely hard times. I hope I'd be that kind of faithful friend. Living a life that matters is not about the riches and fame the world so desperately seeks. Paul thanks them for their costly faithfulness. What an incredible challenge for all of us.

APPLICATION: Who would I actually risk my life for? Am I willing to sacrifice my comfort, time, money and even my life for the Gospel and cause of Christ? Will I stand up for a friend who needs me?

PRAYER: Lord, help me be more like Priscilla and Aquila, ready to serve and sacrifice it all for You and the Kingdom of God. Amen.

THE LEGACY OF FAITHFUL ENDURANCE

Give my greetings to Priscilla and Aquila....

2 Timothy 4:19a (NLT)

After more than fifty years in ministry, I've learned something that is both sobering and deeply personal: *starting well is not enough*. I want to finish well. I've seen men and women I respected serve God faithfully for years, only to stumble, become discouraged and lose their way. I've also watched many go through disappointment, betrayal, failure, sickness and seasons when nobody seemed to notice, and they kept going. That scares me. Not because I doubt God's faithfulness but because I know my own heart. I know that years of ministry don't automatically mean I'll be faithful tomorrow. I still have to choose Jesus and guard my heart. I still have to keep showing up.

One of my lifelong goals has been that when I finally see Christ face to face, He can look at me and say, *"Well done, my good and faithful servant"* (Matthew 25:21). That matters to me more than anything I could ever accomplish in ministry. Almost anyone can be faithful for a season. The real test comes when the excitement wears off, hard times hit, recognition disappears, and nobody is watching. That is when faithfulness becomes more than a decision. It becomes a way of life.

That is what impresses me about Priscilla and Aquila. Twenty years have passed since we first met them in Acts 18. Churches have come and gone. They faced incredible hardship, and life and ministry were not what they expected or hoped for. Paul is now nearing execution. Yet there they are. Still serving. Still opening their home. Still leading the church. Still married and faithful to one another and Christ. And now, expecting death any moment, Paul sends them a simple greeting: *Give my greetings to Priscilla and Aquila*. Just their names. No impressive titles. No list of accomplishments. No mention of a massive ministry. Just faithful servants and friends. In that same chapter, Paul gives us his own testimony: *I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, and I have remained faithful* (2 Timothy 4:7, NLT).

That's the goal. Not to be impressive or famous, or even remembered. To finish faithfully.

APPLICATION: Ask yourself: Am I still faithful? Keep serving. Keep loving your spouse. Keep following Jesus, even when nobody notices.

PRAYER: Lord, when life gets hard, and I'm discouraged and tempted to quit or give up, help me make the hard decision to stay faithful to You, my spouse, my friends and my church. Help me finish the race with honor, and one day hear, *"Well done, my good and faithful servant."* Amen.

WHEN THE GOING GETS TOUGH— THEN WHAT?

Whenever the day came for Elkanah to sacrifice, he would give portions of the meat to his wife Peninnah and to all her sons and daughters. But to Hannah he gave a double portion because he loved her, and the LORD had closed her womb. Because the LORD had closed Hannah's womb, her rival kept provoking her in order to irritate her. This went on year after year. Whenever Hannah went up to the house of the LORD, her rival provoked her till she wept and would not eat.

1 Samuel 1:4-8 (NIV)

When a crisis hits, our faith can often be the first thing to suffer. This was not true for Hannah. She had to depend on God while her rival continuously put her shortcomings in her face, provoking her to the point that she couldn't even eat. Hannah's womb was empty, but her spirit was full, and her faith kept her going. Her spirit may have been heavy with disappointment, but instead of pulling away from God, she leaned in.

As my first marriage began to suffer, I pulled away from God. I had been faithful in my walk with God, I was a good wife and mother, so when it all collapsed, my disappointment became so heavy that I pulled away from God for what ended up lasting three years. It was not a great time in my life. Two years later, when spiritual warfare hit much closer to home and involved my own sons, I remembered what God had taught me. I knew running from Him would not help. This time, I chose to run toward Him—to lean on His strength and trust Him to see me through.

Hannah teaches us that difficult seasons do not have to determine the direction of our faith. We can be disappointed and still pray. We can be hurting and still worship. We can have questions and still trust. When the going gets tough, we have a choice: pull away or lean in.

APPLICATION: Think about a difficult situation you may be facing right now. Instead of allowing it to push you away from God, intentionally lean in. Pray, open His Word, worship or reach out to someone who can encourage you in your faith. Remember, God is still present, even when your circumstances are painful.

PRAYER: Dear Father, when life becomes difficult and disappointment weighs heavily on my heart, help me lean into You rather than pull away. Strengthen my faith and remind me that You are with me even when I cannot see the outcome. Help me trust You through every difficult season. Amen.

A FAITH-FILLED PRAYER OF DESPERATION

In her deep anguish Hannah prayed to the LORD, weeping bitterly. And she made a vow, saying, "LORD Almighty, if you will only look on your servant's misery and remember me, and not forget your servant but give her a son, then I will give him to the LORD for all the days of his life." 1 Samuel 1:10-11a (NIV)

Hannah was praying a prayer of desperation. She was hurting, and she wasn't afraid to pour her heart out before God. She didn't pretend everything was okay. She wept, she pleaded, and she made a vow.

Jamie MacDonald has a song called *Desperate*, which says this: *I'm at the end of myself, and I'm tired. I've tried all that I know to do right now, it's just by a thread, but I'm hanging on to you. I'm running out of hope, I need a miracle... Oh God, I'm desperate, down on my knees...*

Hannah needed a miracle. She was desperate, yet she trusted God enough to make a remarkable promise. If God gave her a son, she would give him back to God for all the days of his life. In humility, Hannah was surrendering herself and the answer to her prayer into God's hands. She desperately wanted something, but opened her hands to God's desire and will.

As I read this, I could feel the same kind of tension and desperation I'd felt in my own life. During a very painful time in my marriage, I asked God to make a way out. It was a prayer of desperation. He made a way out, but it came at a cost—as God pulled me away, it meant leaving one of my sons behind. I prayed for escape, but God's answer required surrender. In that moment, I had to trust God with what I could not control and believe that His plan was greater than what I could see.

Sometimes, our desperate prayers are answered with a yes, no, wait or a direction we never expected. But regardless of the answer, we can trust God to hear us. We don't have to clean up our emotions before we pray. We simply need to come.

APPLICATION: What are you desperate for God to do today? Bring that request honestly before Him, then surrender the outcome. Trust that He hears you, even when His answer looks different from what you expected.

PRAYER: Dear Father, hear my prayer and help me trust You no matter what. Give me faith to surrender what I cannot control and courage to follow You wherever You lead. Amen.

GOD ALWAYS WINS

Then Hannah prayed and said: "My heart rejoices in the LORD; in the LORD my horn is lifted high. My mouth boasts over my enemies, for I delight in your deliverance."
1 Samuel 2:1 (NIV)

Hannah knew what it meant to fight a battle. Her battle wasn't just with Peninnah; it was with the shame, disappointment and pain that came with years of unanswered prayer. Yet when Hannah finally prayed, she recognized something important: the battle belonged to God. Hannah prayed to the Lord of Hosts—the Lord of the mighty army. She understood that her battle was bigger than the person who was provoking her. Peninnah may have been the one speaking the words, but Hannah knew the real enemy wanted to use those words to weaken her faith and make her question God's goodness.

Hannah refused to surrender her faith. She said, *I rejoice in Your salvation*. She didn't know exactly how God would answer, but she trusted the One who was fighting for her. Her circumstances had not yet changed, but her perspective had.

Sometimes we fight battles that nobody else knows about. Men can especially understand this. There can be pressure to carry everything without showing weakness. But even the strongest man will eventually face a battle he cannot win in his own strength. That is when we need to remember who fights for us.

One of my husband's favorite songs says, *This is how I fight my battles. It may look like I'm surrounded, but I'm surrounded by You*. The weapons of God are different than the weapons of the world. Sometimes the greatest act of strength is getting on our knees, praying and trusting God. The blessing of faithfulness is not that we will never face battles. It is knowing that we don't face them alone. The Lord of Hosts fights for His people.

You may feel surrounded today. You may be facing a battle in your marriage, family, finances, career or your own heart. But remember: what looks like a losing battle to you is never beyond God's ability. Keep praying. Keep trusting. God always wins.

APPLICATION: What battle are you trying to fight in your own strength? Surrender it to God today. Get on your knees, name the battle before Him, and choose to trust the Lord of Hosts to fight for you.

PRAYER: Dear Father, remind me that I do not have to fight my battles alone. You are the Lord of Hosts, the mighty warrior who fights for Your people. Give me the strength to stand, the faith to trust, and the courage to surrender every battle to You. Amen.

WHO DOES GOD SAY I AM?

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

In Hannah's culture, a woman's identity was often closely connected to having children and raising a family. Because Hannah was barren, she could have easily viewed herself as a disgrace or believed she wasn't enough. Peninnah constantly reminded Hannah of what she lacked, but Hannah didn't allow her circumstances to define her identity.

We live in a culture where identity is pushed on us like a ton of bricks. We are constantly reminded of what we are not, what we don't have, how we should look, what we should accomplish and how we should contribute to society. It is no wonder so many people struggle with their sense of worth.

And this isn't just a battle women face. Men can feel the pressure too. A man's identity can become wrapped up in being the provider, having a successful career, owning a home, being physically strong, protecting his family or always having the answers. When those things don't go as planned, it can be easy to wonder, *Who am I if I can't accomplish these things?*

For years, I allowed my identity to be shaped by what others thought of me. God made me in His design, but I tried to change myself to gain acceptance. I didn't see myself as a beautiful mother of six; I saw myself as the shame-filled woman who was divorced and a single mother.

The enemy wants us focused on the negative—our failures, disappointments, limitations, mistakes and past. He wants us to believe that what we do or don't do determines our value. But God calls us to something greater. Our identity isn't found in our relationship status, career, accomplishments, appearance, financial success, parenting or what others say about us.

Second Corinthians 5:17 reminds us that when we are in Christ, we're a new creation. Our past does not have the final word. Our failures don't have the final word. Other people's opinions don't have the final word. God does.

Hannah's circumstances didn't change her worth. She belonged to God before she became a mother, and she belonged to God after Samuel was born. That truth was enough for her.

APPLICATION: What label defines you today? Replace it with God's truth, and remember that your worth is found in Christ.

PRAYER: Father, help me find my identity in You. Remind me I am Yours. Remind me that You define my worth. Amen.

SACRIFICIAL LOVE

...and she said to him, "Pardon me, my lord. As surely as you live, I am the woman who stood here beside you praying to the LORD. I prayed for this child, and the LORD has granted me what I asked of him. So now I give him to the LORD. For his whole life he will be given over to the LORD." And he worshiped the LORD there.

1 Samuel 1:26b-28 (NIV)

Samuel was finally here—the son she had longed for, cried over and surrendered to God before he was even conceived. But Hannah understood that Samuel was never truly hers to keep. He was a gift from God, and she had promised to give him back. When she took Samuel and presented him to Eli, imagine the emotions she must have felt as she walked into the temple carrying the child she had prayed so desperately to receive. Hannah's devotion to God was not based on what was convenient. She was willing to give God what was most precious to her because she trusted the One who had given Samuel to her.

When my children were babies, I dedicated them to the Lord. I didn't realize I would have to repeat that continuously over the years. One of the hardest stages of parenthood I have walked through was watching my daughter walk through a very dark season, and she was diagnosed with Bipolar II disorder. There were many restless nights when I asked God, *Why?* I was told by her doctor that I needed to learn not to react negatively to her negative outbursts. When she lashed out in anger, I had to step back, breathe and give her over to God again and again. There were tears and many prayers. God gently reminded me that as much as I love her, He loves her even more.

Sometimes sacrificial love means letting go—not because we don't care, but because we trust God more than ourselves. We cannot walk every step for the people we love, fix every problem, or protect them from every painful experience. But we can pray, love, support and place them back into the hands of their Creator.

APPLICATION: Who or what are you struggling to surrender to God? Place that person or situation back into His hands today. Surrender is not giving up; it is trusting the One who loves them even more than you do.

PRAYER: Dear Father, help me love sacrificially and trust You completely. Remind me that You are faithful. Help me release what I cannot control and trust You with those I love. Amen.

LOVE, RESPECT & DEVOTION

"Do what seems best to you," her husband Elkanah told her. "Stay here until you have weaned him; only may the LORD make good his word." So the woman stayed at home and nursed her son until she had weaned him.

1 Samuel 1:23 (NIV)

Elkanah's response to Hannah reveals something beautiful about love, respect and devotion. When Hannah told her husband that she would remain home until Samuel was weaned, Elkanah did not argue, pressure her or forcefully override her decision. He simply supported her and trusted God with the outcome.

Real love does not always mean getting our way. Sometimes love means supporting someone when they make a difficult, faith-filled decision. It means listening, respecting, encouraging and standing beside the person God has placed in your life.

Elkanah respected both God and his wife enough to support her obedience. He understood that Hannah had made a vow to God, and instead of standing in the way, he encouraged her to fulfill it. His words demonstrated trust and respect. He allowed Hannah the freedom to follow God while trusting God himself.

Last year, my husband was offered a job that, if he accepted, would require a drastic change in my life and my job. My husband knew this was going to be difficult for me, yet because of his deep love and respect for me, he asked if I wanted him to turn down the position. But I knew God's plan wasn't just about me. I believed honoring God meant supporting my husband as he stepped into his calling. It was a sacrifice, but it was also an opportunity to demonstrate love, respect and devotion to him and to God.

For men, Elkanah provides a powerful example. Spiritual leadership does not mean controlling people or demanding your way. Sometimes leadership looks like listening, encouraging and creating space for others to follow God. For women, Hannah reminds us that devotion to God may require surrendering something we love. Sacrificial devotion asks *What can I give?* Rather than *What can I get?*

APPLICATION: Today, ask God to show you one way you can demonstrate love, respect or devotion through sacrifice to a spouse, a friend, a co-worker or even a stranger.

PRAYER: Dear Father, teach me to love with humility, respect and devotion. Help me support those You have placed in my life and trust You when obedience requires sacrifice. Give me a heart like Hannah and the supportive spirit of Elkanah. Amen.



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