



FAITHFUL

THE LIFE OF JOSIAH

**DAILY DEVOTIONAL AND
OLD TESTAMENT GUIDE**

There's no better time than now to embrace the call to faithfulness. In a world that constantly pulls us in different directions, we're reminded that God remains unchanging and faithful. The question is: are we living in response to that faithfulness? Over the next seven weeks, we will explore what it means to walk in faithful devotion to Him daily.

This devotional is more than a series of reflections; it's a call to action. Each week, we will be challenged to align our lives more closely with God's heart. Let's journey together, building lives that reflect His faithfulness in every way.

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?**

JOSIAH—THIS DAY

Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit" – yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that."
James 4:13-15 (ESV)

One of the greatest threats to our faithfulness is the phrase, *one day*. We should change our mindset from *one day* to *this day*. If you live your life in the past, you will lose it, and you aren't promised tomorrow. This is the day. This is the moment you must choose. This is the moment the Lord has given you.

The other day, I was running from God, not wanting to deal with some things, or, said another way, wanting to choose my will over His. I knew something was separating me from God. I felt a distance creeping in. I thought, *I will do the right thing in a few days*. The next day, I woke up and felt like God was saying to me, *choose this day whom you will serve*. There will be a point when you have said one day so much that your heart becomes hard or distant. There will be a day when you have said one day enough that you will have chosen the other thing. You don't have to be perfect, but there must be a commitment to God. A repentance to turn towards Him. Honestly, it's sometimes the hardest thing to do. We are double-minded, so we try to live out our wills and God's will as long as we can, but there is a moment when God will say, *Choose this day*.

What have you been putting off in your relationship with God? What have you been saying one day to? *One day, I will spend more time with God. One day, I will take a step to invite someone to church. One day, I will serve. One day, I will tithe*. Whatever that thing is, be faithful today, this day. There are a million reasons why today isn't the right day, but I've learned there is never a right day. Today is the day to be faithful to whatever God has placed inside your heart. Today is the day to return to Him, and once you commit fully to Him, you will know in your heart that it's just the beginning. That God will begin to subtly but surely grow you into something mighty for Him. Remember, God is in the business of taking small things and making them mighty for Him. The Bible isn't full of all stars; it's just filled with people who are available. People who said *this day I will serve the Lord*. So, what are you waiting for? Draw near to the Lord. Surrender whatever He has placed on your heart!

APPLICATION: Choose this day to serve God.

PRAYER: Ask God to help you lay down and surrender everything at His feet! Ask Him to give you strength and passion to follow Him!

KEEP SHOWING UP

The servant went and looked, then returned to Elijah and said, "I didn't see anything. "Seven times Elijah told him to go and look. Finally the seventh time, his servant told him, "I saw a little cloud about the size of a man's hand rising from the sea. "Then Elijah shouted, "Hurry to Ahab and tell him, 'Climb into your chariot and go back home. If you don't hurry, the rain will stop you!'"

1 Kings 18:43-44 (NLT)

The phrase, *I didn't see anything*, above has been ringing in my mind. How do you keep moving forward when nothing seems to change? How do you keep fighting when light won't seem to break through the shadows? How do you keep hoping when the victory you thought would happen long ago still hasn't happened? How do you keep choosing the right thing when you don't see anything happening?

Elijah's servant went six times expecting to see some sort of breakthrough. Six times, the answer was the same: *I didn't see anything*. Six times, it felt like God was absent. Six times, it looked like nothing would change. We talk a lot about breakthrough, but what about the waiting? What about the six times where it was said, *I didn't see anything*? Here's the key to making sure we don't miss breakthrough. It's hard, but it's simple. It's to keep showing up.

Sometimes, the most spiritual thing you can do is show up. Sometimes, that's all you can do. Some days, you will have the strength to dream great dreams. Some days, you will have the strength to fight back a thousand obstacles. Some days, you will not have the ability to successfully wage war against all your dark thoughts. Some days, joy will be so full in you that it will swallow up all the bad thoughts like the sunrise bursting forth through the darkness each morning. But some days, you will feel like all strength is gone. Some days, you will wonder if you can keep moving forward. Don't try to move forward; just show up. Here's what I'm learning: sometimes, the most spiritual thing you can do is show up. Keep showing up each day where God has placed you. Seven in the Bible is the number of completion and wholeness. You can't bring that; only God can. Your job, your one job, is to just keep showing up. To keep hoping. To keep knowing that God's silence is not His absence. To trust things are moving when you don't see anything. Here's to showing up. Sometimes, it's the most spiritual thing you can do.

APPLICATION: Just show up wherever God has placed you.

PRAYER: Ask God to give you a strength to just show up. Ask Him to reveal an area you are trying to fix. Ask Him how you can trust Him more.

NOW IS THE TIME TO TRUST

Let the morning bring me word of Your unfailing love, for I have put my trust in You. Show me the way I should go, for to You I entrust my life.

Psalms 143:8 (NIV)

There are so many things that compete for our trust in God. One of the things God revealed to a hymn writer years ago was that he found most of his comfort in his wife and not God. It's so easy to put our trust in others and money because those both provide a sense of security and hope for the future. Years ago, I was talking to a pastor in Africa about faith, and I asked them how their church has so much faith when they have so little. He shared that they must trust God to make it through each day. Many people in America don't have that. At first, I felt pity for them based on their circumstances, but I realized many in this village had a faith and vitality that many people in America don't. The problem is when things are good, we tend to forget God. We move along without Him, but in the stormy seasons, we are desperate for Him. We must learn to stay close to Him in ALL seasons. This is the key.

When Josiah stepped up to lead, the people didn't have a whole lot of hope. First, Josiah was just a teenager, and second, the culture was dark and filled with evil. The good news is that this caused Josiah to model a way to trust in God. Trust doesn't mean we won't have doubts—I guarantee Josiah and the people had doubts—but it's what you do with those doubts that matter. They chose to take those to God, and He guided them. What makes trust so difficult is the unknown. Josiah didn't know what would happen in the future, but he kept trusting God. None of us know what will happen in the future, but we know the One who holds the future in His hands. This is enough. This is the starting point of trust. *God, You know the story, I don't. I trust that You are good.* Think about it: the reason you know it's a bad day is because you've had good days before. You know what it's like to have a bad day because some days have been great days. Don't let the bad days or the difficult days cause you to doubt the goodness of God. What God wants right now is for you to trust Him. When you do, you feel a lightness and joy that transcends your circumstances. Then, you will have a faith that captures the attention of heaven and others around you. Trust Him when it doesn't make sense. He will make a way forward. He always does.

APPLICATION: God holds the future in His hands.

PRAYER: Spend time thanking God for what He's done in your life. Ask Him for help to follow Him. He will be faithful. Take it one day at a time.

HOW TO BE FAITHFUL?

"Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the LORD your God goes with you; He will never leave you nor forsake you."

Deuteronomy 31:6 (NIV)

The other day, I was out of town for the weekend, and right by the hotel where I was staying was a little church. I walked over to the quiet little church, and next to the sanctuary was a room called *The Room of Memory*. I walked in, and it was a small, ornate room with stained glass windows that created a kaleidoscope of colors. I sat in this room for an hour or so on this single wooden pew. All around the room were names of people that were written so they could be remembered. I sat, thinking most of them probably felt like their life just blitzed by. Time has a funny way of going slow and fast, doesn't it? I admit *The Room of Memory* made me think about my life. How have I lived, and how will I be remembered? Some of them were good thoughts, and some were unhelpful. I guess, deep down, there is a fear that most of us have to live in such a way that our lives truly matter. To live in a way that our lives outlast us. To make a difference with our one and only lives. The problem is that it feels like a lot of pressure. For many people, they spend their lives trying to make a name for themselves to be remembered by people they don't even know. As I sat thinking about that, God reminded me of something in that room of memory. He reminded me that I already have a name. That I am a son of God, and that will go on forever. It will never fade. Why spend my life for what I've already found in Jesus? It's funny; God reminds me of my purpose, not on a big stage but in a quiet, forgotten little room off the beaten path.

Don't spend your life searching for what you have in Jesus. The verse above reminds us that He will never leave you. Your future is secure. Your hope is strong and anchored in Him. We are also reminded that He will never forsake us. Said another way, Jesus is the best investment. No one who has ever spent their life on Jesus has had a single regret because His goodness and love are unlike anything the world has to offer. Josiah decided as a king that he was going to be faithful. He decided that he would trust that he didn't need to make a name for himself because he was a child of God. We remember Josiah not because he did some great things but rather because he was connected to a Great God. This creates freedom for us. We are invited to live for the right things today. To number our days to be faithful.

APPLICATION: Don't spend your life searching for what you have in Jesus.

PRAYER: Spend time seeking God and asking for His help to live for Him. Ask Him to help you number your days to honor Him.

FAITHFULNESS MEANS OBEDIENCE

You do not desire a sacrifice, or I would offer one. You do not want a burnt offering. The sacrifice You desire is a broken spirit. You will not reject a broken and repentant heart, O God.

Psalm 51:16-17 (NLT)

There are times when following God is easy, and there are other times when the thing He asks you to do, sacrifice, or endure feels like a seemingly impossible task. It's true; there are things God will bring into your path that will crush you without divine power. The crushing is shaping, molding and creating a new kind of life to flow in and through you. I wish there were a way for this life to happen joyfully and peacefully, but so far, I haven't found that to be the case. A friend said the other day that obedience wouldn't be called obedience if it was easy. God isn't just interested in my feelings. He wants my obedience. You can't say whatever, do whatever, or go wherever and ask God to bless it. Obedience and repentance are about turning towards God and doing the right thing. They aren't always easy, but if you keep your eyes fixed on God, He will give you daily strength to keep moving forward. To keep trusting Him.

The psalm above was written after David had an affair with Bathsheba. Notice what he said: *sacrifice you don't desire but rather repentance*. Feelings that don't generate any change aren't obedience. Feelings are good, but actions are better. I can say I love my family all day long, but showing my love is better. I can say I love my neighbors all day long, but showing them is better. Saying you love God is good, but showing Him is better. God is the only one who can change your heart, but only you can be obedient with the new heart He has given you. Only you can surrender. Once you do, He will be faithful to fill you up! He's good! That's why David says *You will not reject or let us stay in that despondent place*. When we turn to God, we find He's already there waiting for us, waiting to strengthen us, waiting to help us. Remember, He chose us long before we chose Him. Trust in that today.

APPLICATION: Following God isn't based on a feeling; it's based on a commitment to Him!

PRAYER: Where is God calling you to be obedient to Him? Where have you wanted to change, but you haven't? Is there anything you are keeping from God? If so, what keeps you from trusting Him? Ask God to give you the strength to trust Him right now!

LIVING FOR AN AUDIENCE OF ONE

He did what was right in the eyes of the LORD and followed the ways of his father David, not turning aside to the right or to the left.

2 Chronicles 34:2 (NIV)

There comes a point in time when everyone must decide if they will build their life on what's popular to the world or what's proclaimed in the Word. I have learned that the two will be in conflict; what's popular to the world will rarely align with the Word of God. When I was younger, I thought both could coexist; now, I'm not so sure. Jesus Himself said don't be surprised when you face resistance. What's the resistance? It comes from the world not being aligned with the Word of God. People pleasing will always keep us from stepping into what God has for us. We should be mindful of what others think so we can be good witnesses, but we should be like-minded with Jesus. We should set it into our heart, into our bones, into our spirit that we will live for Him alone. When I was in high school, I had a phrase printed out on my door that I saw each day; it simply said, *today, live your life for an audience of one*. You won't be able to please everyone, even your family, job and friends. There might be things you aren't aligned with, and you will have to decide what you will build your life on—the world or the Word.

Josiah couldn't please God and the world. The very things he would do would change the way of life and call people to a different standard of living. At the end of the day, comfort will be one of the biggest threats to our faithfulness to God. I guarantee if you talked to Josiah, he would tell you it cost him something to follow God; however, I think he would tell you it was worth it. I'm sure he faced all sorts of resistance as he began to seek to live for God alone. If we have no resistance in our lives, it might be that we have resorted to living for the world. While resistance isn't a fun thing, it often shows we are in step with what God has in store for us. Satan isn't interested in attacking those who aren't in the spiritual battle. The resistance you face today is a reminder that God is at work, and you are in the battle. Celebrate that!

APPLICATION: Live for an audience of One today.

PRAYER: Ask God to help you live for Him alone. Ask Him to give you a supernatural strength to trust His Word and to follow Him fully. Ask God to give you a heart that craves and desires His Word like our bodies crave oxygen. Ask Him to help you face the resistance and be strong.

ALL IN – UNTANGLING FROM THE PAST

... The king destroyed the altars that Manasseh had built in the two courtyards of the LORD's Temple. He smashed them to bits and scattered the pieces in the Kidron Valley. The king also desecrated the pagan shrines east of Jerusalem.

2 Kings 23:12b-13a (NLT)

So much of what we do in life is influenced and handed down from our families. We have hobbies, interests and passions that all seem to be passed on. The unsavory secret is it seems we also have sin patterns and struggles that can be carried on. This was the story with Josiah. There had been a continuation of sin and struggle. Josiah's grandfather and his dad had both done evil in the sight of the Lord. It's important to know that Jesus helps us deal with our past so that we can move forward in our present. I say this a lot, but your past isn't your past if it impacts your present. Josiah might have thought he was destined to continue in his father's footsteps, but he wasn't. God had different plans. God has different plans for you as well. What Josiah understood, that we must all understand, is that his Heavenly Father's power in him was stronger than his earthly father's. God meets us in our past and sets us free. You are free to live the life God has for you because you know His blood flows through you. You aren't destined to grind it out for the next several decades or repeat the past. Here's why: God hasn't just forgiven you; He's also set you free, which means you are free to live the life God has for you now.

The cross has truly set you free and you must understand and believe that. Jesus is a better savior than you are a sinner. No matter where you have been, no matter what your family before you has done, God has created you for good things. When God met Saul, He changed him; He gave him a new name. Fathers name their children, and it was almost like God was saying I'm the most powerful Father in your life. Part of the Christian life is learning things and unlearning things. Sometimes, we put the face of our earthly father on God. No matter how good or bad your earthly father is, he doesn't compare to God. God will never leave or forsake you. If you have had an absent father, you can feel that you need to provide or figure things out. You don't. You just need to run to your heavenly Father, and He will take care of everything. God has power over everything, including your past, and if He says you are free, then trust that you are free! Trust that today.

APPLICATION: Your heavenly Father directs your future, and He is good.

PRAYER: Ask God if there is anywhere you aren't trusting Him. Ask Him if you feel freed from your past. Ask Him if He's forgiven you, and then practice letting it go! Spend time reflecting on what He's done for you.

ALL IN – KILLING SIN

Josiah removed all the detestable idols from all the territory belonging to the Israelites, and he had all who were present in Israel serve the LORD their God. As long as he lived, they did not fail to follow the LORD, the God of their ancestors.

2 Chronicles 34:33 (NIV)

I confess I enjoy negotiating. I enjoy seeing if I can get something I want a little cheaper. One of the greatest things for me is to feel like I've got a good deal on something. I confess I also will negotiate with my kids sometimes because it's fun. Negotiating is a good thing, but there is one thing you should never negotiate with, and that's sin. Every mistake I have made came from trying to *justify* or *negotiate* with my sin. God wants us to kill sin, not invite it to the table. The problem with sin is that it's like having a baby tiger; it starts out small but grows bigger and bigger, and one day, you won't be able to control it. In every room you walk into, there are three things at work: the flesh, the devil, and the Spirit. The flesh and the devil will always try to make sin look fulfilling and innocent, but the Spirit will convict you and invite you to surrender. Light and dark cannot coexist. One will win out, and if you keep blatantly sinning, the flesh or the devil will quench the Spirit of God's work in your life. The good news is that as soon as you turn to God, He will draw near because He is faithful!

Notice what it says Josiah did. He removed the idols. He didn't try to keep them around. He knew God wouldn't honor a partial commitment. God doesn't need us to be perfect, but He does require us to be surrendered, and if God has called you to surrender something, then we must be obedient. When we are, the Spirit of God will give us the strength and power we need daily because He is faithful. We can never overcome the devil or the flesh by our own strength. We might be able to for a while, but we will eventually grow tired. However, the Spirit of God never sleeps or slumbers. The Spirit of God has a power greater than anything the devil or flesh can throw at it. The way to kill sin is to surrender to God fully, and then through His Spirit, He will set you free and give you the strength you need.

APPLICATION: Don't give sin a seat in your heart. Surrender it to God.

PRAYER: Ask the Spirit to help you with any area you are fighting. Ask the Spirit where the flesh and devil are trying to attack you. Ask the Spirit to give you strength and surrender to Him. Thank Him for His faithfulness.

ALL IN – A SOLID FOUNDATION

"Anyone who listens to My teaching and follows it is wise, like a person who builds a house on solid rock. Though the rain comes in torrents and the floodwaters rise and the winds beat against that house, it won't collapse because it is built on bedrock. But anyone who hears My teaching and doesn't obey it is foolish, like a person who builds a house on sand. When the rains and floods come and the winds beat against that house, it will collapse with a mighty crash."

Matthew 7:24-27 (NLT)

Two people can walk through a painful or tragic thing and yet respond entirely differently. Their response is determined by their temperament, maturity and attitude, sure, but I would submit that the greatest factor is what their foundation is. If your foundation is Jesus, you tend to walk through things differently. If it's something else like comfort, success, peace, love or a variety of other good things, your foundation won't be strong enough to withstand the storms of life. In fact, in many ways, the storms of life reveal how strong our foundations are. It reveals what our lives are built upon. It reveals how central faith and Jesus are in our lives. If a storm can cause you to walk away from the faith entirely, then Jesus was never your foundation. He could have been a part of your life but not the center. That's why Jesus could withstand the critics, the disappointments, the hurts, those close abandoning Him because He modeled what a life built on the right foundation looks like.

I have never once rejoiced in sufferings or storms, but I have rejoiced that those storms reveal that my faith is real. Let that encourage some of you who are walking through a difficult time. The fact that you are here, didn't give up, and are still seeking God proves that you are building on the right foundation. Trust that and keep running after Him. He is so faithful. The thing about building the right foundation is it's a continual thing. Notice the verse above says, *"anyone who hears My teaching and doesn't obey it is foolish."* This implies that our foundation needs to be strengthened and built up each day, and the only way you do that is by drawing near to God and obeying His Word. When you go all in with Jesus daily, you are building a solid foundation that God will use in a mighty way! Keep drawing near and keep trusting Him!

APPLICATION: The fact that you are still seeking God in the storm proves your faith is real!

PRAYER: Thank God that He walks with us in the storms. Thank God that He will never leave or forsake us. Ask God to strengthen your faith! Ask Him to help you run after Him today with all your heart.

ALL IN – LIVING IN THE PRESENT

"Give us today the food we need,"

Matthew 6:11 (NLT)

One of the things that has been the hardest for me to learn to master is living in the present versus living in the past or thinking about the future. When Jesus is teaching the disciples to pray, He is teaching them in verse 11 to be present for the day. To be fully awake in this moment. We can suppress our hearts because of some past mistakes or be so future-minded that we never take a moment to breathe in what God has for us this day. God's mercies are new for this day, meaning you can't take extras for tomorrow. You will need new mercies and daily bread each day to live out what God has in store for you.

Two things have helped me live in the present moment, to focus on daily bread and not the future so much. First, it's gratitude. Anxiety is tethered to the future, but gratitude helps you anchor in the present. Gratitude helps you focus right now, at this moment, on your daily bread and your daily mercies. What has God done for you in this moment? What blessings do you have today? When you see God is faithful today, it will allow you to trust for tomorrow. I invite you to find a rhythm for gratitude. It could be when you wake up or when you go to sleep. Just rattle off the little blessings God gave you today. The food you got to eat, the sleep you had, the good meeting you were in, the Spirit that is faithful to walk with you. The more you practice gratitude the more you will feel the Spirit connecting you to this present moment.

The other is simply to refuse to wish away this season. I have told our church this, but the Bible speaks about time as a commodity. You give time, you spend time, and you receive time. The Lord challenged me one day years ago on how I wish so much time away in difficult or busy seasons. *I can't wait until the weekend, I can't wait until that trip next month, I can't wait until next year.* The list goes on and on, but one thing is true: we are always trying to speed up what we can't get more of—time. So just try to be as present as you can, and ask God to help you take whatever lesson or good thing He is depositing in you this season. With God, you can trust that nothing goes to waste. No anxiety or stress in this season? Try to live in this moment and watch how your joy and peace will start to slowly increase.

APPLICATION: Gratitude tethers us to the moment we are in.

PRAYER: Ask the Spirit to help you live in tune with this day. Spend time thanking God for this season, no matter how difficult or good it has been. Spend a few moments thanking God for all of His blessings. Trust that He is good.

ALL IN – A FUTURE HOPE

"Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in Me. My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with Me that you also may be where I am."

John 14:1-3 (NIV)

One of the big things that our culture emphasizes now is secularism—the idea that you can find any meaning in life outside of God. The problem with this is that God changes the whole outcome of how we live. Paul himself said, if we don't have a future, if there is no heaven then do whatever you want. Think about it—Jesus shows up to His troubled disciples, and what does He give them? A hope that is built on two things:

Who they know: The reason they can have a future hope, the reason their hearts don't have to be troubled is because of who they know. Think about it: Thomas was one of the disciples who doubted. The truth is we remember him from his doubts, but he became a force for the Kingdom and would later leave those doubts behind. What was the antidote? John 14, that he knows the God of the universe. It's almost like Thomas and the disciples are saying, *we don't know the way to go*, and Jesus is saying back to them, *I am the way. Just stick close to Me, and it will all work out.*

Where they will go: The second reason we can have a hope is because we know where we will go. Think of what all God has created in this world. Think of the mountains, the oceans, the sunsets, the animals and all the places that amaze us. The God of the universe has put some of His best efforts into our future home, heaven. This is an astonishing thought; no mind can imagine what God has prepared for us. How can you say no to the glories of this world when they seem so appealing to us right now? Because the best of the world will be mere appetizers to what God has in store for us. Jesus reminds us of our future hope.

Secularism will get you to take those things out of it. Secularism will try to get you to find meaning outside of God, but it doesn't work. God is our primary meaning and the reason we order our days the way we do. Live in the present, but also remember what awaits you to have strength in the current moments of doubt, temptation or weakness. He is worth it!

APPLICATION: Live with a deep understanding of what awaits you.

PRAYER: Ask God to help you remember that He is with you. Do you sense that in what you are carrying? Sit and think about the future hope of heaven and ask God to stir your spirit to what awaits.

ALL IN – I SURRENDER ALL

"And whoever does not take his cross and follow Me is not worthy of Me."

Matthew 10:38 (ESV)

The biggest change in my life came when I stopped trying to slot God into my life and started building around Him. The key thing for me was surrender. Maybe two of the greatest threats to us surrendering all today are our calendar and our comfort. If we say God is our number One, does it reflect that in our calendar? If we say our spouse or our kids are our number one, and yet we never spend any time with them, then they aren't number one. I'm not talking about legalism. I'm speaking about love. You can spend all day with God out of duty and a sense of responsibility, and that's just legalism, but the opposite is true—I cannot love what I don't invest in. I cannot love what I don't focus on or spend time with. For some people, they love the idea of God more than they love God. Remember, Jesus says the truth will set us free, and sometimes the kindest thing God can do is give us truth.

The other thing that is a threat to my surrender is comfort. Sometimes, I don't want to get up or stay up later to spend time with God. Sometimes, I'm happier on the couch or sleeping in. Yet what is true is that we will sacrifice for what we love. There is an invitation to draw near with God but often it will be inconvenient. We must make an intentional effort to draw near to God, knowing it will always cost something from us.

Jesus doesn't assume all will follow Him. The verse above is a call to die, a call to surrender all. There are no terms in surrender. It's just a laying down of my rights, future and will to the feet of Jesus. That's why Jesus says *whoever* for some the price will be too high. They will love Jesus and serve Him when it's convenient, but they won't die; they won't surrender. Like anything in life, your faith will be determined by what you put into it. Jesus' invitation is for all. What are you giving Jesus right now? Does He have complete and full access to you? If not, ask what is keeping you from laying it all down. The irony is when you surrender, what you find is peace, life and joy. Trust Him today.

APPLICATION: The call to Jesus is a call to die.

PRAYER: Ask God to guide and direct you today. Ask Him to help you lay down your calendar and your comfort. Ask Him how you can carve more time out to draw near!

STEADFAST IN STORMS

Then Jesus got into the boat and started across the lake with His disciples. Suddenly, a fierce storm struck the lake, with waves breaking into the boat. But Jesus was sleeping. The disciples went and woke Him up, shouting, "Lord, save us! We're going to drown!" Jesus responded, "Why are you afraid? You have so little faith!" Then He got up and rebuked the wind and waves, and suddenly there was a great calm. The disciples were amazed. "Who is this man?" they asked. "Even the winds and waves obey Him!" **Matthew 8:23-27 (NLT)**

There are times when a storm can be a beautiful thing to behold. Perhaps while snuggled up inside with a good book by the fire or in the midst of a hot and dry summer. One place I'm almost certain a storm isn't beautiful to behold is in the middle of a lake in a rowboat. When you consider the passage above, it's easy to forget that many of the disciples were fishermen by trade. Storms on the water wouldn't have been a completely foreign scenario to them. But this storm must have been different, as it caused even these trained professionals to believe that they were going to die.

At that moment, they went to Jesus. They woke Him up, and He came to their rescue. They're amazed by His power—who wouldn't be? This story should prompt all of us to consider how we react when the storms of life come. Where do we turn? Social media to vent? Friends and family for advice? Escapism in its many forms?

We should turn to Jesus first in every circumstance. When things are steady, we should praise Him for His provision. When things are stormy, we should rely on His power. He is Lord of all, and all authority in heaven and earth has been granted to Him. Do we believe this? And if we believe this, do we understand what it means in our lives?

If you're not in a storm at the moment, praise God. But storms are inevitable. What will your response be when they come? Decide in advance, here and now, to trust Jesus. To rely on His power and providence over our own agency. He is steadfast, trustworthy, and good.

APPLICATION: Reflect on a time that God demonstrated His power in your life. Thank Him for His faithfulness! Ask Him to help you rely on Him in every season of life.

PRAYER: Lord, You are all-powerful. Help me to trust You in every circumstance, especially the stormy seasons of my life. Thank You for rescuing me. In Jesus' name, amen.

PEACE IN PERIL

Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank Him for all He has done. Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.
Philippians 4:6-7 (NLT)

How much do you worry? A lot? A little? All the time? Never? Some people can't get to sleep at night, tied up in knots of worry. Those same people might wake up in the wee hours of the morning, still fixated on the same situation. Others are asleep within two minutes each night and never lose sleep over anything.

Wherever you fall on that spectrum, the call is the same: pray about everything. For the person who worries themselves into an anxiety spiral by playing out every hypothetical in their mind: pray. For the person who maybe doesn't even think enough about the future to worry about it, pray. We are to take every trial, test, and tribulation to the King. Paul says in the passage above that we can tell Him what we need—that's allowed! As we do so, we should thank Him for all He has done. Practicing gratitude has been one of the primary ways I've combated worry and anxiety in my own life.

When we can choose prayer over worry, we'll begin to experience God's peace. This isn't the peace that comes from a meditative yoga session or a still meadow full of wildflowers in the woods. This is the peace that comes from acknowledging and embracing the sovereignty of the Creator. His peace helps us understand that even when things don't go the way we desire, He is still in control.

A point of clarity—fear, anxiety, worry and depression are very real things that people experience. The passage above (and this devotion, for that matter) is not a call to simply strive more. You could walk away thinking that if you just had more faith, you wouldn't experience these emotions. You could begin to believe you're deficient in some way or that your faith is invalid. Please, please, please hear me: we are all called to trust Him. But that might not eradicate all your fear or worry instantaneously. Sanctification is a life-long process.

APPLICATION: What area of your life do you need to trust Him with? Is there a situation that has you tied up in knots with worry or fear? How can you give that over to Jesus? Ask Him to help you—He is faithful.

PRAYER: God, I desire to know Your peace. Help me to bring every trial and trouble that I experience to You. Help me to trust You more each day. In Jesus' name, amen.

FAITH 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)

I've met a lot of what I call *doormat Christians* in my time. Somewhere along the way, they've come to believe their calling from God is to let people walk all over them. To stand up and speak out in any way would be arrogant, rude, or unbecoming of a Christ follower. This simply isn't true. Now, there are some who can go to the opposite extreme, challenging everyone about everything at all times. But I would argue that both extremes are unhelpful. If we're loud, arrogant and abrasive over every subject, I believe we damage our ability to be an ambassador for Jesus. But if we shrink back in fear from ever addressing anything we encounter in the world, we're openly abdicating our ambassador responsibilities.

We are called to take a stand for Jesus. If He truly is our Lord and Savior, then our lives should be wholly given over to Him. That means we will sometimes be out of step with what culture and society say is normal or acceptable. Some may say that our biblically based beliefs will put us *on the wrong side of history*. Having read the book of Revelation, I can confidently say that accusation is erroneous. We must stand for truth, which is defined by Jesus, not by someone's feelings or the latest trend.

Paul tells Timothy that we have been given a spirit of power, love and self-discipline. Would you say that's true in your life?

Are you operating in your own power or that of the Holy Spirit? Acts 1:8 says that we will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon us and that we will be witnesses for Christ.

Does Christ-like love drive you? To answer this, you have to consider how Jesus loved. If I were to sum it up in one word, I'd say sacrifice. Is your love for others sacrificial or circumstantial? Consider 1 Corinthians 13, known colloquially as the *love chapter*.

How about self-discipline? And I don't just mean with your latest diet. Can you see the God-given fruit of the Spirit in your life? Self-control isn't actually about self as much as it's about consciously choosing surrender and submission to the will and ways of Jesus.

APPLICATION: Are you living from a place of fear or faith? Are you standing boldly and humbly for Christ? Or are you shrinking back? Ask God to show you where He wants you to step forward for the sake of the Kingdom.

PRAYER: Father, help me to stand for You. May Your Holy Spirit fuel me daily, granting me the boldness to stand for Your truth. Help me to love as You love. In Jesus' name, amen.

CONFIDENCE IN CRISIS

God is our refuge and strength, always ready to help in times of trouble. So we will not fear when earthquakes come and the mountains crumble into the sea.

Psalm 46:1-2 (NLT)

Do you believe that God will help you in times of trouble? Don't give the Sunday School answer in your head. Be honest—do you trust that He is there for you specifically? Because you might believe that He is a refuge and strength for others who are more faithful followers. For people that you perceive deserve His love more than you. But do you really claim the above verses for yourself?

He is there for you specifically. What a wonderfully comforting thought.

Consider the implication of Psalm 46:2. It doesn't say that the earthquakes won't happen. It doesn't say that the mountains won't crumble into the sea. It simply says we don't have to be afraid when those things happen. Our hope goes beyond our circumstances. Unfortunately, I believe many have concluded that God either doesn't exist or that if He does, He doesn't care because He didn't prevent the negative circumstances in their lives. They prayed for a sick loved one who didn't get better. They suffered an injustice at the hands of another. Maybe they simply experienced a lack in some vital area. And so, in their frustration and perhaps bitterness, they've walked away from God, believing He walked away from them first.

My friend, whatever your circumstances have been in this life, God sees, knows, and loves you. He didn't promise that life would be easy or pain-free. In fact, Jesus promised that in this world, we would have hardships. But He assured us that we can take heart because He has overcome the world (John 16:33).

May your life be full of blessings. And when it seems like it is not, may your faith and trust abound.

APPLICATION: Ask God to increase your confidence in Him, especially in seasons of struggle or crisis. Spend some time searching the Scriptures for stories of people who trusted God (Abraham is a great example—begins in Genesis 12) or verses specifically about trust. Jot a few down in your journal or phone where you can refer back to them regularly.

PRAYER: Lord, help me remember that You are, in fact, Lord of all. Grant that I might have confidence in crisis, trusting that You are my refuge and strength. In Jesus' name, amen.

HOPE IN HARDSHIP

We can rejoice, too, when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they help us develop endurance. And endurance develops strength of character, and character strengthens our confident hope of salvation. And this hope will not lead to disappointment. For we know how dearly God loves us, because He has given us the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with His love. **Romans 5:3-4 (NLT)**

I love running. I've recently begun training for another marathon, which means lots of hours of training to endure the entire 26.2 miles on race day. My son has also taken an interest in running. He asks me all the time to go running with me. But his idea of going on a run with me is very different from my training regimen. He wants to race around the cul-de-sac in an all-out sprint. There's zero endurance to his running. He just gives it everything he's got until he's completely burned out.

How's your endurance? I don't mean as a marathon training partner but in your faith, in your journey with Jesus, as a Christ-following disciple. Are you able to persevere through the problems and trials? Or do you throw everything at it and then just burn out? Paul lays out a clear progression for us in the passage above. When our endurance grows, it develops strength of character. And that character strengthens our confident hope of salvation.

So, how does one grow their endurance? My not-so-sophisticated answer is a little at a time over a period of time. So, how can you trust God a little more today? It doesn't have to be some grandiose gesture. What small, simple step of obedience can you take today? The hardest step on any training run I take is always the first. So, what is that first step for you? Or that next step? Ask God to grant you the clarity and courage to move.

APPLICATION: Take at least ten minutes to get alone, still and silent. Ask God to show you your next step. Then, sit in that silence and solitude and listen for the Spirit.

PRAYER: Father, guide my steps. Show me what my next step of obedience is as I seek to honor You in every facet of my life. In Jesus' name, amen.

FAITHFUL IN THE FIRE

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego replied, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you. If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God whom we serve is able to save us. He will rescue us from your power, Your Majesty. But even if He doesn't, we want to make it clear to you, Your Majesty, that we will never serve your gods or worship the gold statue you have set up."

Daniel 3:16-18 (NLT)

The story of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego is one that I think we can quickly look past. It has somehow become more of a children's church type of story, which truthfully is wild when you consider the violence of what's happening. The king, in his rage, has decided to end the lives of his political captives. His method for carrying out the death sentence is fire—being burned alive. It's cruel and unusual punishment by almost any standard.

All of this is happening because these men refused to bow in worship to a false god (a statue of the king himself). Can you imagine being made to bow down and worship a false god? It's easy to comfortably sit here and declare *I would never!* But what if you were faced with the penalty of death? And not just any death, but death by fire? I think we'd all like to say how we'd respond, but I pray we're never put in this position to find out.

But I am so radically blown away by what Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego say to the king in the face of death. They first acknowledge that the God they serve is fully capable of saving them from the fire. Bold! Could any of us honestly say we'd have faith that deep? But that's not all they say. They go on to assert that even if God chooses not to save them, they still won't commit idolatry. Phrased another way, they're choosing death over disobedience to God. Powerful!

Again, I pray that you're never faced with the choice of your life or your faith. But in another sense, every single day, we do face that choice. Will we remain obedient to the Lord even when it costs us something? Even when it's inconvenient? Even when it's painful? Will we be faithful in the flames? Take comfort in knowing that God did, in fact, rescue Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. And He is also faithful in rescuing us, even if that rescue doesn't look exactly like what we might expect. He is faithful and good.

APPLICATION: Where are you facing a choice between faithfulness to Jesus and compromise? Ask God to help you choose obedience. Ask Him to renew a loyal spirit within you. Confess any sin aloud to Him, and commit afresh to follow Him.

PRAYER: God, You are faithful to rescue Your followers. Help me trust You with my future and life in the face of adversity. Grow within me a strength like that of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. In Jesus' name, amen.

HOLY HABITS

Do not waste time arguing over godless ideas and old wives' tales. Instead, train yourself to be godly. "Physical training is good, but training for godliness is much better, promising benefits in this life and in the life to come." This is a trustworthy saying, and everyone should accept it. This is why we work hard and continue to struggle, for our hope is in the living God, who is the Savior of all people and particularly of all believers.

1 Timothy 4:7-10 (NLT)

Some people simply love to argue. This has always been true, but never has it been more evident than in recent years with the rise of social media engagement. Don't believe me? Check the comment section on the next video you watch or article you read. Having tense online interactions has, unfortunately, become par for the course. Some people even pride themselves on it!

Certainly, we're called to stand for truth. But how easily can we get sucked into the vortex of arguments over godless ideas? Superstition? Wild fabrications with no basis in reality. Christian brother and sister—this is not for us. We must reject this course of action and pursue holiness.

Paul goes on to speak of the value of training for godliness, going as far as to say that it's better than physical training. Now, some of us love our workout regimen. Running, lifting, competing—whatever it takes to get that heart rate elevated and be healthy. But are you willing to do whatever it takes to grow your faith and be spiritually healthy?

Well, how does one go about that? Great question! I'm glad you asked. First and foremost is daily surrender and submission to the Lordship of Christ. Simply acknowledging His rightful place as Lord. From there, it's a matter of practicing the spiritual disciplines. Scripture intake. Prayer. Fasting. Just start with those three. Be honest with yourself—are you making these a priority? You don't have to memorize the entirety of the Old Testament. Start with reading a chapter or two. You don't have to spend four hours prostrate on the ground in prayer before the sun comes up. Set a few reminders or alarms on your phone to stop and pray for a few minutes throughout the day. You don't have to fast for a month, sustaining yourself on water and honey. You can start with a meal or two one day a week. The point is to simply start—then keep going.

APPLICATION: What step can you take to grow your spiritual disciplines? Reflect upon this, and then take that first step! Remember, it doesn't have to be perfect right out of the gate. Just begin!

PRAYER: Lord, help me as I seek to grow in my walk with You. I want to be holy as You are holy. As I seek to live a spiritually disciplined life, empower me with Your Spirit. In Jesus' name, amen.

PURE PURSUITS

And now, dear brothers and sisters, one final thing. Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honorable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise. **Philippians 4:8 (NLT)**

What do you think about most often throughout the day?

Stop and really think about it. As you commute from one obligation to the next, what's on your mind? When you're daydreaming when you should be working, where does your mind go? What occupies your focus more than anything else?

I think in our broken world, it's easy to fixate on the negative. Any day of the week, you can find a story of geopolitical tension that can deeply unsettle you. There's violence both abroad and here in America. Good people suffer while the wicked seem to prosper. And that's to say nothing of the tensions and tumult you personally experience on a day-to-day basis. I think for the average American their mind is filled with negativity, apathy and discouragement.

For those of us who follow Christ, our focus should be different. We're not called to ignore or dismiss the negativity all around us. In fact, bringing light and life to a dark and dying world is our mission! Instead, we fix our thoughts on Christ. We refuse to be mentally undisciplined, allowing our thoughts to carry us away. We take every thought captive, bringing it under the authority of Christ. When we consciously commit to this course of action, we'll find ourselves less susceptible to being deceived and destroyed by the lies of the enemy and this world.

So, how can you fix your thoughts on Jesus today? Paul gives us some instruction to that end. We're to fix our thoughts on what is true, honorable, right, pure, lovely and admirable. This certainly begins with Jesus Himself. Just stopping to reflect on who He is. But then I think we can go a step further and remember what He has done. You can recount His faithfulness to those we read about in the Word. You can also consider how He has revealed Himself in your own life! Naming and counting our blessings is a powerful exercise in our pursuit of relationship with Christ.

APPLICATION: Write down at least ten ways you've seen God's goodness in your lifetime. It can be to you personally, in the lives of loved ones, or the world at large. We're refusing to be inundated with all the negative around us! We're focusing on what is true, honorable, right, pure, lovely and admirable.

PRAYER: God, thank You for who You are and what You've done. Help me to take every thought captive, refusing to allow the lies of the enemy and negativity of the world to lead me away from You. Help me to fix my thoughts, above all else, on You. In Jesus' name, amen.

SANCTIFIED SPEECH

Don't use foul or abusive language. Let everything you say be good and helpful, so that your words will be an encouragement to those who hear them.

Ephesians 4:29 (NLT)

You can tell what's important to someone by listening to what comes out of their mouth. This isn't a revelation. Spend any time with a devoted parent, and they'll talk about their children. That rabid sports fan will always find a way to bring up their team (and usually refers to the team as if they are a member). Someone on a new workout plan or diet trend is legally obligated to tell everyone they come in contact with about it. It's natural—we can't keep our passions to ourselves.

So, with that in mind, would you say you're passionate about Jesus?

Don't just say yes because you think you're supposed to. There's no one here to impress. It's just you and God in this moment. So, be honest—do you talk about Jesus? Does how you talk about other things reflect that you know Jesus?

When we were children, we learned a cute rhyme about sticks and stones and how words can never hurt anyone. That was a bald-faced lie. Foul and abusive language can not only hurt other people's feelings and self-esteem, but it can damage our witness for Christ. Stated succinctly—your words matter. A lot. If we believe this, why would we do anything but seek to use our words to have a positive impact for the Kingdom?

APPLICATION: You can certainly take stock of your own speech to some extent, but I'd like to ask you to consider another approach. Warning—it will require some vulnerability in community. Here's the exercise: Ask a handful of people with whom you spend a significant amount of time to observe your speech over a week. It could be co-workers, family members, neighbors, etc. Whoever is in a position to take stock of your speech. They don't have to start right away. In fact, you may encourage them to start on a later day of their choosing so you're not just on your best behavior around them to score well or pass a test. Ask them to listen for what you talk about most. Ask them to pay attention to how you speak to people as much as they listen to what you're speaking to them about. At the end of that period, invite them to share their feedback. Once they do, take that to God and ask Him to show you how to shift your speech to be more centered around Him!

PRAYER: Father, may the words of my mouth and the mediation of my heart be pleasing to You, O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer. In Jesus' name, amen.

FAITHFUL FOCUS

Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a huge crowd of witnesses to the life of faith, let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily trips us up. And let us run with endurance the race God has set before us. We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, the champion who initiates and perfects our faith. Because of the joy awaiting Him, He endured the cross, disregarding its shame. Now He is seated in the place of honor beside God's throne.

Hebrews 12:1-2 (NLT)

What's slowing you down as you run the race Jesus has set before you? Stop and think about it for a moment. Take stock. Reflect. Ask God to show you.

I've always appreciated the distinction that the writer of Hebrews makes here. We're told to strip off everything that slows us down, especially the sin that entangles us. So clearly, we're to eliminate the sin from our lives. But there are other things, which are not sinful, that can slow us down. Video games. Social media. Sports fandom. A relentless pursuit of the perfect garden/yard. Entertainment. Climbing the ladder at work. None of these things (or countless others I could list) are inherently sinful or wrong. But when we allow them to eclipse Jesus as the top priority in our lives, then we have a problem.

We must keep our eyes on Jesus. That means setting Him as the top priority. That means seeking to know Him more and grow in our relationship with Him. How can we practically do this? Set aside uninterrupted time to pray. Make studying Scripture a regular rhythm, not just to check it off your to-do list, but to grow in wisdom and knowledge of who God is. Attending church regularly to engage with the body of Christ. These are just a few of the steps that we can take to prioritize Jesus.

Think of how you spend your waking hours. Certainly, we all have sin struggles that we are being called out of—confess those and repent! But beyond the obviously sinful things in your life, what is receiving your focus? If someone who didn't know you observed you for a week, what would they conclude is most important to you? Would Jesus even make the top five?

APPLICATION: Take stock of how you spend your days. How much of your time is spent pursuing relationship with Jesus each day? How much of your time is spent pursuing entertainment? What might you need to eliminate from your life to allow yourself to fix your eyes on Jesus better?

PRAYER: Father, grant me a hunger and a desire to know You more. Help me to set aside anything that would keep me from You. In Jesus' name, I pray, amen.

CHRISTLIKE CONDUCT

So prepare your minds for action and exercise self-control. Put all your hope in the gracious salvation that will come to you when Jesus Christ is revealed to the world. So you must live as God's obedient children. Don't slip back into your old ways of living to satisfy your own desires. You didn't know any better then. But now you must be holy in everything you do, just as God who chose you is holy. For the Scriptures say, "You must be holy because I am holy."

1 Peter 1:13-16 (NLT)

Holy. It's a word we say and sing a lot in church. But what does it really mean? By definition, it means to be set apart. Another word we might use is sacred. We are called to be holy, just as the God we love and serve is holy. That means that we are set apart for Him. But what does that practically look like?

First things first—we're not perfect in our righteousness. You can't be. I can't be. We must stand clothed in the perfection of Jesus our Savior. His righteousness is imputed to us as believers. This is called justification. It's not something that we do ourselves—this is the work of Jesus.

So how do we live holy lives, set apart for God? Well after first acknowledging that this is not something we accomplish by our own power, Peter has some great advice for us. He says we must prepare our minds and exercise self-control. Are you guarding your mind? Or is every social media post, news report and passing word from someone in your life passing through your mind freely?

As for self-control, this goes beyond just being able to say no to dessert after dinner. Paul actually tells us that self-control is a fruit of the Spirit. We need the supernatural intervention of God's Holy Spirit to help us grow in our self-discipline and self-control. When we can grow in this way, it enables us to recognize the traps of the world (and the enemy). We don't want to go back to the way we used to live. We want to move forward, growing as disciples.

APPLICATION: First and foremost, stop and thank Jesus for His accomplished work in His perfect life, death and resurrection. Then, ask God to work through His Spirit to help you mature and grow. Consider how you might guard your heart and mind in a world that is constantly on the offensive.

PRAYER: Almighty God, thank You for what You accomplished through Your Son Jesus. Thank You that in Him I am sanctified, justified and redeemed. Help me to live a holy life, just as You are holy. In His name, amen.

RIGHTEOUS RELATIONSHIPS

As iron sharpens iron, so a friend sharpens a friend. **Proverbs 27:17 (NLT)**

Growing up, I didn't have a ton of close friends. I was introverted, shy and fairly nerdy. When I got out of high school and my small hometown, I met the group of guys who have been my best friends for almost twenty years. What has allowed these relationships to endure is not just mutual interests or proximity but a commitment to bettering one another. We refuse to settle for the superficial. We believe God placed us in each other's lives for mutual edification. Put simply—I want them to help me grow as a Christ follower, husband, father, etc. I seek to do the same for them.

Who is sharpening you? Who is helping you grow? Holding your feet to the fire? Asking you the hard questions and refusing to settle for the superficial? I'm fortunate that I have a group of friends who have invested in me for two decades. You may take stock of your life and realize you're not in that place. That's okay! You can start right where you are. You may not dive into the depths right away, but you can begin with some honest conversations about mutual edification.

Quite simply, we need each other. We are created for community. There is no such thing as a lone-wolf Christian. Jesus had many people in His orbit during His ministry, but He was intentional with twelve in particular. Within that twelve, He was even more intentional with three. So, as you consider how to pursue depth in righteous relationships, consider quality over quantity.

Once you've identified who you'd like to invite into this level of relationship, be direct. Don't mince words or beat around the bush. Share with them that you're looking for them to sharpen you, and you seek to sharpen them. This isn't something you can force; you can only invite. Pray about who God has placed in your life that can play this role for you. Then, you can work together to discuss a plan for accountability and encouragement moving forward.

APPLICATION: Ask God to show you who can sharpen you and who you can sharpen.

PRAYER: God, thank You for the gift of community. Help me prioritize healthy relationships with fellow believers so we might grow closer to you together. In Jesus' name, amen.

ACTIVE AND ALIVE

For the Word of God is alive and powerful. It is sharper than the sharpest two-edged sword, cutting between soul and spirit, between joint and marrow. It exposes our innermost thoughts and desires. **Hebrews 4:12 (NLT)**

God's Word is not just a collection of ancient texts; it's a living, dynamic force. Some in our day and age look at the Bible and deem it archaic, outdated and out of step with the times. Hebrews 4:12 reminds us that Scripture is *alive and powerful*, able to reach into the deepest parts of our being. Just as a sharp sword cuts through flesh, the Word of God slices through our defenses, revealing the true condition of our hearts.

When we read the Bible, we encounter the voice of God speaking directly to us. It exposes our hidden motives and challenges our sinful tendencies. But more than just convicting us, God's Word also heals and restores. It guides us toward righteousness, helping us align our lives with God's will. The Holy Spirit, working in conjunction with God's Word, has amazing transformational potential. Are you open to that?

How have you been approaching God's Word lately? Have you been making time for it at all? If so, is reading the Word more of a spiritual checklist thing, or are you coming with the expectation that God will speak and move through it? In the Bible, we meet the living God. He's not distant or disconnected from His creation. He has instructions for us that are very much applicable today, even though the times have certainly changed since the Scriptures were penned.

APPLICATION: Today, let us approach the Bible with reverence, recognizing its power to transform. Allow God's Word to work within you, shaping your thoughts, attitudes and actions. As you meditate on Scripture, ask the Holy Spirit to open your heart to its truths, leading you closer to Christ and deeper into the life He has called you to live.

PRAYER: Father, thank You for the gift of Your Word. Help me to cherish it always. As I meet You in the Scriptures, illuminate and guide my mind. Show me how You desire me to grow. In Jesus' name, amen.

TREASURING TIMELESS TRUTHS

I have hidden Your Word in my heart, that I might not sin against You.

Psalm 119:11 (NLT)

How's your memory? I confess, mine isn't great. I struggle to remember what I had for lunch today, much less important details about upcoming projects at work or crucial information about what plans my wife has made for us this weekend. Sometimes I forget that there are even plans for this weekend! I'll often joke or make excuses about my bad memory.

But the truth is, I can remember a ton of inane things that don't matter. Sports trivia or factoids? I've got a million of them in my head. Song lyrics? Thousands stored in my brain. Random characters from 90s TV shows? I can name them all. What I'm trying to say is I'm the guy you want on your team for trivia night, but when it comes to recalling the important stuff, you better hope I took notes.

Maybe you have a steel trap for a memory. Or perhaps you're like me, just doing the best you can. Either way, I'd ask you to consider how much of your mental storage is dedicated to God's Word. Would you say you have five Bible verses committed to memory? Even if I spot you John 3:16, you might struggle to come up with four more. I don't point this out to shame you. I point it out because I think we've collectively decided that we can always just look up the Scriptures in our Bibles or on our phones. But there is tremendous value in having God's Word committed to memory.

The psalmist declares that he has memorized God's Word so that he might not sin against God. What a great idea! When you're out and about and navigating the myriad of issues life throws at you, what better treasure trove of wisdom to draw upon than that given to us by the Creator Himself? In moments of temptation or trouble, knowing what God says about who you are or what is right and wrong can be crucial.

APPLICATION: Commit to memorizing Scripture this week. You can put a note on your desk, steering wheel or bathroom mirror. Just find a place where you can see it, read it and begin memorizing it. This will be helpful to you in your endeavor to honor God in all parts of your life!

PRAYER: Lord, I pray You would give me a hunger for Your Word. Help me to internalize it for my moments of need. Thank You for the gift of Your Word. In Jesus' name, amen.

ROOTED IN THE WORD

"And you must commit yourselves wholeheartedly to these commands that I am giving you today. Repeat them again and again to your children. Talk about them when you are at home and when you are on the road, when you are going to bed and when you are getting up."

Deuteronomy 6:6-7 (NLT)

Children are a sacred trust of the Lord. When you first become a parent, it can be a bit overwhelming. There's a tiny life that is wholly dependent upon you for survival. Newborns are physically incapable of providing for themselves. Children still need caring, committed, compassionate guidance as they get older and more independent. And what could be more caring than laying a foundation of God's Word?

The passage above instructs us to instruct our children in the ways and Word of God. We're to repeat them again and again to our children. Good news, you're probably already pretty good at repeating things to your children! We're told to go over the Word at home, while traveling, and at all times of the day. So, let me ask you this—when was the last time you intentionally reviewed Scripture with your child? If you don't have a child, when was the last time you made the Word of God a priority in discussion with someone?

We must first commit to God's Word ourselves. What does that regular rhythm of spending time with God in His Word look like for you? I'm a bit hesitant to ask this, as I have known many well-intentioned believers who have spiraled into a legalistic trap when it comes to daily quiet time. If I might offer a word of encouragement in this regard, you'll never be perfect in your pursuit of Jesus. Take heart—He is perfect, and grace abounds. Sometimes, we can get stuck before we even start out of fear of failure. Just start! Open your Bible and meet your Maker there. And if you have been blessed with children or grandchildren, bring them along for the journey. You don't have to be fancy or buttoned up. Just open the Bible and dive in! Discuss what God says and how it applies to our lives.

APPLICATION: What step can you take to grow healthier in your pursuit of God through His Word? How can you take steps with those that have been entrusted to you?

PRAYER: Lord, I ask that You give me a hunger and a passion for Your Word. Help me to pursue You there, and grow within me the conviction to bring others with me on this journey. I pray that the next generation becomes enamored with Your Word. In Jesus' name, amen.

SAVORING SACRED SCRIPTURES

All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right. God uses it to prepare and equip his people to do every good work.

2 Timothy 3:16-17 (NLT)

In these verses, Paul reminds us that Scripture is not merely a human creation but is *God-breathed*. This divine inspiration means that every word of the Bible carries the authority and wisdom of God Himself. The Bible is designed to teach us the truths of God, reveal His character, and guide us in living according to His will.

But God's Word does more than just inform; it transforms. Paul says that God uses His Word to prepare and equip His people for every good thing. This means that the Bible shapes our understanding, convicts us of sin, sets us back on the right path, and trains us to live holy lives. It is a comprehensive guide for spiritual growth and moral living.

The ultimate purpose of Scripture is to equip us as servants of God, thoroughly preparing us for every good work He calls us to do. Whether we are called to serve in our families, communities or churches, God's Word provides the wisdom and strength we need to fulfill our callings.

Do you have a reverence for Scripture? Do we stop to grasp that the Bible isn't just some other wisdom literature but the very Words of God Himself? He revealed Himself to many men across many years, but the message is consistent. The Bible ultimately points to our need for a Savior, which we have in King Jesus.

APPLICATION: We've talked this week about memorizing Scripture, establishing regular rhythms to be in the Word, and sharing the Bible with those around us. Today, let us just take a few moments to thank God for choosing to reveal Himself to us through His Word. Then, let us continue in our efforts to prioritize the Scriptures!

PRAYER: Lord, Your wisdom and ways are life. Grow within me a desire to know You more and more each day. Thank You for the guidance that we find in Your Holy Scriptures. In Jesus' name, amen.

EMBRACING ETERNAL EDICTS

The grass withers and the flowers fade, but the Word of our God stands forever.
Isaiah 40:8 (NLT)

When you're growing up, there are a lot of things that you genuinely think will last forever. You're certain you'll be best friends with someone forever until you grow up and your interests grow apart. You're positive you'll always love that band or artist until you're old and grey. But then you mature, and your tastes shift. Or maybe you think the hobby that you hold so dear will never fade from your life. But then the realities of time, money and an aging body take those things from you (so long Ultimate Frisbee tournaments!).

Some things simply don't last. It's sad, but true. And yet, the Word of God stands forever.

In a world full of change, God's Word never does. Public opinion on social issues may fluctuate, but God is constant. Consider what the writer of Hebrews says in Hebrews 13:8 (NLT): *Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.*

Jesus isn't going to suddenly realize one day that His Word is out of step with cultural and societal norms and then change it. His truth is eternal, standing for all time. As much as society might disagree, there is such a thing as absolute truth. Where some might try to make it relative, citing that what works for you works for you and what works for me works for me, we know better. God is constant, never wishy-washy or shifty. Part of James 1:17 says: *He never changes or casts a shifting shadow.* This is a great comfort because you know that God isn't suddenly going to move the goalposts on you one day. And you can also take comfort in knowing that unlike so much of what we see in this world, His Word will never fade or change. He and His Word are constant, a comfort in the shifting sands and storms of this life.

APPLICATION: What timeless truths can you extract from Scripture? Make a short list in your journal or phone. Give God thanks for them! Ask Him to reveal more to you as you continue to prioritize His Word and pursue Him there.

PRAYER: Thank You, Lord, for the timeless truths in Your Word. Help me to remain steadfast in the midst of a world that is in constant flux. Anchor me in Your Word. In Jesus' name, amen.

DELIGHTING IN DIVINE DECREES

Oh, the joys of those who do not follow the advice of the wicked, or stand around with sinners, or join in with mockers. But they delight in the law of the LORD, meditating on it day and night. They are like trees planted along the riverbank, bearing fruit each season. Their leaves never wither, and they prosper in all they do.

Psalms 1:1-3 (NLT)

What do you delight in? Maybe it's a peaceful day on the lake or the golf course. Maybe it's a party full of life and loved ones. Perhaps great food, long walks on the beach, or just a good book. We all have things that we take special pleasure in. But would you say that you delight in God's Word?

I'm thankful for the Bible; truly, I am. But if I'm honest, I don't know that my relationship with it has consistently reached delight. There have been moments, yes, and I desire that there would be more. But I know I've not prioritized it the way I always should. And like anything, without intentionality and priority being placed on it, the depth and delight can fade.

The great news is that we can have a fresh start right now!

And when we do come to a place of delighting in the Word, the results are clear. According to the passage above, first we will see our attitudes and actions change. We'll no longer join in with or listen to those intentionally out of step with the Word. We will instead be like trees planted along the riverbank. Our roots will be firm and secure, drawing life and sustenance from God's Word.

So today, if you're tired, weary, or perhaps hanging on by a thread, consider your roots. Are you drawing nourishment from the Source of all life, Jesus? Or are you looking to be filled by the counterfeit offerings of this world? Take a step back. Take stock. Then, take time to be with God in His Word.

APPLICATION: Ask yourself: *where are my roots?* Consider the parable of the soils, found in Luke 13:1-23. Consider also the Words of Jesus on foundation, found in Matthew 7:24-27.

PRAYER: God, help me to build my life on You and Your Word. May I be firmly rooted in You that I might withstand the storms of this life. Bless me and help me as I seek to grow closer with You each day. In Jesus' name, amen.

CHRISTLIKE CHARACTER

Don't be selfish; don't try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves. Don't look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others, too. You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had.

Philippians 2:3-5 (NLT)

How humble are you? Trick question, right? If you say you're incredibly humble, then that's a prideful statement. But take stock for a moment and be honest with yourself. Are you a person that others would describe as humble? I think for most of us, we're gracious in the ordinary, small things of life. But when it comes to larger things, we tend to dig in our heels and prioritize our wants and ways over those of others.

Yet the call from Paul in the passage above is clear. Don't be selfish. Be humble. Don't be caught up only in what is important to you. Think of others ahead of yourself. In other words, live like Jesus. While some things in Scripture might be confusing or initially unclear, the verse above certainly doesn't fall into that category.

Have you ever thought about the attitude that Jesus had toward those around Him? The patience and humility He displayed with His disciples, who constantly failed to grasp what He was saying. The same men couldn't be bothered to stay awake and pray with Him in the Garden of Gethsemane. The same men who abandoned Him in His darkest hours. And yet He demonstrated unfailing graciousness towards them. Or consider the crowds who constantly pressed in upon Jesus, seeking healing, feeding, or some other miracle. While He knew that He needed to retreat to be with His Father sometimes, He was always gracious and humble in how He dealt with people.

APPLICATION: How can you choose humility today? What small sacrifice can you make to honor those in your life? We want to love God, which means loving people. And the way we do that is by living like Jesus. Choose humility today!

PRAYER: Lord, help me to be humble, just as Your Son Jesus was. Grant that I might live a life of graciousness, sacrifice and humility. Be magnified in my words and actions today. In Jesus' name, amen.

PRIDE PRECEDES

Pride goes before destruction, and haughtiness before a fall.

Proverbs 16:18 (NLT)

Pride is incredibly destructive. I don't think anyone would argue with that. After all, it's right there in the Bible. But what we may not recognize is the stealth nature of pride. Rarely does someone wake up and openly acknowledge that they are choosing arrogance. Pride creeps in over time. It's a slow journey of self-justification and selfish thinking.

It's my belief that pride is ultimately a violation of the first commandment. Do you remember what it is? *"You must not have any other god but Me."* (Exodus 20:3 NLT) When we allow pride to take the wheel, what we're doing is choosing ourselves over God. We're elevating ourselves to the throne in our hearts where only He should sit. Perhaps you think I'm overstating things, but I truly don't believe I am. Pride is simply idolatry in self-centered packaging. The late great Tim Keller says this about pride: *Spiritual pride is the illusion that we are competent to run our own lives, achieve our own sense of self-worth, and find a purpose big enough to give us meaning in life without God.*

If you're honest with yourself, you can probably look back at times in your life when you became puffed up with pride. You knew better than those around you. You knew better than God. So, you forged your own path. And I'd be willing to bet that the results were disastrous. It's possible that even now, you're recognizing that you're operating from a place of pride. So, what do you do?

Repent. Turn from your selfish ways and acknowledge Jesus not just as Savior for our afterlife but as Lord of our life here and now. If we fail to address the pride that creeps in, we're barreling towards a cliff we can't see. We don't know when we'll go careening off, but that end is inevitable.

APPLICATION: Humble yourself to ask God to reveal any area of your life where you are operating from a place of pride. Repent. Trust God instead of yourself. Commit to Him anew as Lord, not just Savior.

PRAYER: God, I ask that You would take my pride away. Grow my dependence on You, and help me see that I make a poor lord of my life. Help me to live in humility, fully dependent upon You. In Jesus' name, amen.

SERVING IN SECRET

"Watch out! Don't do your good deeds publicly, to be admired by others, for you will lose the reward from your Father in heaven. When you give to someone in need, don't do as the hypocrites do—blowing trumpets in the synagogues and streets to call attention to their acts of charity! I tell you the truth, they have received all the reward they will ever get. But when you give to someone in need, don't let your left hand know what your right hand is doing. Give your gifts in private, and your Father, who sees everything, will reward you."

Matthew 6:1-4 (NLT)

In today's world, where social media often fuels the desire for public recognition, it's easy to fall into the trap of seeking praise for our good deeds. After all, if we don't document things for everyone to like or comment on, did it even happen? However, Jesus calls us to a different standard—one where the intention of our hearts matters more than the applause of others.

Imagine you're in a coffee shop and see someone struggling to pay for their order. You feel compelled to help, so you quietly hand the cashier a few extra dollars to cover the cost. Now, you have a choice. Do you take a picture of the receipt and post it on Instagram with a caption about how good it feels to help others? Or do you simply walk away, knowing you've done something kind without needing anyone else to know about it?

Jesus tells us in Matthew 6:1-4 that our acts of righteousness should be done in secret, not for the praise of others, but for the approval of our Heavenly Father. When we seek recognition for our good deeds, we have already received our reward in full—the fleeting praise of people. However, when we give in secret, God, who sees what is done in private, will reward us in ways that are eternal.

Many years ago, there was a worship song by Big Daddy Weave called *Audience of One*. The chorus goes like this:

*To my audience of one, You are Father, and you are Son
As your spirit flows free, Let it find within me
A heart that beats to praise you.*

*And now just to know you more, has become my great reward
To see your kingdom come and your will be done
I only desire to be yours, Lord*

May we live for our audience of One.

APPLICATION: How can you serve and love others quietly this week—without drawing attention to yourself?

PRAYER: God, be honored in my life. Help me to love others as You have loved me. In Jesus' name, amen.

CONTRITE CONFESSION

You do not desire a sacrifice, or I would offer one. You do not want a burnt offering. The sacrifice You desire is a broken spirit. You will not reject a broken and repentant heart, O God.

Psalm 51:16-17 (NLT)

In Psalm 51, David pours out his heart in repentance after being confronted by the prophet Nathan for his sins. He realizes God isn't interested in mere ritual sacrifices or outward religious acts. Instead, God desires something much deeper—a broken spirit and a contrite heart.

We live in a culture that often values appearances. It's easy to think we can make up for our mistakes by doing good deeds, attending church services, or saying the right things. But David's words remind us that God sees beyond our external actions. He looks at the condition of our hearts. Interestingly, this is something we see God say as He is about to choose David as king, not his brother, who externally looks the part. See 1 Samuel 16:7 (NLT): *But the LORD said to Samuel, "Don't judge by his appearance or height, for I have rejected him. The LORD doesn't see things the way you see them. People judge by outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart."*

True repentance isn't about going through the motions; it's about a genuine acknowledgment of our sin and a deep sorrow for having grieved the heart of God. When we come to Him with a broken spirit, admitting our faults and seeking His forgiveness, He doesn't turn us away. Instead, He draws near to us with mercy and grace. But remember—it's not about balancing the scale by your own actions or efforts. God isn't interested in our performance. He desires heart change.

APPLICATION: Be humble and honest before God right now. Confess any sin in your life that you've been concealing. He already knows about it, but He desires you to take the step of sharing that with Him. Ask God to help you cease any striving and simply rely on the accomplished work of His Son.

PRAYER: Lord, grant me a broken and contrite spirit. Help me to not find my acceptance in what I can do for You, but rather in what Your Son Jesus has done for me. I trust You; help me to trust You more. In Jesus' name, amen.

HUMBLE HEART

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)

My favorite book of the Bible is James. Words are not minced and no bushes are beat around. He gets right to the point in language that is direct and convicting. It's not for the faint of heart, but it has been so helpful for me through the years to return to these wise words regularly. In the passage above, James lays out clear steps for us to walk with God.

The first step is submission. Submission is not a word we like because it means we are giving over control. The desire to control is a powerful one for so many of us! But to submit to God means recognizing His authority over our lives and aligning our will with His. It requires us to let go of our pride and surrender to His guidance. By submitting to God, we place ourselves under His protection, allowing Him to lead us away from the schemes of the enemy, who is real and active in the world today.

Resisting the devil is the next step. When we resist temptation and stand firm in our faith, the devil has no choice but to flee. This resistance is not in our strength but in God's, as we rely on His power to overcome. Think of how often we rely on our own willpower to get us through. How does that tend to go for us? We need to grow more and more dependent on the power of God rather than trusting in ourselves.

Drawing near to God requires an intentional effort to cleanse our hearts and minds. It's about leaving behind double-mindedness and pursuing a single-minded devotion to Him. James calls us to grieve over our sin, acknowledging the seriousness of our disobedience. It's easy to laugh with your friends over past misdeeds, but that's not the call of God.

APPLICATION: When was the last time you asked God to break your heart over your sin? If we're being casual or flippant about our sin, then we're not recognizing that our sin is what put Jesus on the cross. Ask God to give you a greater awareness and understanding of the depths of your depravity. Draw close to Him, and He will draw close to you!

PRAYER: Father, break my heart for what breaks yours. I desire to be fully submitted to You. Bless me, and help me to walk in submission and humility with You all the days of my life. In Jesus' name, amen.

GRACIOUS GUIDANCE

In the same way, you who are younger must accept the authority of the elders. And all of you, dress yourselves in humility as you relate to one another, for "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." So humble yourselves under the mighty power of God, and at the right time He will lift you up in honor.

1 Peter 5:5-6 (NLT)

If you're anything like me, you were taught growing up to respect your elders. This was one of the core tenets of our household. Parents and grandparents were obvious, but this expectation extended to teachers, coaches and even strangers we met in public. But a funny thing happens as you get a little bit older yourself. You can begin to denigrate and dismiss those older than you. What do they know? Their time has come and gone. The world has changed—what wisdom could I possibly glean from them?

Quite a lot, actually.

While the world may want to dismiss those who have gone before, we, as Christ followers, should be looking to soak up as much wisdom and knowledge from elder believers as we possibly can. All of us, adults included, have someone God can use to teach us and humble us. None of us are perfect on this side of glory, so we must be open to the idea of God using others to continue to shape, mold and refine us.

Who is mentoring you? Shepherding you? Who is walking alongside you with intentionality in your journey with Jesus? Are you being discipled? Are you even open to that idea? Pride can sneak in and lead you to believe that you don't need anyone else. But Christian community is not just a need; it's a beautiful gift. If we stubbornly insist on going our own way, I fear that our pride will lead us at least to stagnation if not full-on destruction.

Let us endeavor to clothe ourselves with humility toward one another, walking in mutual edification as the Body of Christ.

APPLICATION: Who can you humbly approach to help you grow in your relationship with Jesus? None of us are so advanced that we've moved beyond the need for intentional Proverbs 27:17 relationships. Ask God to give you the courage and conviction to take a step in this area.

PRAYER: God, help me to live fully surrendered and submitted to Your authority. Surround me with wise believers who can speak truth, love and life over me. Grant me the humility to yield. In Jesus' name, amen.

RECALL HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS

I will praise Your mighty deeds, O Sovereign LORD. I will tell everyone that You alone are just. O God, You have taught me from my earliest childhood, and I constantly tell others about the wonderful things You do.

Psalms 71:16-17 (NLT)

When I was a child, my grandmother often shared stories of how God had been faithful to our family. I remember sitting on her porch, listening to tales of how God provided during hard times, healed in moments of sickness, and guided us through life's uncertainties. She spoke of God's righteousness with such certainty, as if each story was a fresh reminder of His unwavering goodness. Those stories shaped my understanding of God and instilled a desire to know Him more.

Growing up, my grandparents were really the only believers in my life. Something that I didn't fully appreciate then was spending the night with them on Saturdays and going to church with them on Sunday mornings. In addition to having cable television, my grandparents had something I couldn't find anywhere else. Rich stories of God's faithfulness throughout their six decades of life. They lived through multiple wars and monumental moments but were always quick to see the hand of God in their lives. It's only now, as a grown man and parent, that I fully appreciate the depth of the gift they gave me.

Psalms 71 is a beautiful reminder of the importance of recalling and proclaiming God's righteousness. In his older age, the psalmist reflects on how God had been his teacher and guide from his youth. The righteous acts of God had been evident throughout his life, and now, even in his later years, he continues to declare God's marvelous deeds.

Recalling God's righteousness is not just an exercise in memory but an act of faith. When we remember how God has acted in the past, we anchor ourselves in His unchanging nature. This gives us confidence in the present and hope for the future. It also encourages others who may be struggling to see God's hand in their own lives.

APPLICATION: Who in your life has witnessed the goodness of God? Are you open to hearing them recall His righteousness, graciousness and mercy throughout the years? Seek someone out who can bless you in this way.

PRAYER: God, thank You for how You have moved through the years, not just in my life but in the lives of so many others. Help me never lose sight of You in the midst of a world full of distractions. In Jesus' name, amen.

RESPONSE TO REDEMPTION

Let all that I am praise the LORD; with my whole heart, I will praise His holy name. Let all that I am praise the LORD; may I never forget the good things He does for me. He forgives all my sins and heals all my diseases. He redeems me from death and crowns me with love and tender mercies. He fills my life with good things. My youth is renewed like the eagle's! **Psalms 103:1-5 (NLT)**

Have you ever heard of a gratitude journal?

Several years ago, I was introduced to this concept. There are many variations, but I'll share with you what I do. At the end of each day, I write down three things I'm thankful for in my journal. They don't have to be major milestone moments. It can be something as simple as *I had a lovely lunch with a friend today. Or our friends came over to play board games and I won them all.* You may dismiss that as silly. But from my perspective, I see the fingerprints of God. I didn't have a ton of friends growing up, so having one who would enjoy lunch with me was a blessing. Growing up, we were also relatively poor, so going out for a meal was rare. Having multiple people willing to spend time in his home—blessing of God.

Psalms 103 invites us to do something similar: to *never forget the good things He does for me.* The psalmist begins with a call to praise, urging his soul to remember the countless ways God has blessed him. God's benefits are not just material; they touch every aspect of our lives—He forgives our sins, heals our diseases, redeems us from spiritual death, and crowns us with love and compassion. His blessings are profound and transformative, renewing our strength like the eagle's.

When life becomes difficult, it's easy to focus on what's wrong and overlook the many ways God has been faithful. But this psalm reminds us to pause and recount the blessings we have received. As we remember His benefits, our hearts are lifted in gratitude, and our faith is strengthened.

APPLICATION: Today, take a moment to reflect on the benefits God has bestowed upon you. Write down five specific blessings you've experienced recently. Then, take time to praise God for each one. If you're facing challenges, let this practice remind you of His faithfulness. Share these blessings with someone else who might need encouragement, and let the act of remembering fuel your praise and trust in God. Remember—thanksgiving is more than a holiday in November!

PRAYER: Father, thank You for every blessing in my life. You're gracious to me in ways that I often fail to acknowledge. Help me always be mindful and praise You, my Creator and Sustainer. In Jesus' name, amen.

REJOICE IN HIS RESURRECTION

Since we have been united with Him in His death, we will also be raised to life as He was. We know that our old sinful selves were crucified with Christ so that sin might lose its power in our lives. We are no longer slaves to sin. For when we died with Christ we were set free from the power of sin. And since we died with Christ, we know we will also live with Him. We are sure of this because Christ was raised from the dead, and He will never die again. Death no longer has any power over Him. When He died, He died once to break the power of sin. But now that He lives, He lives for the glory of God. So you also should consider yourselves to be dead to the power of sin and alive to God through Christ Jesus.

Romans 6:5-11 (NLT)

I remember talking to a person who had recently come to faith in Christ. The joy in their voice was unmistakable as they described how different life was after becoming a believer. *It's like I'm a new person*, he said. *I used to feel so stuck, but now it's like I'm lighter and freer than I've ever been!* His excitement reminded me of the powerful truth in Romans 6: through our union with Christ in His death and resurrection, we are indeed made new.

Paul's words in Romans 6 highlight the profound transformation that occurs when we place our faith in Christ. Our old self—bound by sin and death—has been crucified with Him. The power of sin, which once held us captive, has been broken. We are no longer slaves to sin; we are free to live a new life in Christ.

This passage calls us to remember that our identity has fundamentally changed. Just as Christ died to sin and now lives, we are also called to live in this new reality. We are alive in Christ, empowered by His Spirit to walk in righteousness. We are, in fact, no longer slaves, which is also the title of an excellent worship song that you might consider listening to today.

APPLICATION: Reflect today on what it means to be *alive to God through Christ Jesus*. Consider areas of your life where you may still feel the pull of your old self. Ask God for the strength to walk in the freedom He has given you.

PRAYER: Lord, I am free in You. Help me to stay free. May I rejoice always in the miraculous power You have demonstrated in transforming and freeing me. In Jesus' name, amen.

REFLECT ON HIS RETURN

"Don't let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, and trust also in me. There is more than enough room in my Father's home. If this were not so, would I have told you that I am going to prepare a place for you? When everything is ready, I will come and get you, so that you will always be with me where I am. And you know the way to where I am going."

John 14:1-4 (NLT)

In the early 2000s youth group scene, a band stood out above many of their contemporaries. To this day, I can vividly recall the lyrics to many of their songs, but one stands out above all the others. The band: Audio Adrenaline. The song: *Big House*. If you've never heard it, do yourself a favor and look it up today. Here are some of the iconic lyrics:

It's a big big house...With lots and lots a room A big big table...With lots and lots of food A big big yard...Where we can play football A big big house... It's my Father's house

You may mind this song silly, but I assure you to a teenage boy who was new to church and Christianity, it resounded as an incredible invitation.

In the passage above, Jesus promises His closest friends that He is going before them to prepare a place for them, that when everything is ready, He will come back for them, and that they may never be parted again. When it clicked in my head that this invitation and promise wasn't just for these men in the Bible but also for me, it was a game changer.

Fellow brother or sister. The world is dark. Evil seems to prosper. Up is down, and down is up. Taking a stand for our beliefs may seem more challenging than ever. But we can cling to the goodness of the promise that our Savior is preparing a place for us. Will we actually play football? I don't know, but I hope so! But whether we each get our own mansion or it's, in fact, one big big house, I know He will be there, and that's all that matters to me. Take heart. Stand strong. Endure! He is coming back!

APPLICATION: Reflect on what it will be like to stand face-to-face with Jesus. To be in His presence. I imagine there will be so much joy. Take a few minutes to check out the song mentioned above, and if you want another early 2000s CCM pillar on this same subject, check out MercyMe's *I Can Only Imagine*.

PRAYER: Jesus, thank You for preparing a place specifically for me. You saw me before time began and claimed me as Your own. Help me live with the confident assurance and eager expectation of Your impending return. In Your name, amen.

RECEIVE THE SPIRIT

"But when the Father sends the Advocate as My representative—that is, the Holy Spirit—He will teach you everything and will remind you of everything I have told you."
John 14:26 (NLT)

When I first became a believer, I voraciously consumed the Word of God. Not a brag, it mostly was a function of having few friends in childhood that weren't books. Something I noticed early on in the gospels is that when Jesus would say, "You've heard it said," and then quote Scripture, everyone actually seemed to know exactly what He was talking about. I later learned about the priority of Scripture memorization in the Ancient Near East. But at that time, I just feared I'd never be able to remember all the things Jesus had to say. But over time, I realized I wasn't on this journey alone. The Holy Spirit, whom Jesus promised to His followers, was there to guide me.

John 14:26 powerfully reminds us of the role the Holy Spirit plays in our lives. Jesus, knowing that His disciples would face challenges and uncertainties, assured them that the Holy Spirit would come as their Advocate—someone who would teach them, guide them and remind them of all He had taught. This promise isn't just for the disciples; it's for all believers. That means you and me, here and now!

The Holy Spirit is our constant companion, helping us to understand God's Word and apply it to our lives. We talk so much about the Father and the Son that we can sometimes overlook the presence of the Spirit (Francis Chan wrote a book about this in 2009 called *Forgotten God*). When we face difficult decisions, the Spirit gives us wisdom. When we struggle to remember what Jesus taught, the Spirit brings those truths to mind. This divine guidance is a gift, ensuring we are never alone or without direction.

APPLICATION: Take a moment today to acknowledge the presence of the Holy Spirit in your life. Pray and ask the Spirit to guide you in understanding God's Word and to remind you of Jesus' teachings in your daily life. If you're facing a challenge or decision, seek the Spirit's wisdom and trust in His guidance. We're so quick to run to friends, family or strangers on the internet for guidance. Let's start with our Creator!

PRAYER: God, help me never to forget that You are with me through Your Holy Spirit. I pray that You would make me sensitive to the Spirit's direction. Help me to come to You first in my struggles. In Jesus' name, amen.

REMEMBER AND RECOUNT

After that generation died, another generation grew up who did not acknowledge the LORD or remember the mighty things He had done for Israel.

Judges 2:10 (NLT)

You may not have made it all the way to Judges in your read through the Bible in a year plan. Allow me to give you some context. Because their failure to reflect on who God was and remember what He did is heartbreaking, but even more so when you consider all that happened. Moses is sent by God to free the Israelites from Egypt. There are ten plagues. Then God leads the people out of Egypt by a pillar of cloud and a pillar of fire. God parts the Red Sea so His people can cross on dry ground, then uses it to crush their enemies. He provided both food and water in the desert—miraculous! God gives them the Ten Commandments and constantly fights on behalf of His people.

Then Moses gives way to Joshua as the leader. We then see the crossing of the Jordan River on dry ground, like the Red Sea 2.0. Next is the conquering of the most heavily fortified city in the area via a marching band. There's also a supernatural extension of a day that the Israelites might continue to fight and experience victory (see Joshua 12, which also tells us that the people of God ultimately defeated 31 kings and their armies).

God has brought them into the land He promised. And just when Joshua is about to die, he calls together all the leaders and challenges them to remember the faithfulness of God. They reaffirm their commitment to serve God and honor Him. In Joshua 24, we see Joshua actually recount many of the events I've just described. And the people promise to remain faithful.

Judges 2:8-9 record the death and burial of Joshua. Then we get Judges 2:10, which again tells us that a whole generation came along who failed to remember the mighty hand of God in their lives.

One of my greatest fears is that this would happen today. Elder brothers and sisters, may we REMEMBER and proclaim to the next generation the power of God. Younger brothers and sisters, may we be open to hearing our faith family TESTIFY about how God has moved on their behalf.

APPLICATION: Who are you sharing the glory and goodness of God with? If you can't immediately think of a few names, it's time to ask God to show you who! If you're not sitting under the wisdom and guidance of an elder believer who testifies to God's goodness in their life, then it's time to find someone!

PRAYER: God, may I never forget Your faithfulness. Help me proclaim it to the nations. Give me courage and conviction. And may the next generation be open to receive it. In the matchless name of Jesus, amen.

Understanding the Old Testament

For many people, the Old Testament can be confusing and a bit overwhelming. If you've ever felt intimidated, *you're not alone!* This guide includes seven key concepts to help you gain some footing so you can read and understand the Old Testament with greater confidence.

KEY CONCEPTS

- #1: The Bible is One Big Story
 - #2: The Story of the Old Testament
 - #3: The Four Major Time Periods of the Old Testament
 - #4: Jesus is the Fulfillment of the Old Testament
 - #5: Three Primary Ways to Interpret the Bible
 - #6: Applying the Bible
 - #7: God is Making All Things New
- Recommended Online Resources
- Recommended Books

My hope is that the Scriptures would become a greater part of who you are, and that you'd fall in love with the One who has been pursuing you since before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:4).

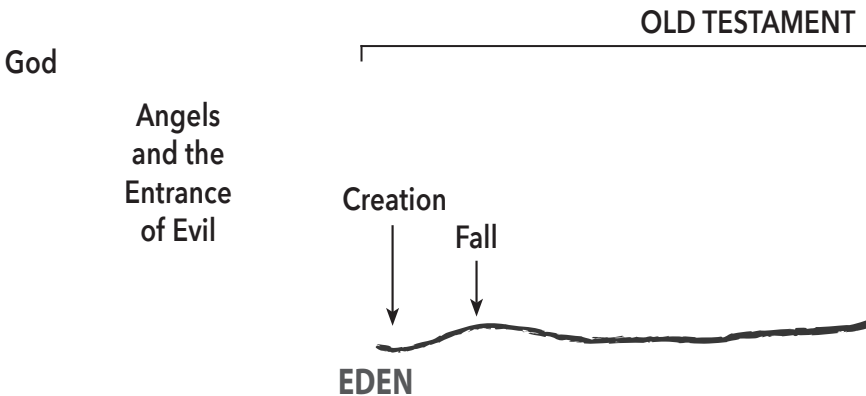


Mark Taylor
Adult Discipleship Pastor

Key Concept #1

THE BIBLE IS ONE BIG STORY

In order to understand any story, it's essential to know the entire story. If all you see is five minutes in the middle of a movie, for example, it's impossible to know what's going on. It's only when you watch the entire movie that the characters and episodes begin to find their place and make sense. The same is true of the Bible. The overarching story provides context for the individual parts of the story. This timeline provides a high-level view the overarching story of the Bible. This is often referred to as *The Larger Story*.



God: The Eternal One

There was a time before all time when there was only God. He is eternal.

- He is *from everlasting to everlasting* (Psalm 90:2). *The eternal God is your refuge* (Deuteronomy 33:27).
- See also: Psalm 136; John 1:1-18; Romans 1:20; Colossians 1:15-17.

Angels and the Entrance of Evil

First, God made angels (before the world).

- The angels rejoiced in heaven during creation (Job 38:1-7). They were present while the waters were *still above the skies* (Psalm 148:1-4)
- Satan became filled with pride and wanted to make himself like God (Isaiah 13:12-14; Ezekiel 28:14-18).

- War broke out in heaven. Satan and a third of the angels were cast down (Revelation 12:3-9).
- The serpent was lurking in the garden before the fall of Adam and Eve (Genesis 3:1-13).

Creation: The Splendor of Eden

Genesis 1-2 was written in the form of a poem, and describes the absolute beauty, glory and goodness of God. Adam and Eve were created in the perfect image of God.

The Fall of Mankind

Satan lured Adam and Eve to mistrust God (Genesis 3:1-6). They disobeyed His single command (Genesis 2:17). As a result, all humanity would be born in sin.

He said to me: "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To the thirsty I will give water without cost from the spring of the water of life."

Revelation 21:6 (NIV)

NEW TESTAMENT

**Jesus Sent
to Rescue**



**The Age of
the Church**



**Jesus Will
Return**



EDEN RESTORED

The Old Testament

The rest of the Old Testament (Genesis 4 - Malachi 4) records the history of a nation wrestling with God. It's the story of God's faithfulness in the midst of man's failure to return to Him. The Old Testament lays the foundation for the New Testament.

- *Phillip found Nathanael and told him, "We have found the one Moses wrote about... and about whom the prophets also wrote—Jesus of Nazareth."* (John 1:45)

Jesus Sent to Rescue

Jesus came to save us.

- *"For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."* (Luke 19:10)
- See also: Isaiah 61:1-7; John 3:16-17; Ephesians 2:1-10; 2 Corinthians 5:17.

The New Testament

This is the time in which we live. We look backward in faith and forward with hope as we tell the world a Savior has come.

This is the age and mission of the church.

- *"Therefore go and make disciples of all nations."* (Matthew 28:19-20)
- *"Go into all the world and preach the gospel."* (Mark 16:15)
- See also: Romans 1:16; 2 Corinthians 5:20; 1 Peter 3:15.

Jesus Will Return

One day, Jesus will bring final restoration.

This is the ache and longing of our hearts.

- *And so we will be with the Lord forever* (1 Thessalonians 4:17:b).
- See also: Matthew 24:36-44; John 14:1-3.

Key Concept #2

THE STORY OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

This timeline identifies 12 major turning points that shaped the journey of God's people throughout the Old Testament. You might consider these like a *table of contents* to help you understand the flow of the overarching story.

CREATION: God created the world and everything in it. He breathed His life into man (Genesis 2:7). Eden was paradise. Our address is Eden and we are all homesick.

THE FALL: Adam and Eve violated God's design. *Sin came into the world through one man* (Romans 5:12). They chose to worship creation rather than the Creator.

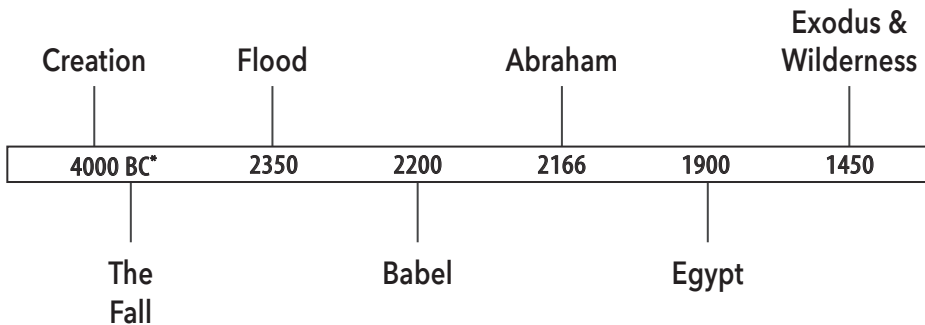
THE FLOOD: Evil grew upon the earth, so God sent a flood. Noah, his wife and their three sons survived. Their offspring are why we're here (Genesis 6-8).

THE TOWER OF BABEL: Even though they had a fresh start, people continued to search for life apart from God. They wanted to build a great city for themselves, so God confused their language and scattered them over the face of the earth (Genesis 11:1-9).

ABRAHAM: God still loved His people, so He called Abraham to begin a new nation and become a blessing for all the nations on earth. God's love is limitless. He had the whole world in mind the whole time (Genesis chapters 12, 15 and 17; Ephesians 1:4-6).

EGYPT: There was a famine in the land, so God's people traveled to Egypt. They became slaves to an evil king. They were in Egypt for about 400 years (Exodus 1:1-14).

EXODUS: Because of His great mercy, God saw their misery and called Moses to rescue them (Exodus 3:7-10). After leaving Egypt, they wandered in the wilderness for 40 years (Numbers 32:13).



*Dates are approximate but generally accepted by most conservative scholars.

[Josiah was one of the *good* kings during
the years of the divided kingdom.]

CROSSING JORDAN: Because of Moses' disobedience, his leadership was transferred to Joshua (Deuteronomy 34:9-12). Joshua led the people across the Jordan River and headed toward the Promised Land (Joshua 1-4).

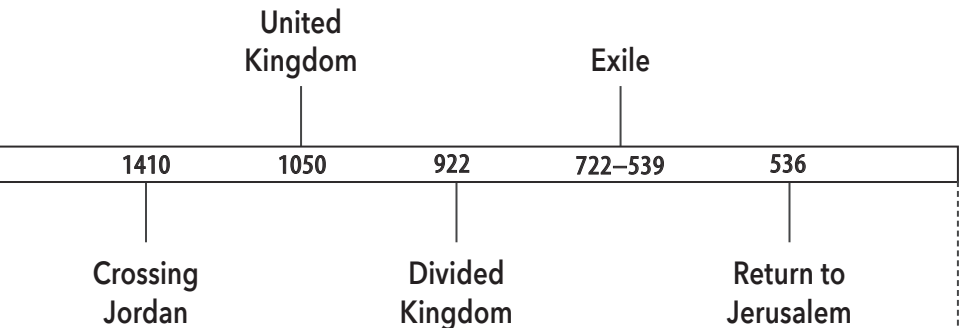
UNITED KINGDOM: As they settled in the land, the Israelites demanded to have a king (1 Samuel 8). Saul, David and Solomon served as the first three kings of Israel (1 Samuel 9-1 Kings 10).

DIVIDED KINGDOM: Solomon's disobedience led to corruption and turmoil among the people, so God divided the kingdom (1 Kings 11:9-13).

The 10 northern tribes ended up having 19 evil kings. They were eventually conquered and taken over by Assyria (2 Kings 17:5-6). The southern tribes also had 19 kings (seven of which could be considered *good*). Eventually, Babylon conquered these two remaining tribes (2 Kings 25). By this point, you can likely see our need for a Savior!

EXILE: God's people lived in exile for generations. Exile is a word that means you can't go home. Once again, they were scattered and became slaves to foreign nations.

RETURN TO JERUSALEM: God stirred the heart of Cyrus, king of Persia, who issued a decree that God's people could return to Jerusalem and rebuild the kingdom (1 Chronicles 36:22-23). That's why it's so powerful that when Jesus came, He proclaimed *the kingdom of God is at hand!* He is the one true King.

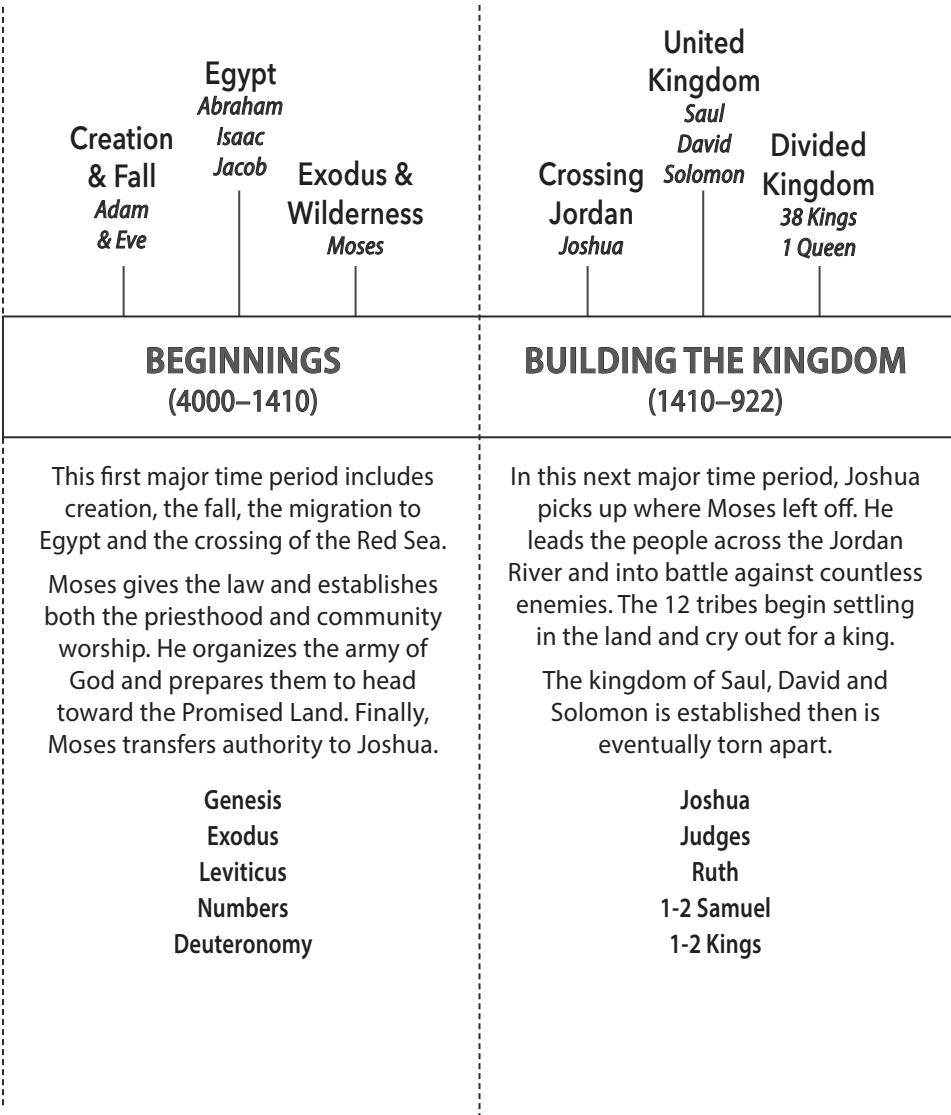


There are no biblical writings from about 390 BC until the time of Jesus. These are often referred to as *The Silent Years*.

Key Concept #3

THE FOUR MAJOR TIME PERIODS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

The Old Testament can be divided into four major time periods. Think of it like breaking down the periods of your own life (e.g., childhood, teenage years, college, single or married, empty nest, and so on). The timeline below describes the major sections of the Old Testament and lists the books of the Bible most closely related to each time period.



Creation & Fall
Adam & Eve

Egypt
Abraham
Isaac
Jacob

Exodus & Wilderness
Moses

United Kingdom
Saul

Crossing Jordan
Joshua

Divided Kingdom
David
Solomon
38 Kings
1 Queen

BEGINNINGS
(4000–1410)

BUILDING THE KINGDOM
(1410–922)

This first major time period includes creation, the fall, the migration to Egypt and the crossing of the Red Sea. Moses gives the law and establishes both the priesthood and community worship. He organizes the army of God and prepares them to head toward the Promised Land. Finally, Moses transfers authority to Joshua.

Genesis
Exodus
Leviticus
Numbers
Deuteronomy

In this next major time period, Joshua picks up where Moses left off. He leads the people across the Jordan River and into battle against countless enemies. The 12 tribes begin settling in the land and cry out for a king.

The kingdom of Saul, David and Solomon is established then is eventually torn apart.

Joshua
Judges
Ruth
1-2 Samuel
1-2 Kings

Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Song of Songs span the history of the Old Testament and therefore don't fit neatly into the four major time periods.

Fall of the
Northern
Tribes
(Israel)

Fall of the
Southern
Tribes
(Judah)

Return to
Jerusalem

FALL OF THE KINGDOM (722/586–539)

REBUILDING THE KINGDOM (536–390)

This is the period of the prophets.

God sends messengers to call His people to return to Him, to warn them of judgment and to pronounce future blessings.

Isaiah
Jeremiah
Lamentations
Ezekiel
Hosea
Joel
Amos
Obadiah
Jonah
Micah
Nahum
Habakkuk
Zephaniah

During this final period of the Old Testament, a good king from Persia (Cyrus), issues a decree that God's people could return to Jerusalem and rebuild their city.

These books address the scattered Israelites, teaching them how to live during exile and remind them of the need for God to be their King.

Esther
1-2 Chronicles
Ezra
Nehemiah
Daniel
Haggai
Zechariah
Malachi

Key Concept #4

JESUS IS THE FULFILLMENT OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

When Adam and Eve disobeyed the command of God in the Garden, three primary things happened. The man and woman were overcome with guilt and shame, forced to live a life of futility, and broke the intimate union with God and each other. This explains the hardship of life. As you can see below, Jesus is the ultimate rescue. He provides forgiveness, offers a life of purpose, and restores our relationship with God and each other. This is the Gospel, the amazing good news of the Bible... our invitation to new life!

THE FALL

Genesis 3:7-10 (NIV)

Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves. ... they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden. But the LORD God called to the man, "Where are you?" He answered, "I heard You in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid."

Genesis 3:17b-19 (NIV)

... "Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat food from it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground ..."

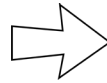
Genesis 3:16, 23-24 (NIV)

"I will make your pains in childbearing very severe; with painful labor you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you." So the LORD God banished him from the Garden of Eden... He drove the man out, He placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life.

THE RESULTS

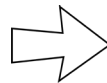
Guilt/Shame

- *Genesis 2:16-17;*
- *Ezra 9:5-7; 13-15*
- *Romans 3:9-26; 6:23*



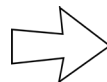
Life of Futility

- *Psalm 89:46-48;*
- *Ephesians 4:17-19;*
- *James 1:11; 4:13-14*



Broken Relationships

- *Genesis 4:1-10;*
- *Isaiah 59:1-2;*
- *Galatians 5:19-21;*

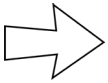


And now these three remain: faith, hope and love ...

1 Corinthians 13:13a (NIV)

(see also Colossians 1:5; 1 Thessalonians 1:3; 5:8)

THE RESCUE



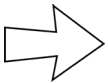
Forgiveness

You now have a place to go
with your guilt and shame.

- *John 1:29*
- *Romans 5:1-5; 8:1*
- *1 John 1:1-9*

Experienced by

FAITH



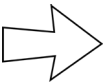
Life of Significance

Your life has meaning far
beyond what you imagine.

- *Matthew 28:18-20*
- *1 Corinthians 15:58*
- *Ephesians 4:1-16*

Produces

HOPE



Relationships

Restored

You don't have to
be alone anymore.

- *John 17*
- *1 John 4:1-7*
- *Colossians 3:12-14*

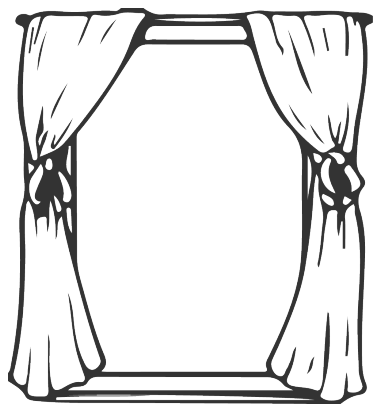
Fills us with

LOVE

Key Concept #5

THREE PRIMARY WAYS TO INTERPRET THE BIBLE

Here are three basic approaches to studying the Bible that will help you explore and understand the meaning of a particular text.

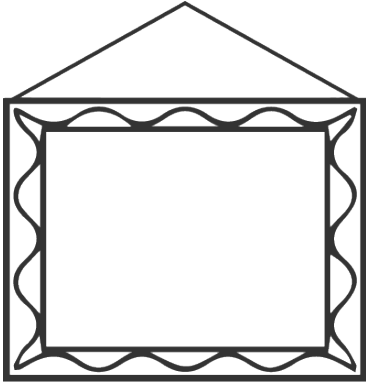


WINDOW

Approaching the Bible as a **WINDOW** means reading it from a **HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE**. Imagine looking through a window to simply see what happened. It's like reading a history book.

Using this approach, ask questions like:

- Where did the story take place?
- When did it happen?
- How would you describe the setting?
- Who were the characters in the story?
- What happened?
- What happened next?
- What's the plot or main idea of the story?
- What are the plain facts and details?
- It's essential to understand history because it shapes our future.

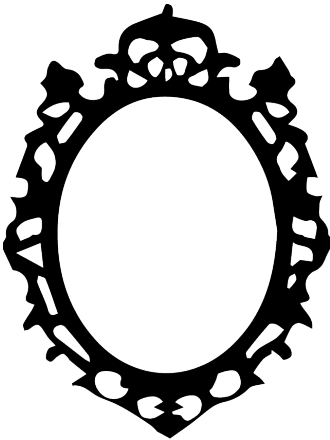


PICTURE

Approaching the Bible as a PICTURE means reading it from a LITERARY PERSPECTIVE. Consider the author, the audience and the intended message.

Using this approach, ask questions like:

- Who wrote this text or passage?
- To whom was this letter written?
- What specific details are included?
- How were the details arranged?
- What important themes emerge?
- What was the central message to the original audience?
- How does this central message apply to me?



MIRROR

Approaching the Bible as a MIRROR means reading it from a THEMATIC PERSPECTIVE. Most passages speak to a specific theme or two, which will help you make more direct applications in your own life. It's like using the Bible as a mirror, comparing who you are right now to the person God is transforming you to be.

Using this approach, ask questions like:

- What are the main topics in this passage (e.g., love, salvation, faith, repentance, God's character, community, etc.)
- Is there a specific truth in this passage?
- What does this teach me about myself?
- What needs to change in my life?
- How does this passage encourage me about the changes I've already seen?

Key Concept #6

APPLYING THE BIBLE

One of the best ways to grow in your understanding of the Bible is to put what you learn into practice. The great thing is, you don't have to figure it all out on your own. God wants to teach us more than we want to learn, and the good news is, God is ultimately the one who gave us these ancient words! In particular, Scripture is meant to change how we think, what we do and how we feel.

Scripture Addresses Three Primary Human Dynamics

Mind

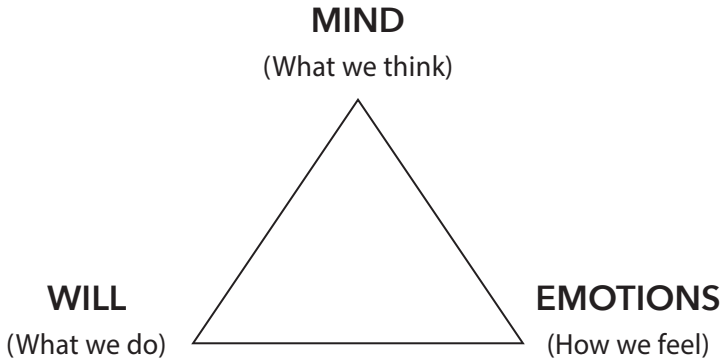
- *We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are **taking every thought captive** to the obedience of Christ ... **2 Corinthians 10:5 (NASB)***
- *Meanwhile a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was a **learned** man, with a **thorough knowledge** of the Scriptures. **Acts 18:24 (NIV)***

Will

- *Whoever is **lazy** regarding his work is also a brother to the master of destruction. **Proverbs 18:9 (ISV)***
- *Who is wise and understanding among you? Let them show it by their good life, by **deeds** done in the humility that comes from wisdom. **James 3:13 (NIV)***

Emotions

- *... the **LORD** God caused to grow from the ground every tree that is **desirable** and **pleasing** to the sight and good (suitable, **pleasant**) for food ... **Genesis 2:9a (AMP)***
- *Though you have not seen Him, you love Him; and even though you do not see Him now, you believe in Him and are filled with an **inexpressible and glorious joy**. **1 Peter 1:8 (NIV)***
- ***Rejoice** with those who rejoice, and **weep** with those who weep. **Romans 12:15 (NIV)***



Bible Study Application Questions

Mind

- God, what do You want me to know?
- Is there a specific truth or concept You're trying to teach me?
- What are You trying to help me understand?

Will

- God, is there something You're leading me to do?
- Is there a specific path or step You want me to take?
- What behavior are You addressing in my life?

Emotions

- God, what feeling are You leading me into?
- What words or phrases resonate with you?
- What's stirring in your heart as you read?

Beyond study, the goal is to deepen intimacy with God. A central question to ask is, *God, what do You want to say to me?* Trust that He will direct your heart and mind as you seek Him.

Key Concept #7

GOD IS MAKING ALL THINGS NEW

After the fall of Adam and Eve, God promised to save those who return to Him and trust Him with all their heart. You can see this in the seed of promise (Genesis 3:15) and through the covenant God made with Abraham (Genesis 12, 15, 17). For thousands of years, God has been calling us home. Jesus is our final and perfect Savior. As you can see from the comparison between the beginning of the Bible and the end of the Bible, God is making all things new. This is our anchor, this is our hope.

FROM EDEN TO EDEN RESTORED

Genesis 1-4	Revelation 19-22
God created the heavens and earth (1:1)	God creates new heavens and earth (21:1)
Light created (1:3)	Lamb is the light (21:23)
Darkness and night created (1:5)	No darkness or night (22:5)
Waters gathered into seas (1:10)	No more seas (21:1)
God made the sun and the moon (1:16)	No need of the sun or the moon (21:23)
Creation pronounced done (2:1)	New creation pronounced done (21:6)
Man's primeval home by a river (2:10)	Man's eternal home by a river (22:1)
Death for eating from a tree (2:17)	Life for eating from a tree (22:2)
Marriage of Adam (2:18-23)	Marriage of the Lamb (19:6-9)
Eve, the wife of Adam (2:22-25)	New Jerusalem, wife of Christ (21:9-10)
Serpent deceived (3:1,13)	Serpent banned from deceiving (20:3)
Satan's first attack on man (3:1ff)	Satan's final attack (20:7-10)
Satan appeared in garden (3:1)	Satan disappears in lake of fire (20:10)
A garden which became defiled (3:6-7)	A city that can't be defiled (21:27)
Fellowship with God broken (3:8-10)	Face-to-face fellowship with God (21:3)

*"See, I am doing a new thing!
 Now it springs up; do you not perceive it?
 I am making a way in the wilderness
 and streams in the wasteland."*

Isaiah 43:19 (NIV)

continued...

Initial triumph of the serpent (3:13)	Ultimate triumph of the Lamb (21:10)
Savior's first coming promised (3:15)	Savior's second coming promised (22:20)
Pain greatly multiplied (3:16)	No more mourning, crying or pain (21:4)
Curse on man and nature (3:14-19)	No more curse (22:3)
Serpent's doom promised (3:15)	Serpent's doom accomplished (20:10)
Curse imposed on nature (3:17)	Curse removed from nature (22:3)
Man's dominion over nature lost (3:19)	Man's dominion restored (22:5)
First death (3:21; 4:8)	No more death, neither sorrow (21:4)
First sacrificial lamb (3:21)	Last sacrificial Lamb (21:4, 14)
First paradise closed (3:23)	New paradise opened (21:25)
Angel kept people from garden (3:24)	Angel welcomes people to city (21:9-10)
Man driven from God's presence (3:24)	Believers shall see His face (22:4)
Tree of life taken from man (3:24)	Tree of life open to man (22:14)
God's mark on Cain (4:15)	God's name on people's forehead (22:4)
First city built by Cain (4:17)	Holy city comes from God (21:2)

RECOMMENDED ONLINE RESOURCES

For Commentary and Study

enduringword.com/bible-commentary.

- Select any book of the Bible a little way down that page, then select chapter.
- Verse-by-verse. Very easy to read and understand.

For Word Search and Translation Comparison

biblegateway.com

Other Great Spots

thirdmill.org/paul

- Some of the best help understanding (background, audience, etc.) of the writings of the Apostle Paul.

blueletterbible.org

- Type the book/chapter/verse in search box,
- Select NASB and all kinds of resources pop up.
- I use this particularly for Strong's Greek/Hebrew word study and biblical usage.

engediresourcecenter.com

- Commentary on different passages by topic
- From Jewish (Christian) perspective – very insightful.

bible-history.com

- History, tons of maps, background of the books of the Bible, and a 1000 more things...

ligonier.org

desiringgod.org

RECOMMENDED BOOKS

God Dwells Among Us: Expanding Eden to the Ends of the Earth
G.K. Beale and Mitchell Kim

*What's in the Bible? A Tour of Scripture from the Dust
of Creation to The Glory of Revelation*
R.C. Sproul and Robert Wohlgemuth

The Most Significant People, Places, and Events in the Bible
Christopher D. Hudson

Old Testament Essentials: Creation, Conquest, Exile and Return
Tremper Longman

A to Z: All the Names in the Bible
Publisher Thomas Nelson

He Gave Us Stories
Richard Pratt

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